

Imperiled Species Management Plan: Species Conservation Measures and Permitting Guidelines



July 23, 2020



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

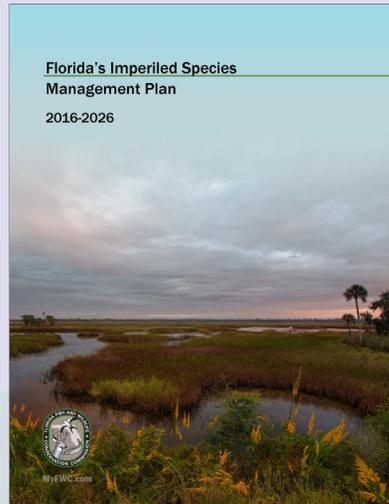
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Background

- Imperiled Species Management Plan
 - Approved November 2016
- Addresses 59 species
 - 38 State Threatened
 - 21 Recently removed from the list

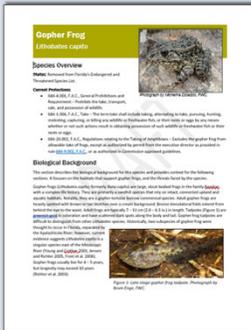


Florida's Imperiled Species Management Plan (ISMP) was approved by Commissioners in November 2016. The ISMP is a comprehensive plan addressing conservation of state-listed and recently delisted species. The plan is closing out its third year of implementation, and we have made significant progress towards meeting objectives and improving our agency's approach to conserving imperiled species.

The plan includes both state-listed and recently de-listed species and is supported by species-specific action plans, regulatory policies, integrated implementation strategies, and Species Conservation Measures and Permitting Guidelines (Guidelines).

Photo: ISMP Cover

Species Conservation Measures and Permitting Guidelines



- Developed for all species included in the ISMP (59)
 - State-Threatened and non-listed species
- Incorporated into species rules by reference
- Biological background
- Voluntary conservation measures and permit options
- Avoidance, minimization, and mitigation options for state-Threatened species



The Species Conservation Measures and Permitting Guidelines are a significant component of the ISMP. Guidelines clarify protections and improve the permitting process for the state's imperiled species. All 59 species included in the ISMP will have guidelines developed, which includes listed and non-listed species. Rule 68A-27.0012, F.A.C. describes that prior to removing a species from the state-Threatened list, a management plan (including needed protections) must be approved. The Guidelines for non-listed species complete this process, started when the ISMP was approved in 2016.

Once approved by the Commission, Guidelines are incorporated into rule by reference.

Guidelines include several key components:

Biological background is necessary to understand a species' essential behaviors and assess which activities may result in take.

They also include voluntary measures designed to benefit the species.

Different permit types available and explanation of when each is applicable.

Avoidance, minimization, and mitigation options are included in Guidelines for state-Threatened species.

Species Conservation Measures and Permitting Guidelines will be completed for all remaining species, phased to overlap with research findings and ongoing conservation programs. Guidelines will be presented to the Commission through 2021.

Species Overview

Gopher tortoise commensal species

State Threatened:

- Florida pine snake (revised)

No longer listed:

- Gopher frog
- Florida mouse



This group of Guidelines includes:

3 species considered commensal to the gopher tortoise. Permitting guidelines for the gopher tortoise were revised in coordination with development of these Guidelines to ensure consistent protections and guidance for these species:

1 state-listed species:

Florida pine snake (revisions to existing guidelines, focused on consistency with revisions to the Gopher Tortoise Permitting Guidelines)

2 species removed from the list:

Gopher frog
Florida mouse

Photos, clockwise from top left: Florida pine snake (Kevin Enge, FWC, Florida mouse (Fiona Sunquist), Gopher frog (Kevin Enge, FWC)

Species Overview

No longer listed

- Mangrove rivulus
- Suwannee cooter
- Lower Keys reptiles:
 - Red rat snake
 - Striped mud turtle
 - Peninsula ribbonsnake



