

Florida Invasive Animal Task Team – Meeting #4
South Florida Water Management District
2535 Davie Road
Davie, Florida
December 16, 2004

Attendance:

Ellen Donlan, FDEP (State Parks)
Bob Doren, SFERTF
Jim Duquesnel, FDEP (State Parks)
Amy Ferriter, SFWMD
Pam Fuller, USGS
John Galvez, USFWS
Elizabeth Golden, FDEP (State Parks)
Scott Hardin, FWC
Tom Jackson, NOAA

Rafaela Monchek, SFERTF
Tony Pernas, NPS (ENP)
Art Roybal, USFWS (Co-chair)
Don Schmitz, FDEP (Co-chair)
Kristina Serbesoff-King, Nature Conservancy
Skip Snow, NPS (ENP)
Bill Thomas, USFWS (Ding Darling)
Sonya Thompson, Miami-Dade County (Parks)
Kristi Yanchis, USFWS

Administrative Items:

The meeting summary from meeting #3 was approved unanimously with changes to Skip Snow's presentation. (Motion: Art Roybal; Second: Tom Jackson)

Update: FL Invasive Animal Task Team – Distribution of Final Standard Operating Procedures (or Charter), Don Schmitz:

The changes from the last meeting were incorporated to ensure it matched the language of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force's charter. The Vice-Chair was replaced with a Co-chair. The SOP was approved unanimously. (Motion: Don Schmitz; Second: Amy Ferriter)

Bob will bring the Standard Operating Procedures to the Working Group for their approval.

Membership:

Attending FIATT participants will ask their supervisors to email Rafaela Monchek the names of their member and alternate.

Bob Doren approached the Working Group about adding a sub-goal to the Strategic Plan and Biennial Report. Unfortunately, the current draft of the Plan and Report was already in the approval process, but the Working Group agreed to add exotics to the next revision in two years.

In August NEWTT and FIATT had a joint training workshop for the STEMS website. The training session was productive, and several members of the teams are adding information to the site. He encouraged FIATT participants to go to the www.ecostems.org website if they haven't already. Please contact Bob Doren if you would like to be added as a user. He is currently working on a report on exotics for the USACE, and hopes to add a section on exotic animals. He invited FIATT to help add information on the impact of invasive animals in the future of CERP.

FIATT website:

FIATT must determine what should be included on their website. The USGS site on invasive species was suggested to help identify a framework for the site: www.nas.er.usgs.gov.

The site should include background information on the team, including how FIATT relates to the Task Force, what FIATT is and what they do. The site should also serve as a tool for public awareness, and include country of origin, latitude and source of introduction.

A collage of pictures identifying multiple species should be on the cover page, including a picture of an exotic bird, reptile, insect, mammal and fish. Tom Jackson and Scott Hardin offered to provide these photographs.

The website should have a list of related links, and include current team information such as approved meeting summaries and information on the next meeting.

A “Website Subteam” was created including Tom Jackson, Don Schmitz, Rafaela Monchek, and Pam Fuller. Don Schmitz will provide a site for the sub-team to review and potentially use as a base.

Updating the Goodyear Report:

The Goodyear report is a comprehensive overview of what is and isn't known about exotic animals. A Strategic Plan will be created using the Goodyear report as a reference. The team has already created a list of species of concern to be prioritized and used as a starting point for the Plan. Ranking criteria has already been established to use in the prioritization process. Photos, history and a distribution map will be included, in addition to a list of needed research that is accessible by university faculty. The report will explain what needs to be done for Everglades restoration, identifying issues the Working Group/Task Force should be aware of.

Don Schmitz will create the introduction to the report. Scott Hardin said the state is currently reviewing a ranking system for animals that should be ready next year and could be applicable here. Skip Snow suggested focusing on prevention in addition to dealing with what is already present. FIATT must look at North Florida since some plants there become a problem in South Florida, and vice versa. Issues and priorities should be identified, including who is dealing with them, and what isn't being dealt with.

There will also be a pathways section to discuss how some species arrive here. Tom Jackson will continue gathering data to create a list of non-indigenous species. Don Schmitz and Art Roybal will create and distribute an outline out for comment, then distribute assignments for each section.

Species Experts Assignments – Subworking Group Formation:

This agenda item was postponed to a future meeting.

Managing Invasive Animal Species in the Urban Interface, Jim Dequesnel:

Jim provided a presentation on managing invasive animal species in the Florida Keys. The degradation of water in the Keys is happening quickly due to onshore development. Land has been acquired, and there has been condemnation of some undeveloped land. The Key Largo hammock is less than a ½ mile wide, creating a challenge in maintaining a corridor for wildlife, and in reducing fatalities from the road.

