



Panther Update

October 2008

Big Cat Field Stories



Let's Shake On It! FP 159's Paw by Mark Lotz, FWC

What is the Total Number of Florida Panthers and How are they Counted?

A survey of the Florida panther population is conducted every year by Roy McBride, professional panther hunter and biologist, who has been commissioned by the FWC to capture panthers since 1981. The results of this survey are submitted annually to the US Fish and Wildlife Service. He has also recently published a report in the Southeastern Naturalist entitled, "Counting Pumas by Categorizing Physical Evidence". His latest survey results released in 2008, for the twelve months ending December 2007, indicated that there were 117 verified individuals. From there he subtracted the known 21 mortalities (deaths) to provide a net minimum count of 96 panthers.

The count is an indicator based on rigorous data gathering. It is conservative because the panthers are tallied based on verifiable physical evidence only. Roy defines the geographical areas to cover and, with assistance from other agencies such as the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) along with his highly trained cat hounds, systematically collects data throughout

the year by searching for panther sign such as scrapes (see photo), kills (a panther's style of killing and eating is unique from other animals) and tracks. He also collects photographic evidence mainly from security system and trail cameras. All of this information, including existing location data on the collared panther population which normally approximates 30 animals, is categorized and analyzed.

Panther tracks can yield a surprising amount of information. Researchers determine gender of the animal by size and stride length. They can also tell whether the print is from a juvenile or adult panther. Note the paw size of 140-pound FP159 in the photo above. This paw will produce a print easily identifiable as that of an adult male. Researchers can also estimate how long ago the paw print was made by taking into account effects of rain, wind, vehicle tracks, and hound behavior (scent dissipates from a track after 24 hours). Additionally, Mr. McBride has developed a method to establish whether similar tracks found in multiple locations are made by a single or separate individuals based on timing (age of the tracks) and the distances between these locations.



A Panther Was Here! Scrape Found on the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge



Tracks of FP140 Found on a FPNWR Trail

Although he had been verifying the presence of panthers in Florida since 1972, Roy was asked to publish his annual count in a scientific journal in 1985. At that time, there were 30 in total with 2 documented deaths, resulting in a first official count of 28

panthers. In 1995 the genetic introgression program began with the introduction of 8 female Texas cougars into panther habitat. Roy, with his hounds, had been the one to capture those cougars, hauling the drugged females out of the wild on mules. Although the main impetus for genetic introgression was to reverse the deleterious effects years of inbreeding had on Florida panthers, another benefit has been a rapid increase in the Florida panther population.

Vehicle- Killed Kitten Brings Mortality Total to 15.

A 2 to 3-month old female panther was struck by a vehicle and killed in Everglades National Park (east of the entrance station) the night of *September 29*. Her mother was observed standing nearby by the driver. This is the 15th verified panther mortality in 2008. Six of them have been road-kills.

Two Male Panthers Found Dead on the Same Day.

In a morbid coincidence, only the skeletal remains of the panthers were found on *September 15*. Both were males, cause of death was unknown for both (there was no indication of intraspecific aggression or foul play), and both had died only days earlier. Their locations were different, however, and one was collared: FP155. FP155 (3 years old) was found on Hendry County landfill property and UCFP109 (8 years old) on private property in Collier County. FP155 was collared in *November 2007* just south of the Caloosahatchee River.



Captured FP155 Under Anesthesia by Mark Lotz, FWC

In the photo above, tattoo ink caused the black shading in the ear and blood was drawn from the jugular vein through the shaved area on the neck. **Look for the complete story this month in FWC's Field Note *September 08*.** <http://myfwc.com/panther/news/index.html>.

What Humans Are Doing

New panther review likely with planned increased development at Naples Reserve. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will review the project for wetland impacts and will send the project to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for a determination on whether to reopen a panther review under the Endangered Species Act.

<http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2008/sep/11/new-panther-review-likely-changes-planned-developmp/>

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission unveiled a panther educational tool named Ranger on *September 15* at the Naples Field Office on Shell Island Road just north of Marco Island.

<http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2008/sep/16/panthers-afterlife-serves-fwc-educational-tool/>

What You Can Do This Month

Get Involved in Teaching Others About Florida Panthers. Start by Attending a Training Class Offered at The Ritz-Carlton, Naples on *October 25*. Email: Training@floridapanther.org

Buy Tickets to the January 3 Florida Everblades Hockey Game. Tickets will be available through *October 31* (or until the supply is exhausted) for \$15 each, with proceeds benefitting the Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge. These tickets will make wonderful Halloween gifts or stocking stuffers for any sports lover! For more information, email: Events@floridapanther.org.

Special Thanks To:

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