

ETDM Annual Report

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

February 2005

Before ETDM Implementation

Prior to MOU and agreements, describe in detail how your agency conducted daily business on FDOT projects.

- 1) Describe how your agency was organized in Florida?
 - ***Our section was organized with a headquarters in Tallahassee, and 2 field offices in Vero Beach and Punta Gorda with all offices performing environmental assessments of all projects, including proposed FDOT road projects, in their regional areas.***
- 2) How did project information enter your organization?
 - ***Projects were, and are sent to us though the Advanced Notification process from DEP, Corps 404 and ERP dredge and fill permits, direct contact with the Tallahassee, District, and Florida Turnpike Environmental Management Offices (EMO). We also get involved with a large number of projects through contact with, and assistance to FDOT's consultants during the PD&E phase. We also worked a lot at the request of Tallahassee EMO personnel on special projects (regional mitigation banks, wildlife underpasses, funding for major wildlife studies, changes to the PD&E Manual, etc.)***
- 3) How many staff were involved and how were they allocated?
 - ***Staff levels before the ETDM process was initiated consisted of 5 people who potentially reviewed FDOT projects part-time, and 1 statewide Transportation Coordinator. In the past, all of our people who reviewed highway projects also reviewed and provided comments on DRIs, Dredge and Fill permits, land acquisition proposals, mining plans, and gopher tortoise permitting, etc.; essentially any large development project which could result in the loss, or degradation of habitat, public lands, and potentially impact listed wildlife species or other fish and wildlife resources.***
- 4) How were projects assigned?
 - ***They were assigned geographically by FDOT District to minimize travel cost. The Transportation Coordinator usually handles large regional projects, especially multi-county projects or those that require multi-year partnering or long-term interagency***

coordination on state and federal agency Environmental Advisory Teams.

- 5) How frequently did staff consult or coordinate with FDOT on projects?
- ***It has been a routine part of our workload the 30 years I have been here, and we have daily contact with FDOT or their consultants.***
- 6) How many FDOT projects were reviewed and coordinated with FDOT each year
- ***Our agency has historically accomplished a cursory review of all major FDOT projects after which a decision is made to provide an in-depth review of those which may have adverse direct and cumulative impacts to important fish and wildlife resources and important habitat systems, or public land. Of course this is tempered by our existing workload from other development project. We estimate that we provided an in-depth review and wrote agency comments on about 15 to 25 percent of FDOT projects, which cross our desk given our total involvement in other types of development impacts. The Statewide Transportation Coordinator, however, spends a majority of his time on Highway issues.***
- 7) Describe your typical involvement with FDOT projects and at what phase that involvement usually occurred: planning, PD&E, permitting, etc...
- ***It varied depending on the type and size of the project; whether the project is located in an area of regional or statewide importance; and the needs of FDOT. We have routinely worked to provide technical assistance to FDOT during all of the above phases of transportation work including determination of an alignment for the Northern Extension of Florida's Turnpike, early planning on the first High Speed Rail project, inter-agency partnering on the Suncoast 1 and 2 Expressways, serving on the SR-40 Task Force, serving on the Wekiva Beltway Task Force, Value Engineering exercises on wildlife underpasses (post-construction), agency coordination and initial surveys to determine credits in establishing the Platt Branch Mitigation Bank, and re-location of the Panama City Airport, etc. Some of these partnering efforts required FWC personnel as much as four years to complete.***
- 8) How many staff hours per month were typically devoted to working on FDOT projects? Planning Phase? PD&E phase? Permitting?
- ***We do not keep detailed records of staff time and therefore cannot accurately estimate time spent for individual highways***

work phases. The transportation coordinator roughly spends approximately 60 to 70 percent of the time on highway related issues. However, most of the work of the entire staff ranges between approximately 15 to 20 percent of their time, and is usually spent on the PD&E phase either assisting in designing wildlife and vegetation surveys, providing wildlife friendly designs for bridges and other structures, and recommending methods of impact avoidance, minimization, and mitigation strategies. We have also spent some time during the planning stage for large new roads, although, while these have been usually rare, they are becoming more common now in north Florida with increasing development. Although there are exceptions, we usually devote less time on projects during the permitting phase unless problems arise, or unless requested by FDOT, or the permitting agencies since at this point the project budget is set, and design issues are usually long settled. Our section in Tallahassee and the south Florida field offices also accomplish all gopher tortoise Incidental Take Permit for highway projects, and other development related issues.

9) What were the major barriers to coordination and involvement with FDOT projects: Budget? Staff? Other Resources? Time? Communication? Meetings? Field Reviews?

