

Imperiled Species Management Plan: Species Conservation Measures and Permitting Guidelines



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Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission



Division: Habitat and Species Conservation

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All photos by FWC unless otherwise acknowledged

Presenting 6 new guidelines

Species Conservation Measures and Permitting Guidelines

- All ISMP species will have guidelines
- Tool for landowners, consultants, partners, and interested parties
- Provide options for avoidance, minimization and mitigation when applicants are seeking permits
- Require Commission approval

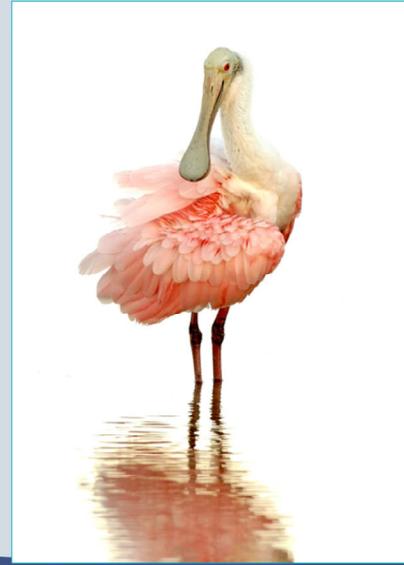


Photo courtesy of Jack Rogers

Guidelines are stand-alone documents that lay out the biological and regulatory needs for each species. The ISMP provides a framework for the Guidelines and details overarching policies, however, each set of Guidelines focuses on individual species (or suites of species). The Guidelines provide species-specific information on:

- essential behavioral patterns
- survey methods (which are not required but if followed, do provide assurance of species absence)
- recommended conservation practices
- species-specific exemptions or authorizations for take
- coordination with other regulatory programs
- permitting options for achieving conservation or scientific benefit

The Guidelines also authorize exemptions in some cases so no permits are needed.

Species Guidelines

- Florida bog frog
- Georgia blind salamander
- Crystal darter
- Southern tessellated darter
- Sherman's short-tailed shrew
- Wading birds: little blue heron, tricolored heron, roseate spoonbill, reddish egret



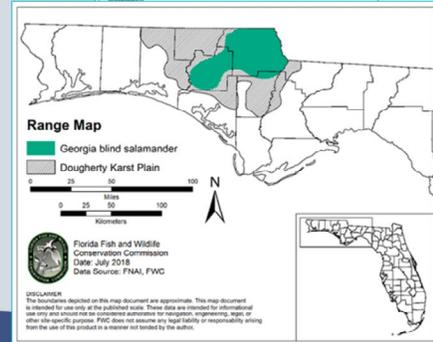
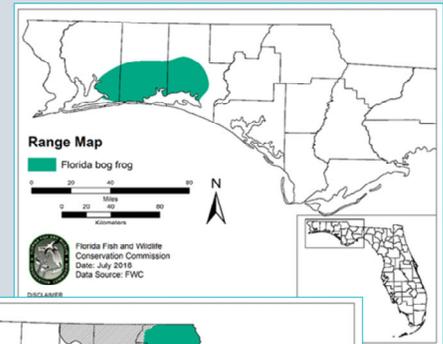
The 9 species included in this presentation are:

- Florida bog frog
- Georgia blind salamander
- Crystal darter
- Southern tessellated darter
- Sherman's short-tailed shrew
- Wading birds: little blue heron, tricolored heron, roseate spoonbill, reddish egret

These species range from panhandle rivers to a handful of caves in north Florida, to the coastal areas and swamps near the everglades. Each set of guidelines was developed by species experts with input from the public and partners.

Panhandle Frogs and Salamanders

- Protections from other regulations
 - Florida statutes protect caves and cave life
 - Environmental Resource Permitting conditions
 - Florida Forestry and Agricultural Wildlife Best Management Practices
- Conservation practices include
 - Maintaining water quality/quantity
 - Limiting hardwoods near streams with bog frogs
 - Creating buffers around sinkholes and cave openings



The Florida bog frog and the Georgia blind salamander are both state Threatened species found in very limited areas of the panhandle. The bog frog is found mainly on Eglin Air Force Base and surrounding public lands, and the Georgia blind salamander is known from a handful of caves and sinks in Calhoun, Jackson, and Washington counties.

