



Panther Update

September 2008

Big Cat Field Stories



Panthers Aren't Afraid to Get Their Feet Wet *courtesy FWC*

Panthers Verses Hurricanes by Mark Lotz, FWC

No, this is not an announcement of a charity sports event between professional hockey (Florida Panthers) and college football (Miami Hurricanes). Actually, I'm often asked how hurricanes affect Florida panthers. The short answer is: they don't. Wildlife is well adapted for the extremes of the environment. Humans, on the other hand, while being technologically superior, are far less adaptable on a large scale when forced to live without electricity, shelter, or clean running water. While hurricanes can cause catastrophic damage to a human landscape in this regard, the damage inflicted upon natural areas in terms of the ability for wildlife to adapt is much less severe. Of course, there are exceptions to this generalization. For example, hurricane Hugo devastated extensive areas of red cockaded woodpecker habitat when it hit the Carolinas in 1989. But Florida panthers are habitat generalists and have large home ranges which make them quite capable of coping with temporary habitat alterations caused by hurricanes. In all likelihood, panthers seek refuge in thick saw palmetto patches, which are surprisingly resilient and adept at blocking wind during a hurricane. Without walls and rooftops to fall on them, panthers are probably safer in the woods than we are bunkered in our homes. Although trees may topple, the chances of a tree falling on a panther are pretty remote and this is one cause of death which has never been documented in Florida panthers.

Tropical storms such as Fay, which recently came ashore near Cape Romano, pose a different threat. While hurricanes pack high winds and travel quickly, tropical storms tend to move more slowly and produce copious amounts of flooding rainfall. This inundates vast areas of the environment. However, many areas in south Florida are typically already under water during the summer rainy season. This is a natural, seasonal event, to which wildlife has adapted and many forms actually rely on. So, in general, the effect of a tropical storm on panther habitat is to deepen the areas that are naturally holding water, leaving essentially the same segments of dry land for panthers to utilize.

As previously mentioned, Florida panthers claim large home ranges which encompass a myriad of habitat types. Home ranges do not shift during high water events but seasonal variation in habitat usage occurs irrespectively. For example, as cypress leaf-out in spring near the end of the dry season, panthers often seek

refuge under this newly emerged, cool canopy. But in the middle of the summer rainy season, when the cypress strands have 3 feet of water in them, panthers will typically be found resting in drier hardwood hammocks.

Wind and water, no matter how fast or deep, do not seem to impose any lasting negative impacts on Florida panthers. How long this statement holds true depends on our ability to ensure that enough habitat is preserved, allowing the Florida panther to remain resilient to these natural cycles.

Hope is Alive for K275 by Deborah Jansen, BCNP

Since 1992, 110 panther dens and 276 kittens have been located by FWC and BCNP biologists. Each time, they spend many hours prior to finding the kittens. The work includes setting up the den box, triangulating the den, monitoring the female's movements to determine her den attendance patterns, waiting on standby for the female to move off to hunt once the kittens are 2 weeks old, then rushing to the site prior to the female's return, and ultimately crawling through dense palmetto thickets searching for the kittens. So, it is always a relief to see a kitten's dappled fur, camouflaged by the shadows and palmetto roots. Except this time the Big Cypress biologists hoped not to find a kitten.

On August 21, 24 days after K275 was reunited with his siblings, Big Cypress biologists checked the den. (See August Update: http://www.floridapanther.org/update_august08.pdf)



Can You Find All Three? K275 with Siblings. *by Ralph Arwood*

They knew that the mother, FP153, had moved her kittens again, a normal behavior now that they were over 6 weeks of age. So they searched for kitten remnants - a paw, some fur, a transponder - any indication K275 did not survive after his return to the den. They found nothing. Finding nothing does not assure that he is alive, but hope still is.

The full story of FP107's life will be available by mid September On: <http://myfwc.com/panther/news/index.html>



FP107 Treed Before Capture. Now Deceased. Courtesy FWC

Refuge Loses Female Panther

FWC Panther Biologist Mark Lotz reported that, during a routine telemetry monitoring flight on *August 6*, Female FP107's radio collar was emitting a mortality signal. The carcass was collected on the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge but the cat's immediate cause of death was not apparent. Mark stated that, "FP107 was 8 years old and had been collared for almost 7 years. During that time she produced 13 kittens but, to our knowledge, never successfully raised any of them to dispersal age. One litter, K180 and K181, was removed to permanent captivity in March 2005. These kittens are now on display at the Jacksonville Zoo."

What Humans Are Doing

Keeping You Informed About Panthers

On August 28, The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission released its Annual Report on the Research and Management of Florida Panthers: 2007-2008. The FWC submits this report to the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of collection permitting requirements called for under the Endangered Species Act. This comprehensive report is now available to the public on the Panther Net website. See: <http://myfwc.com/panther/news/reports.html>

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission recently published a report that gives us a peek 50 years into the state's future. The report shows a state that could double in size to 36 million residents by the year 2060. That will put a heavy burden on Florida's water supply as well as natural lands, with devastating effects on wildlife, including the Florida panther. It's called "**Wildlife 2060: What's At Stake for Florida**". See: <http://www.myfwc.com/Wildlife2060/index.htm>

WGPU's Gulf Coast Live interviewed FWC representatives, including panther biologist Mark Lotz, regarding Wildlife 2060 on *August 12*. To hear their comments go to: <http://www.wgcu.org/gulfcoastlive/Default.aspx?PageIndex=11>

FWC's Panther Pulse answers the most commonly asked questions about Florida panthers. There you will find estimated population size and number of panthers that are currently being radio-tracked as well as births, deaths (or mortalities) and photographs of Florida panther kittens. The pulse was recently updated - *August 1*. Go to: http://myfwc.com/panther/pulse_Aug1.html

What You Can Do This Month

Get involved in educating the public about Florida Panthers by becoming a trail guide at the Refuge. Trail guide classes will begin in mid September. For more information, call Lisa Ostberg on 239-352-4449.

Mark your calendars for National Wildlife Refuge Week beginning October 11. For information regarding the Florida Panther NWR activities and registration call Takako on 239-353-8442 or later this month, visit <http://floridapanther.org>

Special Thanks To:

Layne Hamilton, [Florida Panther and Ten Thousand Islands NWR](#)

Mark Lotz (FWC), [Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission](#)

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