



## THE NEWSLETTER OF FLORIDA'S WILDLIFE LEGACY INITIATIVE

Winter 2013

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### Goal Post: Terrestrial

**Zachary Prusak, Florida Fire Manager, The Nature Conservancy**



Courtesy of The Nature Conservancy

Most of Florida's conservation lands require fire management in order to maintain viable populations of plants and animals within these ecosystems. The practitioners of the art and science of prescribed fire now apply this natural process. The agencies tasked with this daunting task face myriad responsibilities and so many prescribed fire opportunities are lost.

Among the multiple threats to fire-dependent habitats listed in the [State Wildlife Action Plan](#), incompatible fire management—not enough fire applied at an ecologically appropriate return interval—is listed as a high priority statewide threat, as well as a major source of stress for fire-adapted habitats in Florida.

The Nature Conservancy in Florida's surveys of fire leaders and land managers have consistently cited common obstacles to achieving a desirable fire frequency and to increasing the acreage burned in critical upland habitats. One frequently cited obstacle is the lack of full-time dedicated fire teams with mobile equipment who can take advantage of appropriate weather conditions, which can change overnight.

The need for landscape-scale fire capacity has long been acknowledged by site managers, and prescribed fire "strike teams" have been used on a small scale since the late 1990's. This team structure has also been identified in the State Wildlife Action Plan as one of the solutions to increase fire frequency.

The Nature Conservancy's fire strike teams are structured to maximize safety, ecological efficacy and interagency cooperation by *assisting and augmenting* a host agency's own staff and equipment. This structure allows for multiple burns across a region on any burn day.



Courtesy of The Nature Conservancy



Courtesy of The Nature Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy's Florida Chapter has had great success with fire strike teams since 1999, starting with a US Fish and Wildlife Service-funded scrub-jay team. Since then, The Nature Conservancy's fire strike teams have burned nearly 750,000 acres. Since 2008, the FWC's [State Wildlife Grants Program](#) and [Gopher Tortoise Management Plan](#) have been essential partners in increasing the extent of habitat burned by funding new fire strike teams, such as that in Putnam County, and by augmenting existing funding of well-established fire strike teams in [Lake Wales Ridge](#), [Apalachicola Bluffs](#) and [Milton](#).

State Wildlife Grant and Gopher Tortoise funds have allowed fire strike teams to assist or lead 540 fires on 120 individual conservation sites comprising 154,700 acres with 25 partners! This is an incredible success story, where the wildlife and habitats that Floridians treasure benefit from partners working together.

[Learn more about The Nature Conservancy's fire restoration!](#) [Meet Zach Prusak!](#) [And help celebrate Prescribed Fire Awareness Week the week of January 28, 2013!](#)

### Goal Post: Data Gaps

**Daniel Greene, PhD Student, Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, University of Florida**

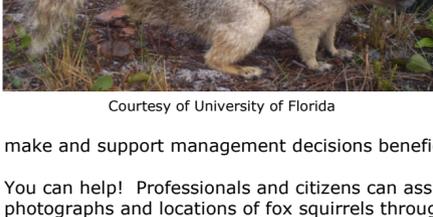
How many unique subspecies of fox squirrels occur in Florida? Where in Florida are fox squirrels found? How should fox squirrels and their habitats be managed and monitored?

These are some of the questions University of Florida researchers will answer through their "Conservation of Florida's Fox Squirrels" project. Concern over the apparent decline of [Florida's fox squirrels](#)—two of the four subspecies are state-listed—led to State Wildlife Grant funding to answer these questions and to address the [Data Gaps](#) goal.

University of Florida researchers are using genetic markers to determine how many subspecies occur in Florida and to identify those subspecies in need of conservation efforts. Researchers have also developed a methodology to recognize individual fox squirrels from their unique color patterns. This methodology allows for the



Courtesy of University of Florida



Courtesy of University of Florida

use of infrared trip cameras throughout Florida to study and monitor fox squirrels. To understand which forest management practices support fox squirrel populations, project personnel are placing trip cameras in forests with a variety of fire and timber management practices.

Florida's fox squirrels are a critical part of pine forests. Researchers are excited about the progress so far and look forward to determining fox squirrels' genetics and to better equipping land managers to

make and support management decisions beneficial to fox squirrels.

You can help! Professionals and citizens can assist with the collection of genetic samples and provide photographs and locations of fox squirrels throughout Florida by contacting [Courtney Tye](#). To learn more, visit the [Fox Squirrel Registry](#).

For more information, contact [Bob McCleery](#) or [Daniel Greene](#).

### 60 Species + Dozens of Stakeholders = 1 Imperiled Species Management Plan

**Laura Barrett, Imperiled Species Management Plan Coordinator**  
**Claire Sunquist Blunden, Imperiled Species Management Plan Stakeholder Coordinator**

Another equation: 2 + 68A-27 = 1

The answer: in September 2010, FWC Commissioners approved changes to rules concerning Florida's endangered and threatened species. The former 2 categories for state-listed species—threatened and species of special concern—were updated in Rule [68A-27](#) to create 1 category of state-listed species.



