

Lake Wales Ridge Ecosystem Working Group and Southeast Florida Scrub Ecosystem Working Group Meeting  
Feb. 7<sup>th</sup> 2018 at Archbold Biological Station  
Minutes

**New Beetle species documented on Lake Wales Ridge after Hurricane Irma – Mark Deyrup, PhD (ABS, Entomology Program)**

- New beetles discovered in trees that came down after the hurricane
  - o Rotten wood normally hidden from view exposed
  - o Beetle had piercing mouth parts that suck out fungal hyphae
  - o Found in laurel oaks, which are highly flammable
  - o Diversity kept high due to patchy burns
- Seasonal Ponds: Drying down and left dead sphagnum moss
  - o Found caterpillars of a moth whose host is probably algae, not new species but lots of things unknown about it
  - o Edge of ponds have a lot of biodiversity too
- Rosemary Balls
  - o Keystone species
  - o Herbicidal chemicals in roots to create patches, also chemically protected against most insects
  - o Many species that specialize on the rosemary (caterpillar, bugs that only eat the male flower, and a new beetle that is yellow with brown markings that only feeds on scrub rosemary)
  - o Although not a major component of the landscape, many species specialize on it, so it's an indication that at onetime rosemary was wide spread

**The effects of Hurricane Irma on the red-cockaded woodpecker – Emily Angell (ABS, Avian Ecology Program)**

- Lost 8 pines at Avion Park Airforce range
  - o Do the inserts make the tree weaker?
    - Probably not dramatically so. RCWs chose weakened trees with heart rot anyway, and the natural fulcrum on the pine is usually exactly where the insert or natural cavity is located
- Missing RCWs?
  - o No dead birds in cavities
  - o 12 adults missing but hard to say if they just left, majority males
- Other Properties
- Withlacoochee Citrus: 3 Trees, Croom: no damage
- Hal Scott 1 tree down, many in water
- Disney wilderness: 3 trees down
- St. Sebastian: no damage
- J.W. Corbett WMA: 1 tree down
- Big Cypress:
  - o 25% of trees accessible, the others inaccessible due to floods
  - o Lost 10% of trees as of yet (may lose more due to inundation)
- Picayune
  - o 45% of all cavity trees lost

- Four clusters of RCWs completely lost (and two more on the way out due to inundation)
- Beetle explosion as well
- However, did not find any dead birds in trees
- Managers are putting out inserts
- Archbold
  - Increased connectivity in wetlands, may see an increase in the invasive species due to that connection

### **Camille Carol: Public Perspective of Scrub**

- Did an ecosystem services evaluation survey
- Many don't want to live next to scrub and didn't value scrub, is this common/how have you addressed it?
  - Yes, common. The name is not very appealing, try "Ancient Fire Forest" or "Ancient Ridges" because people like the word ancient, inherently valuable.
  - Celebration of an ecosystem of no where else
  - Put in good PR, hard to change the "scrub" name
  - Coming to scrub—let in the secrets, but manage expectations so folks know it will be a challenge
  - The scrub-jay and gopher tortoise are ambassadors to scrub (who doesn't love them?)
  - TNC Book Last Great Places had a good segment on scrub
  - People often want to know it's protected but they actually don't care to experience it
  - Ridges have a scenic value we don't often get to experience in Florida
  - Scrub wasn't appreciated by ecologists for a long time
  - Could we do a "State Wide Scrub Awareness Week"? That would be a great way to highlight scrub value
  - Emphasize water aquifer re-charge—an ecosystem value folks can get behind

### **New Land acquisitions for the FL Corrido – Hillary Swain, PhD (ABS, Executive Director)**

- Conservation in Context
  - 2.6 mil acres that flow slow
  - 82% of LWR on the watershed
  - 28% conservation lands
- Highlands county is among the highest concentration of imperiled species in the US!
- 83% of scrub is gone
  - Early logging
  - Large conversion to citrus
  - Sand mining
  - Development
- "State of Scrub" by Will Turner
- By 2004—species that needed to be conserved were at least present on publicly managed land
- Globally significant ecosystem that we know a lot about from science, less from public support
- Florida's working ranches, large concentration of cow-calf operations at headwaters
- We are losing citrus to greening and that will be a problem
  - Citrus is compatible with fire mgmt.
- Native wetland plants found on working ranches

- Conservation Progress
  - o Easements on rural/family land
  - o “slow the flow” programs for properties to hold water back
  - o Department of Defense: needs for military and conservation align at Avon Park Air Force Range
  - o 11% of the county conservation easements on private property

**FL Scrub-Jay translocation progress and updates- Reed Bowman, PhD (ABS, Avian Ecology Program Director)**

- Rookery Bay, Naples FL – 20 birds moved, second year birds during 1989-95
  - o Extirpated by 2001, area not large enough to support birds
- Brevard County translocations net increase of 2-5 groups, ongoing translocations
- Mosaic Wellfield, 2003 to 2011 moved 51 birds, increase 23 groups (in 2012)
  - o 2017: 31 groups on three adjacent sites
- M4 metapopulation in Hillsborough/Manatee Co. 82 birds total
  - o Since 2011 growth stabilized
- Carter Creek
  - o Due to management of habitat, birds have come in
- May need to go towards moving scrub jays between genetic units because small areas do not have any jays they can donate
- Originally wanted to keep birds within a genetic unit to keep genetic diversity and certain adaptations that are advantageous for their environment

**Gopher Tortoise update: Kelly O’Connor (FWC)**

- Viable population 250 Gopher Tortoises, trying to do surveys on public land to identify these populations
- Platt WEA good GT habitat
  - o 967 tortoises
- Lake June in Winter Scrub State Park
  - o Overgrown, hard to complete the surveys
- Fisheating Creek WMA (support level)
  - o 11 GT in 1 km (very good numbers)
  - o Full survey scheduled
  - o GT habitat also around this area that was not surveyed but probably a good reason why so many GTs were found on first round
- There is support for surveys outside of FWC if someone needs technical assistance FWC can give it to them to help survey for GTs
- Along the ridge at Lake Louisa sign of decrease of GT population
  - o Sampled some that were there, although did not exhibit physical signs of URI (upper respiratory infection) did show positive, could be carriers

**Update on female Florida panthers North of the Caloosahatchee Jennifer Korn (FL Panther Biologist, Johnson Engineering, Inc)**

- Panthers can’t be black, only spotted cats can be black
- There are occasionally rare black bob-cats
- Females not documented North of the Caloosahatchee river since the 70s
- Then one was caught on trap cameras Nov 2016 at Babcock Ranch Preserve

- Camera caught female with male and then two kittens! Probably her first litter and she lost them
- Then second litter—survived Irma fine
- Second documentation of a female N on the Caloosahatchee River at Platt Ranch
- Working on modifying areas in the roads to create wildlife crossings under road
- If you sight a panther/get a photo, you can report it to FWC or email Jennifer at [jmk@johnsoneng.com](mailto:jmk@johnsoneng.com)