- ***Except for staff time, there were and are no major barriers to our involvement with providing technical assistance to FDOT, or in FDOT's willingness to work cooperatively to resolve wildlife and habitat issues. Over the years we have lost positions, and the number of positions we were able to devote to reviewing development related matters has not kept pace with the workload generated by Florida's growth. Our recent agency reorganization may significantly diminish that role, at least within our section as it was historically structured within FWC, due to possible changes in work duties for some field positions.***

10) Describe your involvement with the MPO's planning process?

- ***Our agency was never much involved with the MPOs because they were not a part of our mandated coordination process we have with other state and federal agencies. However, in the past, we have worked with the MPOs on occasion when requested, especially when projects in urban areas impact significant resources.***

11) When did your agency typically become aware and comment on a transportation project?

- ***FFWCC provides comments to FDOT and other agencies (Florida State Clearinghouse) on several issues including impacts to fish and wildlife resources including listed species. Historically this***

was either just before, or during the early stages of the PD&E phase.

12) How often have you published joint notices with FDOT?

- ***FFWCC has never published joint notices with FDOT.***

After ETDM Implementation

After MOU and agreements, describe in detail how your agency conducts daily business on FDOT projects.

1) Describe how your agency is organized in Florida?

- ***FFWCC is organized with a Tallahassee Headquarters Office and two Field Offices located in Punta Gorda and Vero Beach which are now supervised by another section. In the past, Punta Gorda reviewed projects in portions of Districts 1 and 7, and Vero Beach reviewed projects in Districts 4, 6, and portions of Districts 1 and 5. This same geographic area of responsibility for the three offices was the same regardless of environmental streamlining under ETDM.***
- ***The FFWCC ETAT coordinator operates on a statewide basis and coordinates comments from other ETAT representatives within FFWCC field offices. The statewide coordinator accomplishes all ETDM projects in FDOT Districts 2, 3, and portions of Districts 5 and 7 which collectively covers 40 of the state's 67 counties (60%). The Transportation Coordinator in Tallahassee also coordinates with, and enters all ETDM comments from Tallahassee and our Field Offices.***

2) How does project information enter your organization?

- ***We access FDOT project through the ETDM Web site, and provide our comments electronically by computer. Other projects are also sent to us through the Advanced Notification process from DEP, Corps 404 and ERP dredge and fill projects, and direct contact with the Tallahassee, District, and Florida Turnpike EMOs. We also probably have the majority of our involvement with projects through contact with, and assistance to FDOT's consultants. We also worked a lot with the Tallahassee EMO personnel on special projects (regional mitigation banks, wildlife underpasses, funding for major wildlife studies, changes to the PD&E Manual, etc.)***

- 3) How many staff are involved and how are they allocated?
- ***Baring future changes in work duties due to agency reorganization which involves the field offices, staff levels could be the same before and after the ETDM process was initiated. We have 5 people who potentially review FDOT projects part-time, and 1 statewide Transportation Coordinator. All of our people who review highway projects also review and provide project comments on DRIs, 404 and ERP permits, land acquisition, mining, and gopher tortoise permitting, etc.***
- 4) Describe how Section 1309 funds have been used to streamline process?
- ***I am assuming that these are the funds that we received from FDOT which were originally provided by the Federal Highway Administration. If so, we received approximately \$12,000 as a one-time grant from FDOT to buy 6 high-speed computers with enhanced graphics, memory, and storage for displaying GIS data files, which are essential in evaluating potential impacts of the highway projects that we review. We have also used part of the funds to have our two Field Offices, which are located in rural areas, equipped with high-speed Internet connection.***
- 5) How are projects assigned?
- ***They are assigned geographically by FDOT District to minimize travel cost. The Transportation Coordinator usually handles large regional projects, especially projects with multi-agency involvement, multi-county or FDOT District projects, and projects that require multi-year partnering or Environmental advisory teams. This results in an overlap or “sharing” of FDOT Districts, which is accomplished by the Tallahassee, Vero Beach and Punta Gorda Field Offices.***
- 6) How frequently does staff consult or coordinate with FDOT on projects?
- ***Usually on a daily basis, both directly with the FDOT Tallahassee and District Environmental Management Office personnel, including project managers and engineers or FDOT’s consultants. We probably provide the majority of technical assistance to FDOT’s consultants who are either planning or in the process of accomplishing the PD&E or early permit work, and provide our recommendations concerning appropriate mitigation strategies.***
- 7) How many FDOT projects have been reviewed or coordinated with FDOT over the past year? How does this differ from prior to business practice?

