



Florida Panther Update

Field Stories

April 2011

BCNP 2011 Capture Season: Microchips Reveal Panther Family Ties

By Deborah Jansen, Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP)

BCNP 2011 Capture Summary

| Capture Date | FP# | Gender | Age (Feb) | K# | Status |
|--------------|-----|--------|-----------|------|---------------|
| 28 Oct | 151 | F | 9 | K113 | Failed Collar |
| 3 Feb | 133 | M | ~ 11 | | Failed Collar |
| 5 Feb | 187 | M | ~7 | | New Cat |
| 12 Feb | 145 | F | ~ 7 | | Recollar |
| 14 Feb | 190 | F | ~ 5 | | New Cat |
| 26 Feb | 191 | F | 12 | K56 | New Cat |
| 28 Feb | 192 | F | 1.7 | K287 | New Cat |
| 2 Mar | 182 | F | 2 | K279 | Recollar |

This year's capture team hunted thirty days: February 3 through March 4. We also caught FP151 with a failed collar on October 28. Two of the four new cats had microchips. With these we learned that FP191 was only the 56th kitten of now 320 kittens handled at dens in south Florida. Prior to scanning her, the team guessed her age based on tooth wear and her overall appearance such as muscling and coat quality. We guessed 5 to 6 years maximum. Were we surprised when the transponder list identified her as K56! Not only was she in great shape at 12 years old, but the houndsman, Rocky McBride, had also just treed two yearlings with her and thought there might have been a third.

The other new cat with a microchip was FP 192(K287). We knew she was fairly young because we could still see faint spotting on her tawny coat. Each team member always guesses who the mom might be before we pull out the transponder list. When the list identified her mother as FP170, we said, "Who is 170?" She wasn't a Big Cypress cat! Digging further into the data, we found that FP170 was a female who lived in Picayune Strand State Forest (PSSF) and that FP192 had been born in PSSF in July 2009. Although dispersing females typically set up their home range not far from their mother's, this female was caught a 30-mile straight line distance from her birthplace. Sadly, her mother, FP170, was found killed by another panther only two days after her daughter was collared in Big Cypress.



One-Year-Old Female Offspring of FP145 Treed in BCNP during Her Mother's Capture on February 12. Photo ©Ralph Arwood

Panther Rescue Causes Traffic Jam on I-75

By Mark Lotz, Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

Wildlife underpasses have played one of the greatest roles in protecting Florida panthers from untimely road deaths, aiding in the species' continued recovery. However, as effective as they are, sometimes these protective measures get breached. That is exactly what happened on Monday night, March 7th. The FWC was notified that a panther was trapped between the fences on I-75 (Alligator Alley) near the 91 mile marker, running back and forth along one fence trying to escape. The FWC panther capture team quickly mobilized to the scene. FWC officers, along with the highway patrol and Road Rangers, were already present. If the panther would have been closer to an underpass, the fence could have been opened at a corner allowing the panther to be guided through the opening. However, because of this panther's location, the only option to safely get it off the right-of-way was to dart it.

Once the team was ready, the other cooperating agencies shut down traffic in both directions in case the panther ran out onto the roadway after being darted. Fortunately this cat stayed put. Interested travelers waiting in nearby vehicles were able to observe the entire rescue before traffic resumed. Afterwards, the fence was checked from the end to the next underpass in both directions for holes, breaks, gaps, or any other explanation of how the panther may have entered onto the roadside of the fence. Everything was in order. Most likely, it entered from where the fence begins which was only ¾ of a mile away. The panther was taken south to Picayune Strand State Forest (PSSF) and released. He was a young male, about 2.5-years-old, which is a time when panthers his age are exploring for their own territory. This panther became FP193 after his experience and is wearing an ATS brand VHF radiocollar equipped with a GPS pod. Since his release, he has ventured south through PSSF, crossed US41, and



Mom FP170 with K287 and Sibling on March 1, 2010 in the PSSF during Aerial Monitoring. Photo by Darrell Land, FWC.

watched the planes by the Marco Island airport. Few panthers have home ranges that don't also include roads and dispersing males can be at more risk as they look for a place to call their own. FP193 escaped one potentially deadly encounter. Here's to hoping his luck holds and he becomes a contributing member of the panther population.



FP193 after coming out of the crate at the release site is still a little groggy from the anesthesia. Multiple jumps into the fence as he tried to "escape" the freeway resulted in the surface wound to his face. Photo by Dave Onorato, FWC

A Perfect Panther Print

On March 2, Tom Shupe, a District Wildlife Biologist for the FWC, reported the discovery of panther tracks in Charles H. Bronson Wildlife Management Area, which is in Seminole County east of Chuluota near the St. Johns River. The panther had walked about 100 yards along a new fence line leaving pristine prints the whole way. It crossed under the barbed wire, but didn't leave any hair. Many photos were taken and five quality casts were made. Though no known breeding populations exist north of the Caloosahatchee River, male panthers have been documented in the past crossing the river and dispersing into northern parts of Florida.



Panther Track on Charles H. Bronson Wildlife Management Area. The knife is 3.75 Inches Long. Photo Courtesy the FWC

Notices and Links

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) are asking anyone with information about a dead Florida panther found February 23, 2011 in the Golden Gate Estates area of Naples, Florida to call the FWC's Wildlife Alert Hotline at **888-404-FWCC (3922)**. Information leading to an arrest and/or conviction could result in a **\$5,000 reward**. <http://www.myfwc.com/news/news-releases/2011/march/24/pantherreward>

On March 2, the USFWS declared the Eastern Cougar as Extinct. This press release serves as a reminder of the finality of extinction and how close the Florida panther is to being next in line. <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/ecougar/newsreleasefinal.html>

Artist Credit: Robert Savannah



The 10th Mountain Lion Workshop entitled "Cougars: Conservation, Connectivity and Population Management" will be held May 2-5 in Bozeman, Montana. Presenters covering Florida panther topics include the FWC's Darrell Land and Mark Lotz, the USFWS's Robert Frakes, and the FGCU's Ricky Pires. <http://fwp.mt.gov/events/2011mountainLionWorkshop>

On March 7 the BBC released an article and video by Nick Clarke Powell entitled, "Florida Panthers and Yellowstone Wolves in the Backyard". The importance of predators in the ecosystem is discussed using Florida panthers and Yellowstone wolves as examples. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-12634898>

Florida Panther Update Partnership This newsletter is made possible through the efforts of the following agencies:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) www.floridapanther.net

Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP) www.nps.gov/bicy

Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge (FPNWR) www.fws.gov/floridapanther



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