To encourage reforestation of natives, plants have been given to residents for their property. Australian pines have been taken down and replaced with native plants.

There are currently two sources of invasiveness rankings. The state doesn't allow counties to create their own plant regulations, but a task force had been working on a local list for the keys when this rule was created. Currently, the state list is used.

Green iguanas, common mynahs (exotic bird) and parrots are becoming big problems in the Keys. There are also concerns with the public opinion on the disposal of exotic animals. Exotic insects (including fire ants) are also a problem to native birds while nesting, eating their eggs. Volunteers are currently being used to help get rid of exotic plants. This group should be disseminating the best ways to handle exotics. Recommendation on the euthanizing of exotics should be made in preparation to ensure that when it becomes a state rule the county can proceed.

Roundtable:

Pam Fuller with the USGS is involved in a team that is building a database on exotic animals (www.habitattitude.net). The team requested FIATT provide a list of experts to pull together the necessary information. FIATT will be consulted in the design and review of the site.

Tom Jackson has created a list of the local exotic animals which he will distribute to FIATT and the USGS team. Tom distributed several articles for the team's review.

Jim Duquesnel created a spreadsheet of best technology and methods of euthanasia and disposal of exotic species for land managers. He requested the FIATT website provide a link for universities to access the types of projects the state and federal parks need. Jim stressed the importance of ensuring the team's list of exotic species is accurate.

Amy Ferriter distributed a letter from the NPS and the SFWMD requesting a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), an annual meeting, a clearinghouse of data and a contractor training program. This resulted from the 2004 Everglades Invasive Species Summit. Cross training should occur between exotic animal and plant people to ensure they are aware of what to look for. Comments on the MOU should be given to Tony by January 3rd. Bob will bring the letter to the Working Group at their next meeting.

Tony Pernas announced there are 16 NPS exotic plant management teams across the country. The NPS is working on having all-taxa teams, with Florida being one of them. He requested input on how a Florida all-taxa team would be structured. The team would be required to work on NPS land, but can treat areas that pose a threat to a National Park.

Skip Snow discussed the recent discovery of 2 pythons while treating Melaleuca in the Park. In October, 6 pythons were killed with a mower in a retention area. The SFWMD assigned a staff person to survey their lands for pythons. An exotic reptile program will be aired on television as part of the waterways program. An exotic fish program is being created. There was also an anaconda found killed on the road near Fakahatchee Strand. Skip will send Rafaela and Art information on the pythons.

Sonya Thompson is in the process of creating a wildlife program for Miami-Dade county. She will coordinate with Tom and Scott to determine what is present in the parks to determine which exotics are present.

Tom Jackson stressed the importance of creating a group position on euthanasia.

Don Schmitz stressed the importance of rapid assessment.

Bill Thomas has the same tasks with FWS as Tony Pernas does for the parks. Only FWS staff such as refuge law enforcement officers, Special Agents, and those individuals who have taken the FWS sponsored Hunting Program/Firearms Safety Course are actually qualified to dispatch exotic wildlife with the support of FWS. He announced there are some situations where exotics are serving as a food source for endangered species, for example hogs and panthers. FWS has found that sometimes killing hogs stimulates their breeding. He added that FWS already has a euthanasia protocol.

Pam Fuller commented that risk assessment (RA) will become more important and very few people know how to do perform this. She is putting together an RA training program, making available a compilation tools. Marshal Myers (Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council - attorney for the pet industry) provides talks on the pet trade and "habitatitude". National pet stores are changing fish bags to have a logo and information on releasing pets. PIJAC is trying to get local fish stores to use them as well. She also announced she was asked by the ANS Task Force to create standardized information on species. She will provide the information to Amy Ferriter and Tony Pernas.

Scott Hardin is seeking grant funding for creating training tools for use in the field including pathways and distribution. A special permit has been issued to only one SFWMD employee to possess a specified firearm in a management area out of hunting season for the purpose of collecting pythons. No additional permits will be issues. There is also discussion on an amnesty program for turning in exotic wildlife. When exotics are returned, the customer can only receive the purchase price or an exchange of equal or lesser value; otherwise customer is required to have a dealer's license. An operational way for people to turn in exotics is needed, especially for large constrictors, but there is concern that the program will be overrun.

Jim Duquesnel would like to inform the public of the number of people arrested, warned, or cited for releasing animals in a park.

Kristina Serbesoff-King is the Invasive Species Coordinator for the Nature Conservancy. She is currently working on their strategy and requested any recommendation be provided to her.

Annual Report:

The Annual Report will include a summary of FIATT from its inception. The Report will be 5-6 pages. Art and Don will create the report and distribute to the team for their review in January.

Next Meeting:

The next FIATT meeting will be February 24, 2005 at SFWMD headquarters in West Palm Beach.