



Florida Panther Update

February 2010

Field Stories

FWC Panther Capture Team Secures Four Cats

Photos courtesy Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

January rained record cold on capture efforts and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission panther team found themselves at times breaking ice on puddles with their ATVs while scouting for tracks. Four (three males and female FP148) mature panthers, roughly between four and six years old, were collared in January. Three were caught in Picayune Strand State Forest, and FP173 was found on Panther Island Mitigation Bank between Corkscrew Sanctuary and Flint Pen Strand south of Corkscrew Road.



January 20 Capture: FP173 on the Verge of Waking Up



January 26 Capture: FP174, a 'Big Boy', Weighed 154 Pounds



January 27 Recapture: FP156's Paw. His enlarged toe pad on the front foot makes his track unique and identifiable. FP156 was spotted "buzzing" the FWC field office two days later when crossing Sabal Palm Road after the team pulled out for the day's capture work. This cat was GPS collared previously in December of 2007.



January 29 Recapture: FP148's Ear. The ear tattoo indicated she had been captured before. Every adult captured panther is tattooed (kittens in dens are not). The tattoo is applied by pins in the shape of a number that fit into a crimping tool. All panthers get transponder chips as well, so if both ears were missing or tattered to the point where the tattoo was unrecognizable, biologists would scan for the transponder chip.

Ask a Biologist by Mark Lotz, FWC Panther Biologist

Are all Captured Panthers Fitted with the Same Collar?

The FWC is still utilizing the ATS brand as its "standard" VHF collar. In addition, there is a new GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) GPS collar under trial. This collar emails us data via cell phone towers. Also being tested this year are GPS "pods." These are completely separate GPS units that mount onto the ATS VHF collars (we attach them in the field after sizing the collar). Because the ATS VHF collar is quite reliable (we have one that's been working for 8 years now) this may help ease the complications associated with GPS systems often failing. With the pod, if a GPS unit fails, we can maintain contact with the panther through VHF signals. This will allow us to recapture the animal and retrieve our GPS data whenever we want. For example, if a female's capture has to be delayed because she is toting kittens one season, we can easily wait until the following season because her ATS collar will still be emitting signals.

Frozen Kitten Helps Panther Mom out of Danger

On *December 31*, kitten UCFP136 was killed on County Barn Road in Naples, Florida, punctuating an already tragic record year of panther road deaths. In the first few days of the new year, potential for a second tragedy loomed. The kitten's mother was now at risk to be hit by a vehicle if she decided to criss-cross the busy County Barn Road in search of her missing offspring. FWC biologists Dave Onorato and Mark Lotz kept vigilance for the next five days over her activities fearing this mother might end up as the first mortality of 2010. FWC Law Enforcement was also present to help keep traffic at bay. For the first two days they monitored her tracks and initially it seemed she was heading east, back to where she came from and out of danger. However by *January 3*, it was apparent that this mother had crossed County Barn several times, still searching. They decided to bring back the now frozen remains of the kitten so the mother could discover it and move on. Panther biologist, Mark Lotz described what happened next. "We chose the location for the kitten based on what we had learned of her preferred travel routes and because that particular spot had a fairly wide viewing area to optimize capturing her in the camera's field of view. We also made the scent trails of/with the kitten along areas she most likely would have traveled as she traversed the property." In spite of rain threatening to wash away the scent trails, Dave Onorato's digital images verified that mom had finally learned the fate of her kitten that night.



Frozen UCFP136 Discovered by her Mother

By Dave Onorato, 01/03, 11:53 pm, 42 degrees

Within a two-hour time period she sniffed and studied her kitten and the surrounding area, left, returned briefly, and was gone. Mark added, "We left the kitten out there one more night to determine if the mother would return again - but she did not. So Dave removed the kitten and cameras while we hoped she would make her way out of that area safely. I was optimistic. She seemed to be road savvy based on the one crossing I witnessed."

Mortalities

On *January 19*, UCFP137, an approximately 2.5 year-old male, died from wounds sustained with a fight with another panther at CREW Flint Pen Strand Unit.

On *January 29*, the skeleton was found of UCFP138, a 6 to 8 year-old male, by an exotic plant removal crew member working in Brazilian pepper at Rookery Bay. Cause of death is unknown.

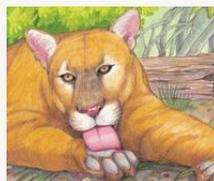
What People Are Doing

Milicevic family donated 4,000 acres for panthers in Hendry County.

<http://www.miamiherald.com/news/florida/AP/story/1438167.html>

On *January 4*, **Florida panthers made the New York Times** with an article entitled, "A Love Affair with Panthers, for the Moment" By NATALIE ANGIER. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/05/science/05angi.html?pagewanted=1>

A new children's book is now available online. "Felina's New Home: A Florida Panther Story" by Loran Wlodarski, illustrated by Lew Clayton, helps readers learn about how animals in panther habitat adapt to the human presence and what children can do to keep wild animals safe, happy, and healthy. <http://www.sylvandellpublishing.com/Felina.php>



What You Can Do

Save the Florida Panther Month Runs March 6-20.

Celebrate the Florida Panther and its habitat by participating in events held in Southwest Florida's conserved public lands!

<http://floridapanther.org/index-2.html>

Florida Panther Update Partners

Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge (FPNWR) <http://www.fws.gov/floridapanther/>
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) <http://www.floridapanther.net/org/>
Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP) <http://www.nps.gov/bicy/index.htm>
FGCU "Wings of Hope" Florida Panther Posse <http://www.fgcu.edu/CAS/WingsofHope/index.html>
Defenders of Wildlife <http://www.defenders.org/index.php>

Updates Are Compiled By Roxann Hanson

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