A guide to living with

# Florida Panthers

LYNN STONE ©

**MyFWC.com/panther**

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
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Tallahassee, FL 32399-1600

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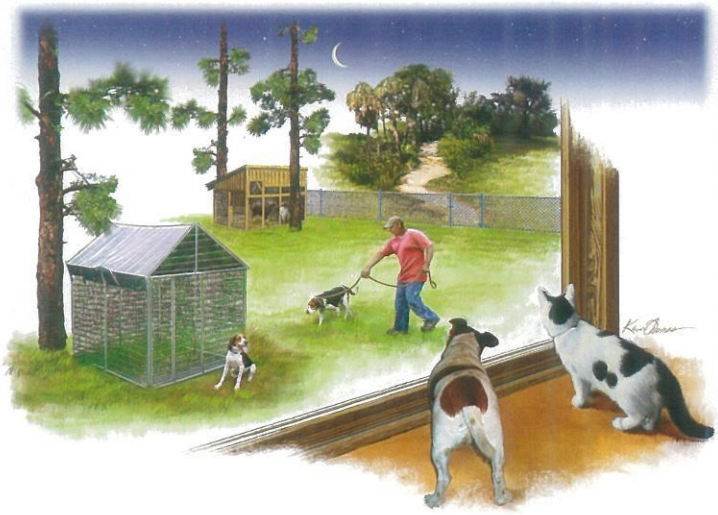
## 7 ways to live safely in Florida panther country

While these guidelines are meant to help you live safely in Florida panther habitat, they also apply to living with more commonly encountered wildlife, including raccoons, snakes, bears and alligators.

**1. Be alert from dusk 'til dawn (and whenever deer are active)**
Florida panthers primarily are active at night. Exercise more caution at dawn, dusk or dark.

**2. Keep panther prey away**
Deer, raccoons, rabbits, armadillos and wild hogs are prey for the Florida panther. By feeding deer or other wildlife, people inadvertently may attract panthers. Do not leave potential wildlife food outside, such as unsecured garbage or pet food. Consider fencing vegetable gardens.

**3. Keep pets secure**
Free-roaming pets, or pets that are tethered and unfenced, are easy prey for predators, including panthers. Bring pets inside or keep them in a secure and covered kennel at night. Feeding pets outside also may attract raccoons and other panther prey; do not leave uneaten pet food available to wildlife.



*Keep your pets safe and secure. Bring pets inside or keep them in a secure and covered kennel at night.*

*Keep livestock safe and secure.*

**4. Keep domestic livestock secure**
Where practical, place chickens, goats, hogs or other livestock in enclosed structures at night. Electric fencing can be an effective predator deterrent.

**5. Landscape for safety**
Remove dense or low-lying vegetation that would provide hiding places for panthers and other predatory animals near your house.

- Remove plants that deer like to eat.
- Choose plants that do not attract deer or other panther prey species. For information on plants that deer do not like to eat, visit http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/UW137.
- Appropriate fencing will make your yard or play area uninviting to prey animals such as deer.

**6. Consider other deterrents**
Outdoor lighting, motion sensors and electric fencing also may deter prey animals and panthers from entering your yard. Outdoor lighting also will make approaching prey and panthers more visible to you.

**7. Hike or bike with a friend**
When recreating outdoors, it's a good practice to let friends or family know your whereabouts and when you expect to return. Better yet, take a friend with you!

## Florida panther facts

- The Florida panther is a subspecies of puma, also known as a mountain lion or cougar. It is the last subspecies still surviving in the eastern United States.
- As of 2006, biologists estimate roughly 80-100 Florida panthers remain in the wild. Most panthers live in Southwest Florida, south of the Caloosahatchee River although some panthers have been documented traveling as far north as Flagler County.
- The Florida panther's decline occurred prior to 1950, when it still was legal to hunt panthers. It was listed as endangered in 1967 and is protected under federal and state laws.
- Florida panther numbers declined to roughly 30 cats by the early 1980s. Severe inbreeding resulted in many health and physical problems. A genetic restoration project in 1995 was successful in improving the genetic health and vigor of the panther population.
- Florida panthers are found primarily in the Big Cypress/Everglades ecosystem in Collier, Lee, Hendry, Monroe and Miami-Dade counties.
- Florida panthers' home range sizes vary by sex and by individual. Female home ranges are typically 60-75 square miles whereas males' are typically 160-200 square miles.