This group of Guidelines also includes:

5 species removed from the list:

Mangrove rivulus

Suwannee cooter

Lower Keys populations of the red rat snake, striped mud turtle, and peninsula ribbonsnake

Photos, clockwise from top left: mangrove rivulus (Scott Taylor), Suwannee cooter (Alex Kropp, FWC), Lower Keys peninsula ribbonsnake, striped mud turtle, and red rat snake (Jonathan Mays, FWC)

Gopher Frog



- Conservation recommendations
 - Improve habitat in breeding wetlands and adjacent uplands
 - Maintain connectivity between wetland and upland habitats
- Guidance on limited relocation from Gopher Tortoise Permitting Guidelines



The gopher frog is no longer listed in Florida. It was previously a Species of Special Concern. It is found across Florida in suitable uplands, except in Miami-Dade and Monroe counties. The species is closely tied with the presence of gopher tortoises, and requires fish-free seasonal wetlands for breeding, with connectivity to adjacent uplands where adults spend most of their time. The primary threat to the species is loss and conversion of upland and wetland habitats via development, fire suppression, and improper fire management.

Recommended conservation practices focus on appropriate burn regimes to prevent encroachment of woody vegetation into breeding wetlands, and to maintain appropriate habitat conditions in adjacent uplands. Guidelines provide information on limited relocation for gopher frogs encountered on gopher tortoise relocation sites. Limited relocation options were developed collaboratively with staff in the gopher tortoise program, and can also be found in Appendix 9 of the draft revised Gopher Tortoise Permitting Guidelines.

Photo: Adult gopher frog (Michalina Dziadzio, FWC)

Florida Mouse

- Conservation recommendations
 - Improve dry upland habitats
 - Maintain connectivity among occupied areas
- Guidance on limited relocation from Gopher Tortoise Permitting Guidelines



The Florida mouse also is no longer listed, and like the gopher frog was also previously a Species of Special Concern. This species occurs in disjunct populations on peninsula ridge systems in scrub and other xeric habitats. As a gopher tortoise commensal, the species is closely tied to the presence of tortoises and their burrows. Threats to the species include loss and degradation of upland habitats, fire suppression and improper use of fire, and introduced predators such as red imported fire ants.

Guidelines focus on recommending appropriate management practices to maintain suitable xeric habitats for the species, as well as maintaining connectivity between occupied habitat patches to create healthy meta populations. Guidelines also provide information on limited relocation practices for Florida mice that are encountered on gopher tortoise relocation sites. Limited relocation options were developed collaboratively with staff in the gopher tortoise program, and can also be found in Appendix 9 of the draft revised Gopher Tortoise Permitting Guidelines.

Photo: Florida mouse (Fiona Sunquist)

Florida Pine Snake



- Guidelines initially approved in 2018
- Revised guidelines focus on consistency with Gopher Tortoise Permitting Guideline revisions and other priority commensals



The Florida pine snake is a state-Threatened species that falls under FWC's Cryptic Species Policy, meaning it can be difficult to detect even in occupied habitat. Guidelines for the species were first approved by the Commission in February 2018.

The Florida pine snake is a priority commensal to the gopher tortoise. Revisions presented today focus on consistency with changes in the draft revised Gopher Tortoise Permitting Guidelines. The revisions are designed to provide clear and consistent information across species-specific documents. The revisions include additional options for limited relocation, if the species is discovered on site.

Photo: Group of young Florida pine snakes (Karen Parker, FWC)

Mangrove Rivulus



- Conservation recommendations
 - Restore structure and hydrology of mangrove communities
 - Minimize contaminants in coastal habitats



The mangrove rivulus is no longer listed. It's found in coastal mangrove forests from Pinellas County south on the Gulf coast, and Volusia County south on the Atlantic coast. As a marine species with no other special protections, it falls under harvest limits of 2 fish or 100 lbs. of fish per person per day, whichever is more (Florida Statutes Chapter 379.361(2)(i)(1) as consistent with Marone fish standards regulations). Threats to this species include habitat loss and alteration, sea-level rise and use of pesticides in coastal habitats.