The primary threats to these species are maintaining water quality and quantity. However, as with some of our previous guidelines and because these two species are wetland dependent or aquatic species, activities that would impact water quality and quantity are regulated through other programs. The conditions for minimization and mitigation found in those permits are usually adequate to provide protection and meet conservation benefit for these species. Following Forestry Wildlife BMPs and requirements for Outstanding Florida Waters protects these species by maintaining water quality and quantity. Bog frogs benefit from keeping shrubs and hardwoods out of the seepage streams and bogs that they live and breed in. Georgia blind salamanders are hard to find but benefit from existing protections about taking cave life, limiting littering in caves, and practices that buffer activities or application of herbicides and pesticides near caves and sinks.

Darters

- Protections from other regulations
 - Environmental Resource Permitting conditions
 - Outstanding Florida Waters designation
 - Florida Forestry and Agricultural Wildlife Best Management Practices
- Conservation practices include
 - Maintaining water quality and quantity in key watersheds
 - Maintaining rocky materials and gravel bars for breeding and spawning



The crystal darter and southern tessellated darter are both state-threatened species. The crystal darter is found in the Escambia river and tributaries, while the southern tessellated darter is found in and around the Ocklawaha River and surrounding tributaries.

The primary threats to these species are changes to water quality and quantity. Following Forestry or Agriculture Wildlife BMPs and requirements for Outstanding Florida Waters protects these species by maintaining water quality and quantity. Since the crystal darter relies on gravel bars for breeding and spawning, the guidelines focus on avoiding impacts to those areas within the river. The southern tessellated darter also needs rocky material to breed and the guidelines explain ways to retain those in the river.

Once again, you can see the common themes that these species are already well protected by other programs and regulations. As aquatic species, activities that may degrade water quality are regulated through other programs, and the conditions for minimization and mitigation found in those permits are usually adequate to provide protection and meet conservation benefit for both of these species.

Sherman's Short-tailed Shrew

- Guidelines focus on acquiring information for this species
- Conservation practices include
 - Maintaining downed wood
 - Leaving snags on site where possible
 - Reducing soil compaction



The Sherman's short-tailed shrew is one of the most elusive species of shrew in Florida. It is larger than other shrews in Florida and is only known from a few locations in Lee and Collier counties. Very little is known about this shrew which is why the ISMP categorizes it as a cryptic species, meaning that even in areas where we know the species lives, it is very difficult to trap or detect.

The focus of the Guidelines is on acquiring information about this shrew including sightings, habitat preferences, and even genetic material.

Based on what we know about other short-tailed shrews, staff recommends practices like leaving downed woody debris and snags that will help provide food and cover for these animals.

Wading Birds

- All four species are State-threatened
- Often found nesting with other non-listed species
- Reddish egret mainly coastal, roseate spoonbill mainly coastal but occurs at some freshwater sites, little blue heron and tricolored heron found statewide



Photo courtesy of Jack Rogers

Staff have developed a multi-species Guideline that covers four species of state listed wading birds: the little blue heron, tricolored heron (pictured here), reddish egret and roseate spoonbill. Some of these wading birds were decimated by plume hunting in the early 20th century and then were significantly impacted by DDT in the second half of the century. Although these threats have been addressed, the Guidelines lay out important conservation measures that will continue to protect them against known threats.

These four species often are found nesting with other non-listed species of wading birds like white ibis, snowy egret, great blue heron, or green heron. They can be found nesting in coastal areas, some of which are included as Critical Wildlife Areas, or in more inland sites. The guidelines explain where each species can be found in the state, when they typically nest, and the duration of their nesting.

Reddish egrets nest mainly in coastal areas and are usually solitary nesters. Roseate spoonbills are also found in coastal areas but can forage and nest further inland than reddish egrets. The little blue herons and tricolored herons can nest at many different locations statewide.

Wading Birds

Guidelines define

- Active nests
- Active breeding sites
- Recent breeding sites
- Core Foraging Areas for reddish egrets
- Actions that may cause take of wading birds, their nests, eggs, or young



The Guidelines define a number of terms and activities that people may not be familiar with for these species of wading birds.

For example, nests are active from the time the adults start building nests to the time when the young permanently leave the nest. This can vary in different parts of the state and by species and staff have a map and guidance about recommended survey dates in each part of the state.

Another definition is for recent breeding sites - this means a site has been used for breeding by one of the four state-listed species over the past 5 years, according to FWC and FWRI data. The dataset for recent breeding sites will not be a comprehensive database of every wading bird rookery but can provide data to public or private landowners who would like to find out more about when birds may have nested at specific locations over the last 5 years.

