

# Big Cypress Watersheds Restoration Coordination Team

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Friday, May 1, 2009 – 9:30 – 12:30  
Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge Headquarters, Naples

## Meeting Minutes

### 1. Welcome/Call to Order

- ◆ The meeting was called to order at 9:40 AM
- ◆ Thanks to Larry Richardson for hosting the group and thanks to everyone for bringing delightful entrées and desserts!
- ◆ We reviewed the minutes from the last meeting and they were accepted.
- ◆ Bob acknowledged that our quarterly meetings have been successful and provide networking opportunities and insight into our watershed while also visiting different agencies around the area.

### 2. Introduction of members

Joe Bozzo, FWC HRC  
Mike Bush, Audubon  
Juliana Da Frota, SWMD  
Eliza Davis, Conservancy  
Sarah Davis, FGCU  
Ed Hanlon, UF IFAS  
Mac Hatcher, Collier County  
Katie Laakkonen, City of Naples  
Shawn Liston, Audubon

Ananta Nath, SFWMD  
Larry Richardson US FWS  
Adrienne Ruga, FWC FWRI  
Takako Sato, US FWS  
Kathleen Smith, FWC HSC  
Bob Sobczak, Big Cypress NP  
Jessica Stubbs, Conservancy  
Daryl Thomas, US FWS  
Rhonda Watkins, Collier County

### 3. Research at the Panther Refuge – Overview by Larry Richardson

- ◆ Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) consists of 26,400 acres and is located within the heart of the Big Cypress Basin in southwest Florida. It is located 20 miles east of Naples, Florida at the northwest corner of the intersection of Alligator Alley (I-75) and State Road 29. The refuge is due west of the Big Cypress National Preserve and due north of Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve and Picayune Strand State Forest.
- ◆ Larry presented a colorful power point presentation discussing the many aspects of research at the Panther refuge. Management priorities include Florida Panther Recovery, prey management – prescribed fire to manage prey, habitat management – water work, built 2 ponds, prescribed fire, cabbage palm cutting, exotic control, water control, public use – trails free.
- ◆ Current monitoring includes:
  - Fire (including response of vegetation, prey, panthers, and cabbage palms to fire).
  - Hydrology
  - Regional wading bird use
  - Vegetation response to palm removal – 600-900 cabbage palms per acre, cabbage palm water use – Dr. Brian Bovard
  - Passerine response to palm removal

- Orchid biology and research (UF and Illinois College)
- Use of scents to attract and collect DNA on free ranging FL panthers (FGCU masters thesis project)
- Pond construction and vegetation
- ◆ Optimum management regime, manage accordingly with respect to ecosystem and priority objectives
- ◆ Lessons from the garden – Orchids don't survive without fungus Who is your fungus?

#### 4. Eyes on the Watershed – Research Photo Exchange

- ◆ Katie Laakonen, City of Naples – photos of seining and trawling in Naples Bay – partnered with Rookery Bay. Caught blue crab and catfish in Gordon River. Keywadin – file fish, seahorse, juvenile bone fish, sea hare. Will monitor transects in 5 different sites every other month.
- ◆ Mike Bush, Audubon – Corkscrew wetlands, Woodstork project, sample habitats. Good year for colony at Corkscrew, 1200 nests (2 chicks) ½ fledged out. Better years for spoon bills; Cypress dome - 1 meter throw trap, collect fish, high concentration of gambusia. Purpose of project = focus in on dry season pools, crowded with fish, get densities, estimates of fish. 2000 fish per m<sup>2</sup>, link fish with birds, birds travel miles, cue on what is it for Woodstorks? What is making them choose an area?; University of Georgia – tick project – Pileated Woodpecker, Possum pouch
- ◆ Bob Sobczak, Big Cypress – Photos of Kissimmee Billy's Strand (Pinelands, dome, pond apple) 11 mile road, 11 miles north, dwarf cypress forest and prairies. Turner River Road, dry 9 miles flows 4 months out of the year., biggest channel, main thorough fare to get inland. Lubber grasshopper.

#### 5. Southwest Florida Feasibility Study Update – Daryl Thomas

- ◆ Daryl gave an update of the feasibility study. Tentative Selected Plan (TSP), reached milestone, approved TSP. Three components – Yucca Pens, SR 29 canal, Split smaller projects Faka Union Canal, water quality treatment facility. Bringing 3 projects to design phase – DOI-FWS supports project. Feasibility study could go further, only protects 3 Army Corps of Engineers has no funding, letter from DOI to approve study , could go further. Reevaluate cost of project, only looked at functional groups, could have done a better job picked additional projects, draft report writing now. Master plan – 13 functional groups, largest best alternative funding mechanism.

#### 6. Other Watershed News

- ◆ Sarah Davis mentioned discussion with Mike Savarese and interest of FGCU to coordinate with team to generate list of possible projects for graduate students.
- ◆ Lake Trafford dredging delayed because dry will restart in June or July.
- ◆ Southern CREW restoration Project (mini SGGE/Picayune), purchased parcels, land out for 951, district moving forward to take out roads and promote sheet flow. 951 extension will include berms to stop water.
- ◆ Conservancy starting estuary report card.

#### 7. South Florida's Watershed Journal Update – Bob Sobczak

- ◆ Bob shared the importance of the watershed journal [www.sfwj.blogspot.com](http://www.sfwj.blogspot.com) and how it bridges the gaps between meetings bringing data to the front of this water wonderland in which we live. He showed a clip from the fire, smoke blowing to Naples.
- ◆ Florida has four meteorological horsemen. They stampede into town from every corner of the sky. The thunderous approach of their hooves and sun-eclipsing clouds they kick up are

cautiously greeted by Floridians with an equal dose alarm and routine: It's time to take cover ... a drenching of apocalyptic proportions may be on the way. Who are the horsemen? Three of our four horsemen ride into town in the summer and fall. They are the enhanced sea breeze (Florida's bread and butter storms), the giant Cape Verde hurricanes that spawn off the coast of Africa, and the often smaller in strength but gorged with moisture tropical disturbances that arc up from the gulf and Caribbean. The fourth – the continental front – rides to town, or more correctly stated, usually rides into town, for unpredictable downpours here and there during our 7 month winter and spring dry season

- ◆ We had a very dry dry season, worst than 1932. Turner River, dry, HP Williams below sea level the past month. Swamp forests, marshes dry through March and April, landscape drying down as well as canals. However the Tamiami canal, full – tidal inflow (flow in opposite direction). Tropical storm Fay flooded longer than average, dry down was abrupt, swamp forest 8 months instead of 9-10 months. Resurrection fern meteorological wonder – indicates moisture, dries down during dry season. Shark River slough officially going dry, Lake Okeechobee after Fay 15 feet above seal level, now at 11 feet.

## 8. Set next meeting date and adjourn meeting

- ◆ The meeting was adjourned at 12:00
- ◆ **Next Meeting Friday September 18, 2009 – Florida Panther Refuge, Immokalee – McBrides Pond Pavillion**