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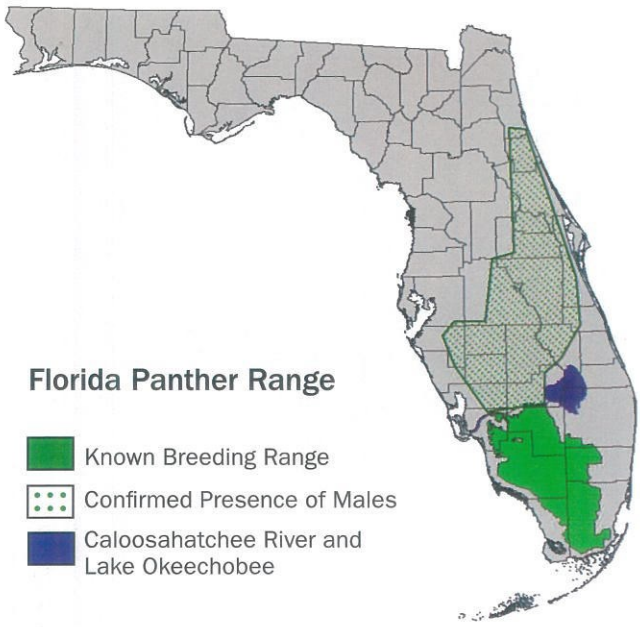
- There is no record of a Florida panther attacking a person. Florida panthers are rarely seen.
- The biggest threat to the future of the Florida panther is habitat loss. A number of panthers also die each year due to vehicle strikes on roadways.
- The Florida panther was chosen as the State Animal of Florida in 1982 by a vote of elementary school students throughout the state.

**For more Florida panther information, visit MyFWC.com/panther**



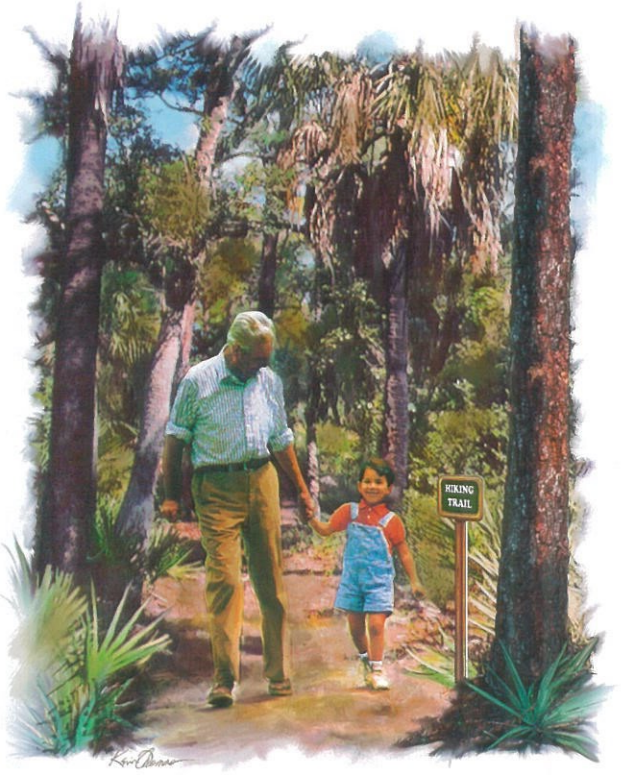

This brochure was produced through a partnership of the Audubon Society of Florida, Conservancy of Southwest Florida, Defenders of Wildlife, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida Wildlife Federation, Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge, Mountain Lion Foundation, National Park Service, National Wildlife Federation, Seminole Tribe of Florida, University of Florida and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Funding provided by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

## You live in Florida panther country

Florida panthers are reclusive and rarely seen by people. Fewer than 100 Florida panthers remain in the wild. They normally live in remote, undeveloped areas. However, as the number of people in southern Florida grows, there is an increased chance of an encounter with a Florida panther.

This brochure contains some guidelines to help you live safely in Florida panther country.




*Keep children within sight and close to you, especially outdoors between dusk and dawn.*

**If you feel threatened by a panther, or have lost pets or livestock to a panther, please call the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Wildlife Alert Hotline at 1-888-404-FWCC (3922).**

## If you see a Florida panther

The Florida panther moves primarily at night. The chances of seeing a panther are slim. But if you live in Florida panther country, you need to know what to do if you see one.

- **Keep children within sight and close to you.** Pick up any small children so they don't panic and run. Try to do this without bending over or turning away from the Florida panther.
- **Give them space.** Florida panthers typically will avoid a confrontation. Give them a way to escape.
- **Do not run.** Running may stimulate a panther's instinct to chase. Stand and face the animal. Make eye contact to let the panther know you are aware of its presence.
- **Avoid crouching or bending over.** Squatting or bending makes you look smaller, resembling a prey-sized animal.
- **Appear larger.** Make gestures that indicate you are not prey and that you may be a danger to the panther. Raise your arms. Open your jacket. Throw stones, branches or whatever you can reach without crouching or turning your back. Wave your arms slowly and speak firmly in a loud voice.
- **Fight back if attacked.** There has never been a reported panther attack in Florida. In western states, where attacks by cougars have occurred very rarely, potential victims have fought back successfully with rocks, sticks, caps, jackets, garden tools and their bare hands. Since large cats usually try to bite the head or neck, try to remain standing and face the animal.

MARK LOTZ