The Guidelines provide examples of activities that are not likely to cause take such as maintenance or removal of canals and water control structures. They also detail examples of activities that are exempt from a permit, such as emergency actions for flood control for health and human safety.

Wading Birds

Protections from other regulations

- As wetland-dependent species, conservation of all four species will be evaluated through DEP programs
- Florida Forestry and Agriculture Wildlife Best Management Practices



As wetland dependent species, wading bird conservation can be addressed through Florida Department of Environmental Protections Environmental Resource Permitting (ERP) program. For projects that take foraging habitat for the little blue heron, roseate spoonbill and tricolored heron, minimization and mitigation conditions in Environmental Resource Permits will likely achieve conservation benefit.

For projects that cause significant habitat modification of reddish egret foraging habitat, FWC staff will evaluate the minimization and mitigation included in ERPs, through Joint Coastal Permitting (JCP). If the mitigation proposed in the ERP is not sufficient to meet the criteria outlined in Rule 68A-27.007, F.A.C., the Guidelines provide additional examples of mitigation such as habitat restoration (planting), management, acquisition, or easements that would lead to a conservation benefit.

The little blue heron and tricolored heron are included in the Forestry and Agricultural Best Management Practices for Wildlife. The other two species are not included in the program because they are usually found in more coastal environments. This program requires that those enrolled in the program avoid heavy equipment operation within 330 feet of active, known, and visibly apparent rookeries (2 or more nests) during the breeding season, February to May.

Wading Birds

- Minimization options
 - Conduct activities outside the breeding season
 - Minimize activities within 330 feet of active nest sites
 - Remove vegetation in a phased manner
- Mitigation options
 - Habitat protection or restoration
 - Acquisition, easements, or wetland credits
 - Funding or information options
 - Mitigation provided through ERPs



If potential applicants are unable to avoid active or recent breeding sites or suitable reddish egret foraging habitat within core foraging areas, they can seek an incidental take permit (ITP) from FWC. While FWC will consider the proposed actions along the avoidance, minimization and mitigation provided by ERP and JCP processes, the Guidelines describe ways to minimize or mitigate for take of these four species of wading birds, if additional minimization or mitigation are needed. Examples of minimization for these species include: waiting to conduct activities until after nesting is completed, working more than 330 feet from active nests, or removing vegetation in a phased manner and replanting.

Examples of mitigation that would be suitable for take of wading birds as part of an ITP include: restoring spoil islands or tree islands, replanting mangroves or trees to support nesting, large scale erosion control projects, or providing funding sufficient to pay for one of the examples above.

Stakeholder Engagement

- Three webinars in August and September 2018
- 30 day public comment period
- One public meeting in September 2018
- Incorporated public comment into draft guidelines



Staff have been working to engage stakeholders in the process since 2011 and have overall support for the development and completion of the ISMP. We have worked with stakeholders that have contributed their comments on the biological status reviews, Species Action Plans, overall ISMP, and now the Guidelines. Staff have presented at Regional Planning Council Meetings, conferences, and to smaller interest groups to make stakeholders aware of status changes for these species and opportunities to provide feedback. We continued to engage with stakeholders during the development of this set of Guidelines.

Stakeholders had the opportunity to participate in the process through email updates, webinars, presentations, and direct phone calls and conversations with staff. In 2018, staff met with stakeholders to discuss drafts of the guidelines, held 3 webinars, and 1 species-specific workshop focused on the wading bird Guidelines. We received approximately 100 comments on the draft Guidelines and have incorporated that feedback into the drafts presented today.

Staff Recommendation

Approval of six Species Conservation Measures and Permitting Guidelines:

- Florida bog frog
- Crystal darter
- Sherman's short-tailed shrew
- Georgia blind salamander
- Southern tessellated darter
- Wading birds: little blue heron, tricolored heron, reddish egret, roseate spoonbill

If approved, these would go into effect immediately.



Staff recommends approval of these six Guidelines that address nine State Threatened species.

If approved, since these are not rule, they would go into effect immediately.

