

Minutes

June 15, 2005 Pine Rockland Working Group Meeting

24 participants in attendance from TNC, IRC, Ecostudies Institute, Everglades NP, FIU, SERC, Miami-Dade DERM, Miami-Dade Parks NAM, USGS, USFS, Fairchild TBG, Turnpike/FDOT, FWC, SFWMD and Big Cypress NP

1:30 – 2:30 Committee Updates and Discussion

Outreach Committee met on Feb. 15 and morning of June 15. The committee is completing review of existing pamphlets, videos and other outreach materials. They are shooting to have a press package prepared for October 2005 which is "Fire Prevention Month" in Florida. They are also working up an outreach package for decision makers that will include the basics of what pine rocklands are, why fire is important and some info on the costs of burning compared to not burning. The existing Miami-Dade pine rockland display will be moved around among Adopt-a-Tree sites. A smaller, more portable display is under development. Last spring, Everglades, DOF and Miami-Dade staff hosted a fire education booth at the youth fair and they will probably do so again in the future.

Discussion of adding info to the PRWG website (hosted by USGS) resulted in recommendations to add the Bahamas Fire Assessment .pdf and the pine rockland section of the USFWS Multi-Species Recovery Plan. Other relevant documents are welcome. Contact Jim Snyder for placement. Names and contact info for PRWG chair and committee chairs will be added to facilitate communications. PRWG participant logos can also be easily added if agencies and organizations send them to Jim.

Science Committee met on the morning of June 15. The focus of the group is currently to develop a recommended minimum monitoring standard for all pine rocklands. Rick Anderson from Everglades NP described the park's old (1999-2004) and new (2005) monitoring schemes which are adaptations of the NPS standard protocol. The new method relies on replicable, rigorous photo-monitoring and NPS Fire Management Handbook guidelines for standard brush and forest plots. Copies of the procedure are available from Rick Anderson, Jim Snyder or Chris Bergh.

The committee will develop monitoring recommendations using a hierarchical approach (i.e. with a minimum recommended standard and options for more detailed monitoring). A "menu" of generic methods for monitoring special interest species or features (e.g. herbaceous diversity in general, a rare herb in particular, cavity nest trees, etc) may be developed.

Recommendations for "Implementation Monitoring" (i.e. day of burn flame length, fire spread rate, etc.) will also be developed.

The importance of data archiving, organization and accessibility was stressed.

No headway has been made on refining the initial list of research priorities or developing the list of funding sources. The original priority list was still considered valid, and wildlife, fire history, fuel mapping and effects of fire history on genetic diversity were noted additions.

The Science Committee will also work toward development of an ecological model for the pine rockland community. See "Conceptual Models of Fire in the 2050 Greater Everglades" below.

Organizational Committee has not met. Keith Bradley from IRC offered to take over the chairmanship of this committee in hopes of catalyzing resource sharing and collaboration. It was noted again that the National Fire Plan's evolving system of federal resource sharing is likely to force federal players to work more efficiently together and that state, local government and private groups may be well served to get on board if at all possible.

Symposium Committee made some progress via email and during the morning of June 15. The symposium will be in February 2006 at FIU's main campus in Miami. A day of field trips (possibly including the Deering Estate, a private pine rockland site that IRC is working on and Everglades National Park) will take place on a Wednesday. The following Thursday will be a full day of presentations followed by an evening poster session/social. And on Friday morning more presentations will be given. Friday afternoon will be set aside for travel to the Bahamas (see below). The two potential time windows for this event are Feb. 8-10 and Feb. 22-24, 2005. Please let Sonya Thompson and Chris Bergh know if you have any preferences by July 13. A final decision on dates will be made based on preferences and availability of a meeting room at FIU.

Joe O'Brien may have some travel funding to support participation in the symposium. TNC can provide up to \$1000 for the symposium. SERC can provide up to \$1,000 for food and conference space at FIU. Everglades may be able to contribute something as well. A firm commitment of at least \$1000 will be needed to pull off the U.S. portion of the symposium.