Black Skimmer

In adopting the new rules, the Commission called for developing Biological Status Reviews for each of sixty species. The Biological Status Reviews recommended

whether each species should remain or become listed as threatened; remain or become a species of special concern, until additional data are gathered; or be removed from state listing.

With the Biological Status Reviews in hand, the FWC and its partners, with support from State Wildlife Grants, began planning for the development and implementation of the [Imperiled Species Management Plan](#). The Imperiled Species Management Plan draws on three components.



Osprey

1. **Species Action Plans:** Evaluating the core threats and needs of each species, the forty-nine Species Action Plans prioritize conservation actions and provide rule and permitting intent. The Species Action Plans are expected to be completed by June 2013.
2. **Integrated Conservation Strategies:** Designed to address multiple species and align current and future resources, the Integrated Conservation Strategies will address elements common across the Species Action Plans.



Alligator Snapping Turtle

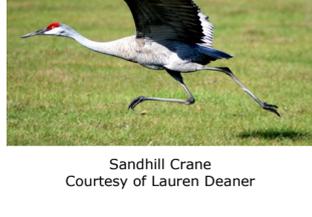
3. **Imperiled Species Management Plan:** Integrating broad conservation strategies with specific actions for each wildlife species, the Imperiled Species Management Plan will identify the highest priority needs for individual and suites of species and will address recommendations for implementing both priority individual species conservation actions and priority integrated conservation strategies that will benefit multiple species.

You can help! Each draft Species Action Plan and the draft Imperiled Species Management Plan will be released for public comment—share your thoughts! You can also follow the FWC on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#) for more information.

### Florida Bird Conservation Initiative: Working Together for Bird Conservation

**Elena Sachs, Florida Bird Conservation Initiative Biologist**

The [Florida Bird Conservation Initiative](#) (FBCI) is a partnership that promotes the conservation of native Florida birds and their habitats through coordinated efforts. Before the launch of FBCI, FWC involvement in existing partnership-based bird conservation initiatives was limited. As a result, Florida's priorities were inadequately addressed in conservation planning, especially with regards to peninsular Florida because its habitats and species are unlike those in partner states. Initially funded through State Wildlife Grants in 2006 to expand FWC's role in avian conservation and to implement the [State Wildlife Action Plan](#), the FBCI improves participation in bird conservation initiatives, planning, and implementation throughout Florida.



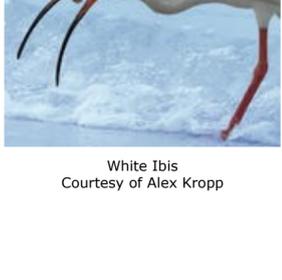
Sandhill Crane  
Courtesy of Lauren Deaner

Though State Wildlife Grant funding ends in June 2013, FBCI's work will continue with support from a [Conserve Wildlife Tag](#) grant that will fund the program through December 2014. With this additional support, FBCI will:



Burrowing Owl  
Courtesy of Lauren Deaner

- Implement priority actions from the FWC's avian species management plans.
- Promote and build cooperative relationships and collaborate with diverse groups to support bird conservation efforts in Florida and regionally.
- Identify opportunities to develop new partnerships and continue to work with key partners to advance bird conservation.
- Manage, maintain, and update the FBCI website and listserv to provide an effective communication tool for avian conservation actions.
- Identify funding opportunities and provide technical and logistical assistance in the development of grant proposals.
- Ensure that regional avian conservation initiatives and programs reflect Florida's perspective and meet Florida-specific avian conservation priorities.



White Ibis  
Courtesy of Alex Kropp

Learn more! Contact [Elena Sachs](#) to join the FBCI listserv.

### Tapped to Adapt? Developing Climate Change Response Strategies

The [State Wildlife Action Plan](#), best management practices, the [Imperiled Species Management Plan](#), Wildlife Management Area plans... The FWC and its conservation partners are planning for the future! To assist planners and decision-makers, and to address the State Wildlife Action Plan's [monitoring and adaptation goal](#), State Wildlife Grants is currently funding a joint [Defenders of Wildlife](#) and FWC project to develop a process and methods for incorporating climate change into planning.



Defenders is currently learning about the FWC's existing planning process and working with FWC staff to identify key points to incorporate climate change information. Later this year, Defenders and the FWC will host a series of workshops for three pilot case

studies to discuss and refine recommendations for incorporating climate change into existing planning efforts. Through this project, Defenders and the FWC will have developed a decision-making process for including climate change response strategies in planning.

[Learn more!](#) And anticipate seeing the process in action once the 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan revisions begin!

### Coalition on a Mission: Teaming With Wildlife

Florida's Teaming With Wildlife Coalition currently numbers 401 members, placing Florida sixth among the 56 US states and territories. You can help Florida become number one by joining our efforts and helping us secure long-term dedicated funding for Florida's wildlife conservation and related education and recreation: [Sign up and learn more about Florida's Teaming With Wildlife Coalition!](#)

**You can help! Join the Teaming with Wildlife Coalition!**