The following slides are considered backup material
and are not anticipated to be part of the actual
presentation



Order of Completion of Guidelines

- Remaining 27 species will be completed over the next 2 years
- Brought to the Commission in batches, can be single species or multispecies
- Staff are focusing first on State Threatened species
- Maximize consistency with other agency efforts
- Coordination on development and evaluation of 9 at risk species which will be evaluated by the USFWS in the next 7 years

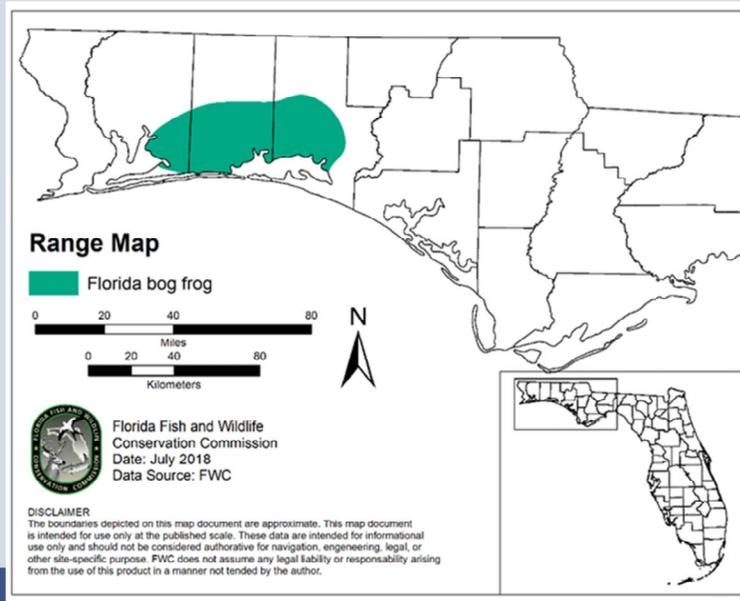


Common Themes in the Guidelines

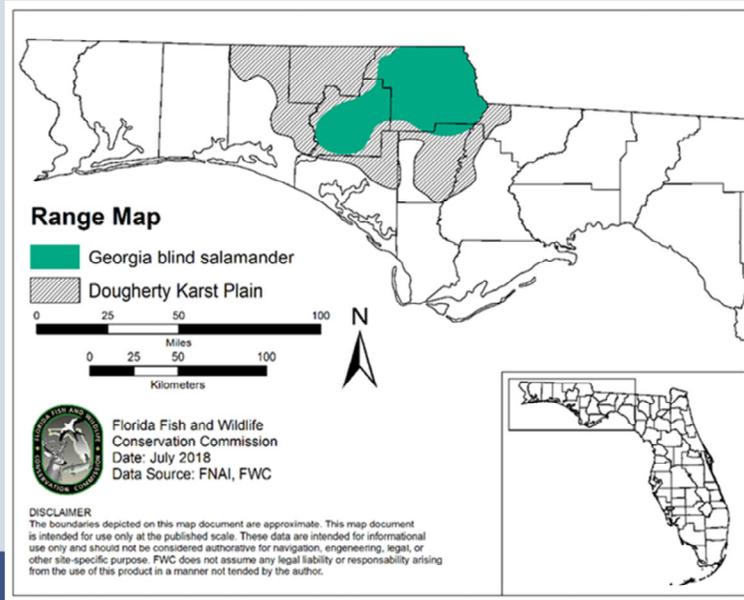
- 8 of the 9 are found in aquatic or wetland environments that would overlap with the Environmental Resource Permitting process.
- 4 of the 9 are found in rivers and streams that have been designated as Outstanding Florida Waters.
- 8 of the 9 species are included in Forestry and Agricultural Wildlife Best Management Practices.
- 2 of the 9 are “At Risk” species that will undergo USFWS evaluation in the next 7 years.