The Bahamas leg of the symposium will involve a trip to Abaco for field trips and development/review of the fire management plan for southern Abaco and the Abaco National Park. All costs will be up to the individual, their agency or company. Chris Bergh will work with Bahamian contacts to identify an overall cost for airfare, room, board and ground transportation. \$750 is a rough estimate for a trip departing Friday afternoon and return to the U.S. the following Monday morning. This would be Feb. 10-13 or 24-27. If you hope to participate in the Bahamas trip, consider these dates in conjunction with the Miami dates above and get back to Sonya and Chris with your preferences by July 13.

2:30 – 4:00 Presentations and Discussion

A Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy for all wildlife in the State of Florida is under development by FWC. Rather than plan for the 1000+ individual species, a habitat approach is being used and pine rockland is one of the habitats. The group discussed the draft summary of pine rocklands in the Strategy with the intent of providing comment but the comment period has expired. The main problems in the summary were a very low acreage estimate (2,959 acres) and lack of migratory species in the "associated species" list.

The University of Miami is Pushing to Develop the Richmond Pine Rockland Tract near Miami Metrozoo in an effort to add money for their endowment. The plan is to develop part of the property with 1200 homes and associated retail, office space, etc. This is the largest pine rockland tract on the mainland outside of Everglades. This link will provide more facts – http://www.tropicalaudubon.org/conservation_archive.html#pineland

Dade County commissioners can be contacted with your comments on this project at the following emails, and UM's decision makers may be susceptible to public input as well – District1@miamidade.gov; District2@miamidade.gov; District3@miamidade.gov; >district4@miamidade.gov; district5@miamidade.gov; district6@miamidade.gov; >district7@miamidade.gov; district8@miamidade.gov; district9@miamidade.gov; >district10@miamidade.gov; district11@miamidade.gov; >district12@miamidade.gov; district13@miamidade.gov

Pine Rockland Best Management Practices – Dr. Joe O'Brien from the U.S. Forest Service is leading this BMP assessment for the Joint Fire Science Program. He wants input on...

"Hazardous fuels management in pine rocklands: What is the scale of the problem, what are the treatment needs, and what techniques do you use for reducing fuel loads?" Treatments under consideration include; fire, mechanical (chopping, etc.), chemical (herbicides), biological (goats and such), and other (hand clearing, etc.). Combined treatments will also be considered. Fuel treatment choices will be evaluated in light of social values, aesthetics, economics, politics and environmental concerns. The project should be complete in 18 months and a General Technical Report will publish the results.

Joe will be developing an online survey and a paper survey to gather input. He will also conduct interviews and may conduct a workshop on this topic during the February PRWG symposium or separately. PRWG members are obviously central to this effort so please participate when the time comes.

Prescribed Fire Training, Demonstration and Research Project in the Bahamas - Chris Bergh provided a brief update on the Bahamas effort including plans for a second training and research burn on Abaco during July 2005, development of a fire management plan for the Abaco National Park over the coming year and convening a national "fire summit" to build governmental and private sector support for fire management in the country. Research is being led by Joe O'Brien and Mac Callaham of the USFS. Major Bahamian partners include the Bahamas National Trust, Friends of the Environment, Andros Conservancy and Trust, Royal Bahamas Police Force-Fire Service and other government agencies.

"Conceptual Models of Fire in the 2050 Greater Everglades" – Dr. Mike Duever with the SFWMD presented the model, its assumptions and outputs and solicited feedback from the PRWG on its applicability to pine rocklands. Mike pointed out the fact that Everglades restoration is hydrology-centric for obvious reasons but that restoration goals may not be achieved if fire regime and alien species dominance are not addressed as well. He noted that the overriding impression that the S. Florida Fire Council's members give of their collective ability to accomplish fire goals is, "continually falling behind."

The South Florida regional model is well developed and vetted. It focuses on the intersection of hydroperiod and fire return interval as the dominant feature of creation and maintenance of vegetation communities (e.g. permanent lakes with no fire on one end of the spectrum and high, dry scrub with 20-80 year fire return on the other and everything in between). The goal is to now move this type of modeling into a more site specific approach that helps to identify problems with a site's fire regime(s) and a strategy or combination of strategies for assuring the appropriate role of fire in a given system.

Mike is willing to help guide the development of a site specific model and strategy for the pine rockland. The Science Committee will add this to its goals.

The Next PRWG meeting will be Dec. 8, 2005.