



# Department of Justice

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## **COLLIER COUNTY MAN SENTENCED IN FEDERAL COURT FOR KILLING A FLORIDA PANTHER**

Fort Myers, Florida - United States Magistrate Judge Sheri Polster Chappell today sentenced Todd Alan Benfield (45, Naples) for shooting and killing a Florida Panther in violation of the Endangered Species Act. Magistrate Judge Chappell sentenced Benfield to 60 days home confinement, to be followed by 30 days of intermittent custody with the Federal Bureau of Prisons, 3 years of probation, a fine of \$5,000, a community service payment of \$5,000 (payable during the term of probation) to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, 200 hours of community service at the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge or the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, a public apology in the Naples Daily News, a hunting ban during the term of probation, and the requirement of a hunter safety course. The court also ordered Benfield to forfeit the compound bow, arrows, ladder tree stand, and accessories he used to shoot the Florida Panther.

Benfield pled guilty on May 18, 2012.

According to court documents, on October 8, 2009, Benfield was bow hunting along Woodland Grade, in the Golden Gate Estates area of Collier County. On that day, he used a tree stand to hunt for deer. From his tree stand, Benfield knowingly shot and killed a Florida Panther with his compound bow and a 3-blade broadhead-tipped arrow. The

following day, Benfield and an associate moved the panther into the Woodland Grade area, in an attempt to conceal the animal. On October 10, 2009, Benfield removed his tree stand from the area in an effort to conceal the fact that he had killed the panther. On the same date, a Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission officer located the dead panther in a section of thick vegetation, in the Woodland Grade area. The officer determined that the dead panther had been dragged approximately 50 yards.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory conducted a genetics analysis of a tissue sample taken from the carcass and determined that it was a Florida Panther.

The Endangered Species Act makes it a federal Class A misdemeanor to knowingly “take” an endangered species of wildlife. The term “take” means to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct. The Florida panther is the last subspecies of Puma still surviving in the eastern United States. Historically occurring throughout the southeastern United States, the estimated 100 to 160 panthers are found in south Florida, in less than five percent of their historic range.

This case was investigated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Office of Law Enforcement, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Division of Refuge Law Enforcement, National Fish and Wildlife Forensic Laboratory, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission - Division of Law Enforcement, Collier County Sheriff's Office - Crime Scene Investigation, Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Miami - Dade Crime Laboratory, and the Joint Wildlife Crime Scene Response Team (Members include: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-Office of Law Enforcement, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Division of Refuge Law Enforcement, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Collier County Sheriff's Office, Collier County Sheriff's Office - Crime Scene Investigation). It was

prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Jeffrey F. Michelland.