- ***Beginning in November 2003, approximately 70 highway projects were initially screened through the ETAT process. A total of 31 projects were selected and reviewed in-depth, and comments provided to FDOT.***
- ***More than 15 FDOT road projects have been reviewed since November 2003 that were not processed through the ETAT process, but were initiated through the Florida State Clearinghouse SAI review from DEP, or through the permitting process. These FDOT District 3 projects required a lot of staff time by the Transportation coordinator in Tallahassee to date due to numerous onsite field meetings to provide technical assistance with FDOT consultants, office meetings to define issues and study objectives for the PD&E, and later meetings in an attempt to resolve permitting issues.***
- ***The following projects are a few of these that required substantial comments and time due to the issues involved which included potential impacts to important resources, public lands, listed species, new roads or alignments, etc.***
 - ***Front Beach Road re-development Project in Bay County***
 - ***SR-65 repaving in Franklin County through Apalachicola National Forest***
 - ***Gulf to Bay Highway in Gulf and Bay Counties (new US-98 alignment for detour around Mexico Beach) in area of the St. Joe Company's WindMark development***
 - ***US-98 alignment around the ST. Joe Company's WindMark DRI Development in Gulf County.***
 - ***Proposed re-alignment of US-98 in Franklin in area of St. Joe Company's SummerCamp development***
 - ***Emerald Coast Bridge Authority's proposed Toll Bridge in Okaloosa and Walton Counties***

Also since November 2003, the Transportation coordinator has committed a significant amount of staff time on several other transportation projects that, while they are not being coordinated through the ETAT process, the equipment provided through the contract, and the ability to access the GIS data sets on the ETAT Web site was very useful. These projects included:

- ***SR-40 Task Force - monthly meetings over the past two years in Ocala on project design, listed species, and public land issues facilitated by the Holland and Knight Law firm, and the Cantonese Center for Conflict Resolution.***

- ***Suncoast 2 monthly meetings during the past 2.0 years in Ocala and Crystal River of the Environmental Advisory Committee which was coordinated by Post Buckley and the Florida Turnpike on issues associated with alternative alignments, public lands, listed species, and avoidance, minimization and mitigation measures.***
- ***Wekiva Task Force meetings in Orlando to make presentations on wildlife friendly road designs, and directly assist the Department of Community Affairs on wildlife issues, and habitat resource protection measures.***
- ***Platt Branch Mitigation Park – attended several meeting with FDOT District 1 personnel, and their consultants to expand the potential use of this FDOT mitigation bank to include the Florida panther (E), sand skink (T), wood stork (E), Florida grasshopper sparrow (E), blue-tailed mole skink (T), Audubon’s caracara (T), and eastern indigo snake (T), based on the results of planned surveys to determine and map suitable habitat and species occurrence.***
- ***The fifth and sixth SR-29 panther underpass in Collier County, and second SR-46 black bear underpass in Lake County located in areas of large public land holdings – provided initial coordination on final design, and location issues on underpasses that our agency recommended that FDOT construct. The Lake County Underpass was recommended by FWC based on a statewide prioritization of roadkill problem areas we accomplished with the assistance of FWC’s Bear Management Section.***
- ***Secondary Impacts – Assisted URS Corporation and other ETAT members at multiple meetings in Tampa to review how best to address the secondary and cumulative impacts of highway projects during the ETAT reviews.***
- ***Gave a presentations on habitat conservation in the planning and design of highway projects in north Florida landscapes on December 3, 2004 at the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Center, and at the 1000 Friends of Florida conference on Transportation Planning and Design for Wildlife and Human Communities in the Florida Panhandle on July 29, 2004 in Panama City.***
- ***Assisted in early agency coordination for the justification and design of an FWC black bear track count study funded by FDOT on US-98 in Jefferson County, where a high roadkill problem area exists adjacent to large tracts of public land.***
- ***Transportation Coordinator also served as agency representative on FDOT’s Scenic Highways Advisory Committee to review and evaluate applications for designation, and grant requests.***

8) Describe your typical involvement with FDOT projects and at what phase that involvement occurs: Planning, PD&E, Permitting, etc.

- ***It varies depending on the type and size of the project, and the needs of FDOT. We have routinely worked to provide technical assistance to FDOT during all of the above phases of transportation work including determination of an alignment for the Northern Extension of Florida's Turnpike, early planning on the High Speed Rail, inter-agency partnering on the Suncoast 1 and 2 Expressways, Value Engineering exercises on wildlife underpasses, agency coordination and initial surveys to determine credits in establishing the Platt Branch Mitigation Bank, re-location of the Panama City Airport, etc. With the initiation of the ETDM process, we are providing significantly more input at the early Planning stage, and we are providing comments on projects which are about to enter the PD&E phase. We have not had any projects that I am aware of yet in the ETDM review that are in the permit stage, or at least we haven't been asked to comment, or no problems have surfaced.***

9) How many staff hours per month are typically devoted working on FDOT projects? Planning Phase? PD&E phase? Permitting?