The Guidelines encourage proper management of coastal mangrove systems, preventing contaminants from entering these systems, and restoring the hydrology of previously altered mangrove forests to increase available habitat.

Photo:

Top – Mangrove forest (Brie Ochoa)

Bottom – Mangrove rivulus (FWC)

Suwannee Cooter

- Conservation recommendations
 - Improve water quality
 - Maintain riverine habitats and adjacent uplands
 - Remove debris that may entangle turtles



The Suwannee cooter was removed from the state Threatened and Endangered Species list in 2017. Take of this species is regulated through general prohibitions and 68A-25.002, F.A.C. (Rules Relating to Reptiles). This species is found along the Gulf coast in rivers from the central Panhandle (Ochlockonee River) south to Sarasota County (Phillippi Creek). Primary threats to the Suwannee cooter are degradation of aquatic habitats and loss/alteration of adjacent terrestrial habitats needed for nesting, impacts from fish hooks /trotlines/setlines and predation of adults and eggs.

Guidelines for this species focus on managing aquatic and terrestrial habitats, removing sources of mortality such as abandoned fishing gear, and preventing contaminants from entering occupied aquatic habitats.

Photo: Suwannee cooter basking (Alex Kropp, FWC)

Delisted Keys Reptiles

- Lower Keys populations of:

- Red rat snake
- Striped mud turtle
- Peninsula ribbonsnake



- Conservation recommendations

- Reduce loss of remaining habitats
- Best management practices for aquatic and terrestrial habitats



The red rat snake, striped mud turtle, and peninsula ribbonsnake of the Lower Keys (west of the Seven Mile Bridge) have all been removed from the state Threatened and Endangered Species list. These are unique populations of each species that are also found elsewhere in Florida and the United States.

Primary threats to all three species include loss of remaining habitats, saltwater intrusion into occupied freshwater habitats, and climate change impacts. Some or all of these species also may be threatened by collection from the wild. Guidelines for delisted Keys reptiles focus on reducing loss of remaining habitats and implementing appropriate management regimes for remaining suitable habitat (both aquatic and terrestrial as these species use both habitats)

Photos (clockwise from top left): Lower Keys red rat snake, peninsula ribbonsnake, and striped mud turtle (Jonathan Mays, FWC)

Draft Rules



- Revisions to four rules to incorporate these Guidelines by reference
 - Rules relating to Reptiles, Mammals and Amphibians
 - Rules relating to Threatened and Endangered Species



Incorporating the Guidelines in rules provides regulatory certainty for the authorizations for take included in some Guidelines. Four rules will be revised to incorporate the Guidelines by reference, improve consistency among other non-listed species rules, and clean up and clarify existing rule language.

Revisions to the rules include:

- 68A-27.003 - Incorporate updated guidelines by reference for the Florida Pine Snake
- 68A-26.002 - Incorporate Guidelines by reference for the gopher frog
- 68A-25.002 - Incorporate Guidelines by reference for delisted Keys reptiles (peninsula ribbonsnake, red rat snake, striped mud turtle), Suwannee cooter,
- 68A-29.002 Incorporate Guidelines by reference for Florida mouse

** Note that additional proposed revisions to 68A-25.002 and 68A-27.003 are being presented as separate agenda items at this meeting.*

Photo: Florida mouse (Karen Parker, FWC)

Stakeholder Engagement



- 30-day public comment period
- 2 public webinars
- Incorporated public comment into draft guidelines



Stakeholder feedback is an important part of Guidelines development. Engagement includes both targeted review by key species experts, as well as public and stakeholder review. We work to incorporate input and improve the Guidelines through the feedback provided.

For this set of Guidelines, we worked in coordination with staff leading revisions to the Gopher Tortoise Permitting Guidelines to ensure stakeholder concerns about priority commensals were understood and addressed.

