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**First Annual Florida Panther Festival Sheds Light on Issues Facing Florida's State Animal
Family Friendly Event Takes Place October 29 in Naples, Fla.**

Naples, Fla. (August 23, 2011) – The first annual Florida Panther Festival on October 29, 2011 at North Collier Regional Park in Naples, Florida will shed light on the plight of the endangered Florida panther through interactive activities about the Florida panther's life and habitat. Activities include presentations by panther biologists, a Living with Wildlife Pavilion, interactive walks, fun and educational activities for children, livestock pen demonstration, live bluegrass music, food vendors, information from various conservation agencies and organizations in panther territory, and much more. The Festival is free of charge. The previous day, Friday, October 28, a variety of field trips are available into areas in southwest Florida where panthers roam. Various fees apply to field trips.

The Living with Wildlife Pavilion will provide area residents proactive steps that can be taken to protect pets and livestock on private property from any wildlife. The Pavilion will be staffed by panther biologists and will include tools biologists use to monitor panthers, capture videos, demonstration livestock pen, handouts, and the popular Adopt-a-Panther program. The [sounds of bluegrass music will enliven the Festival](#) with live performances by two bands, Frontline Bluegrass and the BugTussle Ramblers. Fascinating presentations by panther biologists and panther research team members will take place throughout the day. Presentations will include secrets of panther capture techniques, why biologists track panthers, and how orchids play a role in panther habitat health. There will also be face painting, children's games, and food vendors throughout the day.

[On-site adventures at the Festival](#) include the "Walk the Panther Mile". Rangers from Big Cypress National Preserve will guide a one mile walk on the trail at North Collier Regional Park. Along the way, you'll discover interesting facts about Florida panthers, learn about their habitat, and look for tracks and other signs of wildlife at the park. You'll also meet one of the Preserve's panther biologists and hear about the research they're doing in the Preserve. The free two-hour educational walk requires advance registration and takes place four times on Saturday. For information or reservations, visit www.FloridaPantherFestival.com. Free Panther Tales walks will also take place throughout the day and are open to everyone first-come, first-serve. Panther Tales will be short, leisurely walks along the park's trails to look for signs of wildlife and learn about Florida panthers.

"Our goal is to hold this free event every year for families and visitors to celebrate the Florida panther and become aware of responsible actions for safe coexistence of panthers with communities, livestock and pets" says Ben Nottingham, Refuge Manager of Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge. "Attendees will learn about the issues facing panthers living in the wild and also about the research conducted by various agencies that help the panther's existence in southwest Florida."

Friday field trips require registration. Choices include a guided swamp buggy tour and hike at the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, a bird rookery swamp trail hike at the CREW Land & Water Trust's public hiking trails, an extensive swamp buggy ride through Big Cypress National Preserve, a guided tour of Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary's boardwalk, and guided bicycle tours through Picayune Strand State Forest and Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park. Various costs apply to the field trips. For more information on the field trips and registration, visit www.FloridaPantherFestival.com.

If your organization is interested in supporting the Florida Panther Festival, a multi-partner effort to expand Florida panther awareness and support in our community, sponsorship opportunities start at just \$100 and are tax deductible. If you're interested in supporting Florida panther conservation and education by volunteering at the Festival, there are many opportunities available. For more information, visit www.FloridaPantherFestival.com or call 239-353-8442 ext. 229.

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The Florida Panther Festival is a collaborative effort by a variety of organizations including the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service; Collier County Parks and Recreation; the Naples, Marco Island, Everglades Convention and Visitors Bureau; Audubon Society; Defenders of Wildlife; Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; National Park Service; and Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge.

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FLORIDA PANTHER FESTIVAL EVENT LISTING:

Florida Panther Festival
October 29, 2011
North Collier Regional Park
15000 Livingston Road
Naples, Florida 34119
FREE ADMISSION
10am – 4pm
www.FloridaPantherFestival.com
239-353-8442 ext. 229
floridapantherfestival@gmail.com

Learn about the endangered Florida panther, its habitat and the issues facing the species' survival through activities including fun and educational activities for children, presentations on panther tracking telemetry, talks with panther biologists and research capture team members, an interactive hike, demonstration livestock pen, and information about living in panther territory in the Living with Wildlife Pavilion at the first annual Florida Panther Festival. The Festival will also include live music from the bands Frontline Bluegrass and the Bugtussle Ramblers, arts and crafts, and food vendors. Optional field trips into panther territory are available on Friday, October 28 – various fees apply to field trips. The October 29 Festival is free.

Florida Panther Information:

The Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*) is the last subspecies of *Puma* still surviving in the eastern United States. Historically occurring throughout the southeastern U.S., today the Florida panther is restricted to less than 5% of its historic range in one breeding population in south Florida. The panther population, while increased from a low of 12-20 adults in the 1980s, is still facing numerous threats to its population. With an estimate of between just 100-160 adults, the Florida panther remains one of the most endangered mammals in the world.

In 1982 the students of Florida elected the Florida panther as the official state animal of Florida. A large predator that can grow more than six feet in length, panthers play an important role in the ecosystem. As the top predator in its south Florida habitat, the panther is a necessary element in regulating the food chain. Predatory hunting by panthers helps keep the numbers of its prey--deer, wild hogs, and raccoons--in balance. Florida panthers were persecuted to near-extinction out of fear and misunderstanding (folklore refers to them as "catamounts"). The Florida panther was listed on the federal endangered species list in 1967, and on the state of Florida's endangered list in 1973. Although hunting is now illegal, loss of natural habitat means preservation of this unique animal will depend on strict management and public support.

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