

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners

From: Brad Gruver, PhD., Section Leader, Division of Habitat and Species Conservation

Date: June 24, 2015

Subject: Imperiled Species Management Plan

Purpose:

Provide Commissioners a summary of changes made in the draft Imperiled Species Management Plan (ISMP) based on new scientific information and stakeholder input, including a proposed change in listing recommendation for the Eastern chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*). Staff is seeking Commission review and direction for the proposed draft rules prior to bringing to the Commission for draft rule development. Staff also is recommending and asking the Commission to designate a Biological Review Group to evaluate the listing status of the alligator snapping turtle species (*Macrochelys spp.*) because of new taxonomic information.

Summary:

Florida has abundant, diverse wildlife including many unique and endemic species; wildlife viewing is a major economic engine in the state. The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (and its predecessor the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission) has a long history of actively conserving non-game wildlife and recognizing the importance and value of this resource. Florida law confirms the importance of protecting and conserving threatened and endangered species and FWC, working with many partners, is a leader in this effort. In 2010, the Commission approved revised rules directing how the agency evaluates, lists, and protects species, including the development of management plans for state threatened species, and for species being removed from the list. Since that time, staff have been working on development of the ISMP which will be FWC's first ever comprehensive approach to the management of multiple state-listed species. We have provided several progress updates at previous Commission meetings.

Stakeholders have been actively involved in the development of the ISMP with insightful and helpful input on both species-specific recommendations and holistic approaches to conservation. The ISMP identifies both species-specific and larger integrated conservation actions, and sets out six objectives to direct FWC's work for listed species. While the successful implementation of the ISMP will be achieved primarily through non-regulatory means, some elements of the plan, such as protecting species from unauthorized take, or mechanism to authorize allowable incidental take, will require some regulatory framework and rules. Early drafts of proposed rule changes are provided for Commissioner review and direction as warranted. A formal proposal to advertise rule changes will be presented at a later Commission meeting.

When staff first began work on the ISMP the list of included species was based on the results of Biological Status Reviews, presented to the Commission at the September 2010 meeting. During the last several years data have been collected that has prompted staff to recommend modifying the

list of species included in the draft ISMP. These proposed changes demonstrate that even though the ISMP has not been finalized and approved, important data collection is ongoing and the FWC process is sufficiently adaptive to incorporate the best available scientific information.

The original Biological Status Review Report recommended leaving the Eastern chipmunk as a Species of Special Concern until new data could be collected. Those data have been collected and staff's preliminary recommendation is removal of the Chipmunk from the list, pending peer review of the new Biological Status Review Report. Following the 45 day peer review, staff will return to the Commission with a final listing recommendation.

The original Biological Status Review Report recommended removal of the alligator snapping turtle from the Species of Special Concern list, but new published studies indicate that there are three species of alligator snapping turtle in Florida. Staff will recommend and ask the Commission to designate a Biological Review Group to assess the three new species [Suwannee Alligator Snapping Turtle (*Macrochelys suwannienensis*), Apalachicola Alligator Snapping Turtle (*Macrochelys apalachicola*), and Alligator Snapping Turtle (*Macrochelys temminckii*)] to determine if they meet the criteria for listing, and maintain Species of Special Concern status for alligator snapping turtle until evaluations are complete.

Staff Recommendation:

- Approve staff to move forward on removing the Eastern chipmunk from the Species of Special Concern list (Ch. 68A.27.005, F.A.C.) pending peer review of the Biological Status Review report, and to reflect the designation as such in the final ISMP.
- Designate the Biological Review Group for alligator snapping turtles to prepare the Biological Status Reviews (BSR) and support staff's proposal to maintain the Species of Special Concern listing status until evaluations are complete.
- Provide guidance on proceeding with the Imperiled Species Management Plan, rules and species guidelines development as outlined above.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter

Dr. Brad Gruver, Section Leader, Division of Habitat and Species Conservation