

**Minutes**  
**December 8, 2005 Pine Rockland Working Group Meeting**

20 participants in attendance from TNC, IRC, Ecostudies Institute, Everglades NP, FIU, Miami-Dade DERM, Miami-Dade Parks NAM, USGS, Fairchild TBG, UF, USFWS

Minutes and other PRWG materials will be posted on the following website;  
<http://fl.water.usgs.gov/Miami/pineland/index.html>

**1:30 – 2:30 Committee Updates and Discussion**

Outreach Committee met during the morning of Dec. 8<sup>th</sup>. They are working toward completion of portable pine rockland display. They are preparing outreach materials for people in wildfire/rx fire prone areas to be distributed prior to the onset of wildfire season this spring. They are developing a media packet to target local papers. Finally, they are developing an info packet for local politicians with stories of effective fire management preventing or mitigating wildfire danger.

Science Committee met on the morning of Dec. 8<sup>th</sup>. The effort to develop a recommended minimum monitoring standard took a step back to identify overarching monitoring goals. Much more work is needed on this goal but it was agreed that monitoring to capture pine population dynamics, cover of broadleaf trees and shrubs, and % cover of herbaceous vegetation is desirable (see attachment from Hillary Cooley re: line intercept vs other methods). It was agreed that Everglades photo-monitoring procedure and the “operational monitoring” guidelines suggested by TNC will be promoted as recommended standards.

Development of a list of funding sources for research and other needs is in progress. Developing an ecological model for the pine rockland community is still on the radar screen but there is no progress to date.

Organizational Committee was officially disbanded but we will keep it on the agenda to provide an opportunity for agencies and orgs to provide updates on efforts to catalyze resource sharing and collaboration. Everglades/Miami-Dade MOU development is at a standstill. The national Fire Program Analysis effort is moving toward pooling all federal agency wildfire preparedness efforts by 2008 and in 2009 this will be expanded to include prescribed fire as well.

Symposium Committee has circulated the 2006 Pine Rockland Conference announcement, registration materials and call for abstracts. Everyone was encouraged to distribute this widely to increase attendance. See the website for details. Hillary Cooley and Gary Slater agreed to help review abstracts.

**2:30 – 4:00 Presentations and Discussion**

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program – Alison Higgins provided info on the opportunity to apply for up to \$35,000/private property for habitat management. WHIP is a federal program administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. This year their focus for Florida is on pine rockland and rockland hammock.

Prescribed Fire Training, Demonstration and Research Project in the Bahamas – Chuck Byrd from TNC provided a brief update on the Bahamas effort and the training held November 2005 on Abaco. Twenty-one Bahamians from Abaco and four other islands participated in the classroom training, and the Bahamians who were trained in 2004 took the lead in carrying out a picture-perfect prescribed fire. Joe O'Brien from USFS led the fire effects research effort.

Open discussion about effects of storm surge on pine rocklands. On October 24<sup>th</sup> Hurricane Wilma covered the majority of the Florida Keys pine forests (and everything else) with seawater up to about 8' above sea level. Phillip Hughes from USFWS led a discussion of what the

literature says about this kind of disturbance (e.g. limited tree mortality and a pulse of litter 2x heavier than normal). Other than the effects of hurricane Georges on the Keys in 1998, no other examples of surged pine rocklands were available. Keith Bradley from IRC will be conducting a follow-up to very recent floristic inventory which will help identify short term impacts on pineland species.

Analysis of prescribed fire use in the wildland urban interface of Miami-Dade County. Robin Gray-Urguelles is conducting an independent study on this topic and was seeking input on identification of the roadblocks to prescribed fire use and potential solutions. This led to discussion of the Everglades/Miami-Dade MOU and its stalled status. It was also explained that while FDOF leads all prescribed fires for Miami-Dade County and provides the crews and equipment, while Miami-Dade staff, although trained can only participate in mop up operations due to liability concerns. Liability in general and the proliferation of Smoke Sensitive Areas were noted as major problems. Wildfire response jurisdiction issues between FDOF and Miami-Dade Fire Rescue were also noted.

In this reporter's opinion it all boiled down to this; with dozens of sites that need fire and very few prescribed fires getting done each year, a new paradigm is needed. In order to accomplish fire management objectives and protect the investment of millions of dollars in environmentally sensitive pinelands, Miami-Dade must overcome the liability hurdle see other counties for examples and develop in-house capacity to plan and implement burns. Brevard and Palm Beach Counties were noted as potential models. No other group has sufficient incentive to get aggressive with Miami-Dade County's problem.

Experience dictates that some areas will never be burnable. Miami-Dade should do one of two things with these sites; decide to let them turn into hammock (and possibly even facilitate that transition if warranted by public safety concerns) or begin now to experiment with mechanical alternatives to prescribed fire in hopes that some form of mechanical treatment can do a fair job of replicating fire's effects on species and other resources of concern. Jennifer Possley from Fairchild noted a manual fuel management experiment conducted by Fairchild and NAM in 2002 that resulted in a cost of \$22,730/acre. See attachment.

Management and Conservation Needs of South Florida Pine Rocklands Conference - this conference, hosted by Fairchild Tropical Garden, was postponed due to Hurricane Wilma. Joyce Machinski suggested that it might be best to hold it in conjunction with the summer 2006 Pine Rockland Working Group meeting. Stay tuned for details.

**Next PRWG Meeting Tentatively Set for July 18, 2006**