- ***Our estimates show that we collectively spent approximately 60 to 130 man-hours per month on FDOT highway projects, which includes about 30 percent of our time devoted to ETDM, and about 70 percent reviewing non-ETDM projects. The majority of this time was spent by the Transportation Coordinator. This higher figure could be due to the fact that ETDM is new, and there is a learning curve associated with the screening tool. Also, a majority of the existing non-ETDM projects are much larger, more controversial; require many monthly meetings and field surveys, and information collection, analysis and preparation between meetings. The majority of our involvement in providing technical assistance as requested by to FDOT or their consultants usually occurs just prior to, or during the PD&E phase. However, with the ETDM we are commenting on a sizable number of projects in the early planning stage, which is a significant change from before.***

10) Describe your involvement with MPO's planning process?

- ***Our agency has not previously been strongly involved with the MPOs since they are not part of the mandated coordination effort we have with other state and federal agencies. However, we have provided advisory recommendations directly to the MPOs when requested. We now provide advisory comments on fish and wildlife resource impacts, and offer avoidance, minimization and mitigation measures on those projects proposed by the MPO which are generated through the ETDM process.***

11) Describe instances of where early collaborative decision-making with FDOT has occurred to eliminate duplication or resolve issues?

- ***The following are just a very few of several important examples which occurred prior to the establishment of the ETDM process:***
 - ***Suncoast 1 and 2 Expressways***
 - ***Northern Extension of Florida's Turnpike***
 - ***SR-200 improvements in Marion County***
 - ***SR-46 wildlife underpass for black bears in Lake County***
 - ***Panther underpasses on SR-29 in Collier County***
- ***Providing comments during the early planning stage has always worked in our favor, and has convinced us that many issues and problems such as alternative alignments, bridge designs, habitat connectivity issues and wildlife underpasses can be more easily resolved if identified early before final design and funding occurs.***

12) When did your agency become aware of and receive public input on a transportation project? Planning? Programming? Project development

- ***Normally, almost all public input, except for organized conservation groups, usually reaches our agency (letters, phone calls, complaints) in the late stages of a highway projects, or usually the permit stage or the initial construction stage. The public has usually read in the newspaper that the road is going to be improved, and the public has concerns about "damage to wildlife" or is concerned about a road alignment through their property or business, or through nearby public lands. Although, now we are beginning to receive more public input when a project is funded and placed in the 5-year work plan, and this is probably due to enhanced public outreach by FDOT.***

13) How often have you published joint notices with FDOT?

- ***Our agency has never published a joint notice with FDOT, although this may be something that Federal Highway, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, or the Coast Guard does on bridge replacement projects, interstate highways or roads with strong federal involvement due to navigation issues which we review.***

14) What are the major barriers to coordination and involvement with FDOT projects: *Issues to consider* Budget? Staff? Other Resources? Time? Communication? Meetings? Field Reviews? Environmental Screening Tool?

- ***One major barrier that we had is that our Vero Beach and Punta Gorda Offices, which are in rural areas, did not have the high-***

speed Internet connection needed to handle the large GIS data files used in the Environmental Screening Tool. We have finally made real progress at both offices in that regard, and just recently had this resolved.

- **In addition, the Vero Beach Office was flooded and not accessible for a period of time, while the Punta Gorda Office was severely damaged by the four major hurricanes which occurred in south Florida during the late summer and fall of 2004. Our two field biologist and administrative person in southwest Florida have had to separately re-locate and were working at three separate state office locations. In addition, some FWC staff member's homes had significant hurricane damage.**
- **In addition, our agency and section underwent a major internal reorganization, and in the near future, there will be a reassigning of responsibilities of staff within FFWCC for Environmental Streamlining. In addition, Terry Gilbert, the ETDM statewide Transportation coordinator is retiring as of April 29, 2005.**

15) What are some of the finding or results you have discovered related to your agencies operations, FDOT operations or the environmental process in general since participation in the MOU and agreements?

- **None really come to mind since we have a very long working relationship with FDOT on resolving wildlife and habitat issues associated with highway projects.**

16) What recommendations would you make to improve the environmental streamlining of the process?

- **The evaluation, establishment, and use of upland mitigation banks in all FDOT districts, similar to Platt Branch in Highlands County, to mitigate impacts to upland listed species.**
- **The consolidation of mitigation needs from multiple small highway projects in the same geographical region resulting in the acquisition of quality priority habitat to increase the size of existing core habitat areas on public lands.**
- **Staggering ETDM projects within the same FDOT District so that a large number are not sent out for review with the same due date.**
- **Creation of a standard agency letter for resource protection**

Agency Specific Performance Measures (PM) Questions

- 1) If your agency has established Performance Measures, describe how participation in ETDM process and streamlining has contributed to meeting these measures?
 - ***Our agency has goals and objectives, but we do not have defined performance measures per se.***
- 2) Describe your agency Performance Measures
 - ***NA***