Opportunities for engagement are provided during development of each set of Guidelines. For this group, stakeholder engagement included:

- 30-day public comment period from April 20th – May 20th
- 2 public webinars advertised online and in the F.A.R.
- 55 comments were received
- 6 individuals provided comments
- Additional feedback was received through comments on the proposed revisions to the Gopher Tortoise Permitting Guidelines

Stakeholder groups that provided comment include: utility providers, conservation non-profit organizations, legal firms, private breeders, and private environmental consultants

Photo: Mangrove rivulus (Scott Taylor)

Staff Recommendation

Approval of six Species Conservation Measures and Permitting Guidelines

Lower Keys reptiles

Florida pine snake

Florida mouse

Gopher frog

Suwannee cooter

Mangrove rivulus

Approval to publish notices of proposed rules to incorporate Guidelines and adopt as final without further hearing, unless requested.

68A-27.003, F.A.C.

68A-25.002, F.A.C.

68A-26.002, F.A.C.

68A-29.002, F.A.C



Staff recommends the Commission approve the six Species Conservation Measures and Permitting Guidelines for eight species, as presented. The Guidelines will become effective immediately following approval. *(The Lower Keys Reptiles Guidelines include the Lower Keys populations of the peninsula ribbonsnake, red rat snake, and striped mud turtle)*

Additionally, staff recommends the Commission approve publishing notices for four proposed rules; if a hearing is not requested within 21 days of the notice, staff also recommends that the rules be adopted without further public hearing as allowed by s. 120.54(3) Florida Statutes.



The following slides represent background materials



Photo: Suwannee cooter (Ashley Ballou, FWC)

Guidelines Development

If Guidelines are approved today: 48 complete, 13 remaining

Estimated timeframe to complete remaining Guidelines		December 2020	July 2021
6 species 3 Guidelines	Southeastern American Kestrel	*	
	Beach-Nesting Birds (4 species)	*	
	Florida Tree Snail	*	
7 species 4 Guidelines	Limpkin		*
	Saltmarsh Songbirds (4 species)		*
	Brown Pelican		*
	Key Silverside		*



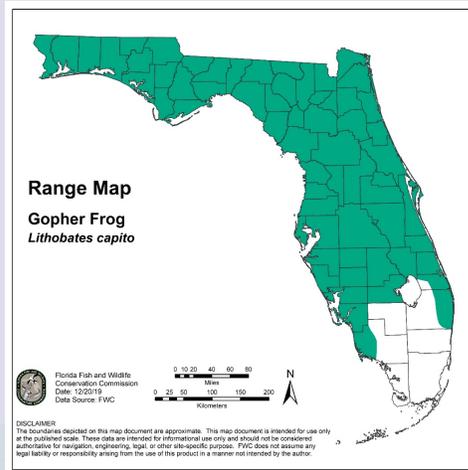
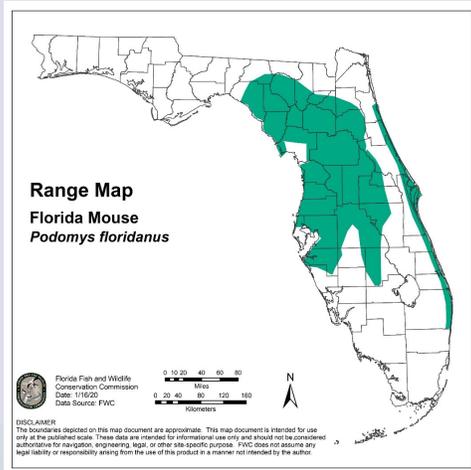
Progress towards completing Guidelines Development:

FWC staff began drafting Guidelines during the development of Florida's Imperiled Species Management Plan, and the first set was completed in 2016.

If Guidelines for 8 species presented today are approved, staff will have completed Guidelines for 48 species (13 species remaining).