Florida Bog Frog



Georgia Blind Salamander



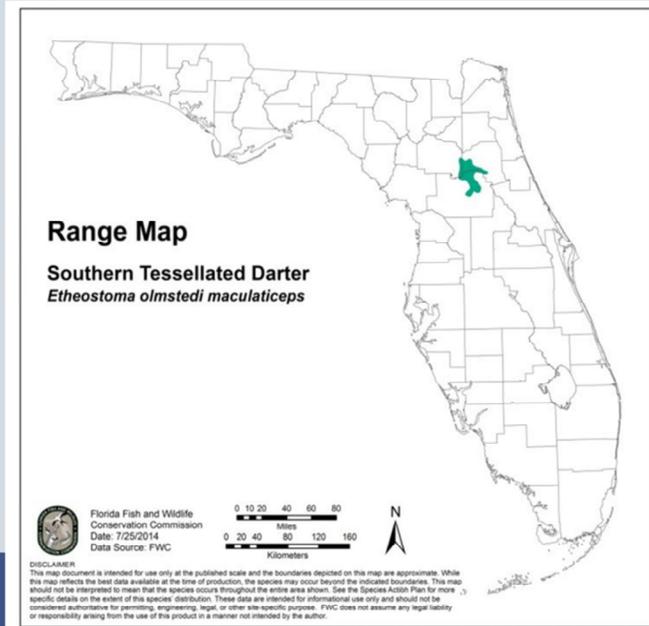
Georgia Blind Salamander



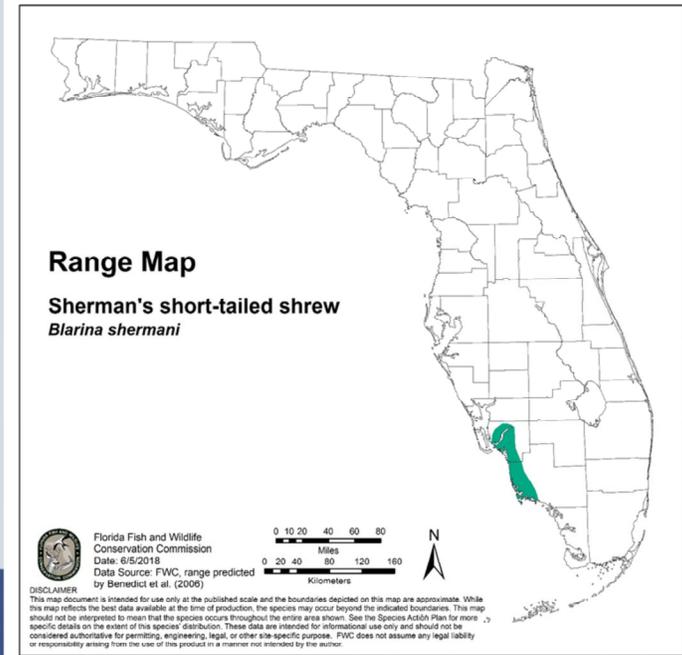
Crystal Darter



Southern Tessellated Darter



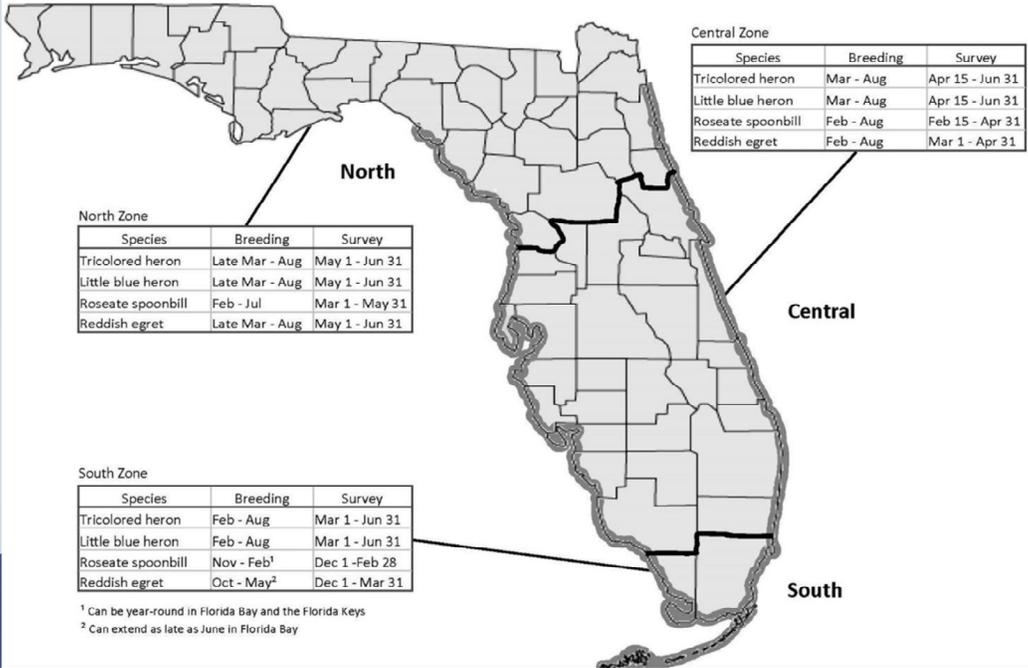
Sherman's Short-tailed Shrew



State-Threatened Wading Bird Ranges, Breeding Seasons, and Recommended Survey Dates, by Zone

■ Portion of range used by all species for breeding and foraging

■ Portion of range used by tricolored heron and little blue heron for breeding and foraging, roseate spoonbill for foraging, and (coast only) reddish egret for foraging



Wading Birds



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Wading Birds

