

**Presentation of the Biological Status Reports and Recommended Listing
Actions for the Bald Eagle, Florida Manatee, Gopher Tortoise, and Panama
City Crayfish
Background Report – April 21, 2006**

At the April 2005 Commission meeting, revised listing process rules were approved. The Commission directed staff to move forward and evaluate petitions received prior to the listing moratorium against the newly adopted listing process. Accordingly, phase one of the listing process was initiated for the bald eagle, Florida manatee, gopher tortoise and Panama City crayfish. Biological Status Reports with listing recommendations were prepared for these species by the Commission appointed Biological Review Panels (BRP). These reports were then peer-reviewed by independent scientists to ensure that the best available data was used in the analyses, and the conclusions were justifiable. These reports are now being presented for Commission review.

Bald Eagle

The bald eagle is currently listed as Threatened. The BRP concluded from the biological assessment that the bald eagle no longer met criteria for listing at any level, has not met the criteria for listing within the last 5 years, and unanimously recommended removing the bald eagle from the list of Threatened species. Independent scientific review of the biological assessment was sought and received from five scientists, all of whom basically supported the information and assumptions used, and the reasonableness of the conclusion made.

Florida manatee

The Florida manatee is currently listed as Endangered. The BRP unanimously agreed that the Florida manatee should be listed as Threatened based on 1) the potential for a greater than 50% decline in population size within the next 3 generations, and 2) the current restricted population size (mature individuals) being less than 2500. The manatee population has increased over the past few decades, but threats still remain that could cause the population to decline significantly in the future. Three of four peer reviewers agreed that the manatee BRP had made the proper recommendation while the fourth reviewer stated that the status assessment is subject to great uncertainty but he liked the use of the precautionary principle.

Gopher tortoise

The gopher tortoise is currently listed as Species of Special Concern. The BRP concluded that the gopher tortoise warranted reclassification from Species of Special Concern to Threatened. This conclusion is based upon 1) reductions in population size $\geq 50\%$ over the last three generations, inferred from a decline in area of occupancy or quality of habitat, as well as the effects of exploitation and

pathogens; 2) a projected $\geq 50\%$ population size reduction in the next three generations, and 3) an estimated $\geq 50\%$ population size reduction in the past two generations and the next one generation. Six of seven independent scientific reviewers of the biological assessment supported the conclusion of the panel. One reviewer felt that the evidence presented was not strong enough to support reclassification and that the listing criteria were not always followed.

Panama City crayfish

The Panama City crayfish is currently listed as a Species of Special Concern. The BRP unanimously recommended that the Panama City crayfish be listed as Threatened based on its assessment of the species' limited geographic range. Specifically, this conclusion of Threatened status is based on: 1) an estimated extent of occurrence of 51 square miles; and 2) an estimated area of occupancy of 18 square miles; in conjunction with evidence for a severely fragmented population and a continuing decline in the species' area of occupancy, area, extent, and/or quality of habitat, and number of locations or subpopulations. Independent scientific review of the biological assessment was sought and all six independent reviewers concurred with the BRP's recommendation to list the crayfish as Threatened. One independent reviewer questioned the objectivity in the application of criteria for assessing population size; otherwise the reviewers stated that the listing criteria were applied appropriately.

At the end of the staff presentation, public comment, and Commission discussion, staff seeks direction to move forward with phase two (drafting management plans) of the listing process for these species.