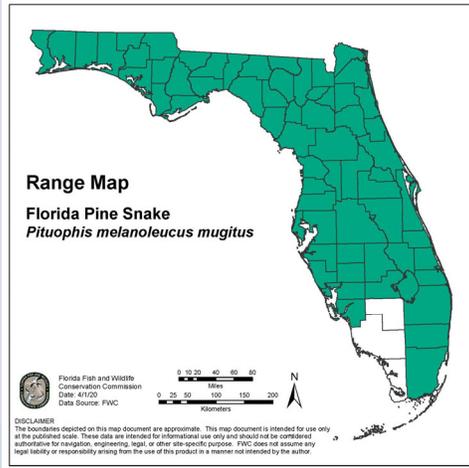
We anticipate completing these in 2021, following the draft schedule outlined here.

Range Maps: Florida Mouse and Gopher Frog



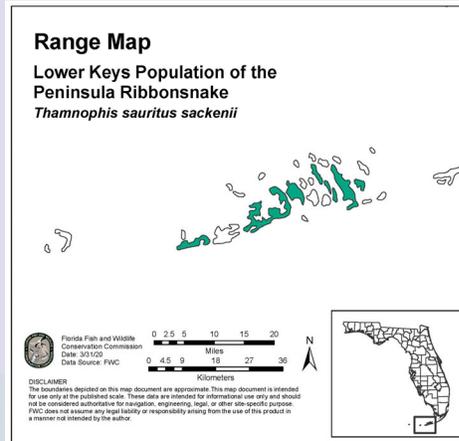
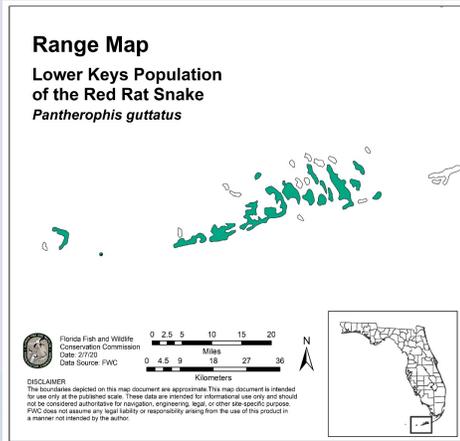
Range maps for the Florida mouse and gopher frog

Range Maps: Florida Pine Snake and Mangrove Rivulus



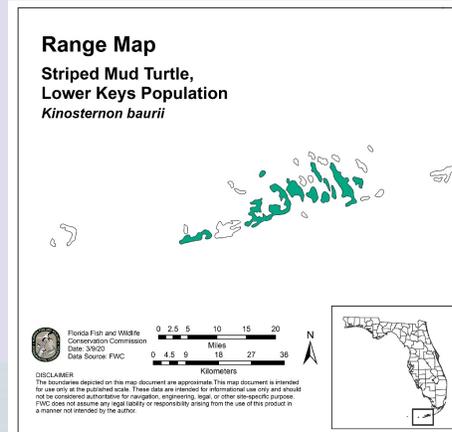
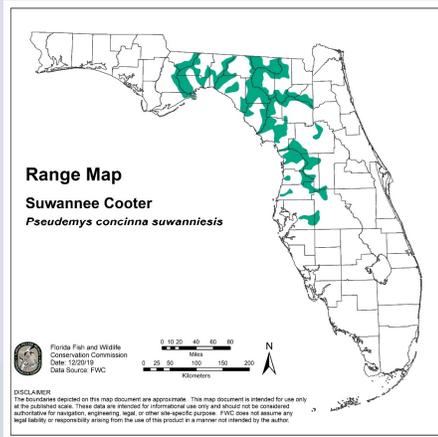
Range maps for the Florida pine snake and mangrove rivulus

Range Maps: Lower Keys Populations of Red Rat Snake and Peninsula Ribbonsnake



Range maps for the lowers keys population of the red rat snake and peninsula ribbonsnake

Range Maps: Suwannee Cooter and Lower Keys Population of Striped Mud Turtle



Range maps for the Suwannee cooter and the lower Keys population of the striped mud turtle