



# Florida Panther Update

May 2010

## Big Cat Field Stories

### Panthers Thrive as Picayune Strand Restoration Continues

Very early one cold, clear day last January, more than one-hundred environmental leaders from around the county, state & nation gathered at the Picayune Strand State Forest just outside Naples for the ceremonial groundbreaking of a new pumping station, a major stepping stone in both the restoration of the Strand and the ongoing Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program (CERP). Among those in attendance were U.S. Senator Bill Nelson (D-FL), U.S. Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL), Assistant Secretary of the Interior Tom Strickland, the late Sam Hamilton, National Director of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and a multitude of other dignitaries.

At about 85 square miles in size (55,000 acres) the Picayune Strand is an area of great importance to panthers. Recognized as an essential piece of remaining viable panther habitat, the Picayune Strand helps connect other prime habitat areas including the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, Big Cypress National Preserve and Everglades National Park. With only a portion of restoration activities complete, biologists are already noting increased sightings of wildlife in the area. In early April, while on a routine morning flight to monitor collared panthers, Darrell Land of the FWC captured a striking photo of an mother panther, FP172, and her two kittens in the Strand (*see below*).



*One of 3 kittens (1 male, 2 female) handled at FP148's den in the Picayune Strand on April 13* Photo by Mark Lotz, FWC

Recently there was additional good news about panthers in the Picayune Strand: on April 13th, the FWC panther team visited the den of FP148 within the Picayune, locating and identifying three kittens: one male, two female, all about two weeks of age. The new kittens are K296, K297, and K298 (*see photo, above*). Biologist Mark Lotz stated that the visit to FP148's den "was pretty uneventful" and that perhaps the most interesting and unusual part of the event was that the team could simply leave the FWC's new field office on their ATVs and drive to the den site without having to tow or trailer any off road vehicles to the vicinity of the den. "She denned in what we refer to as the Belle Meade portion of Picayune. It's in the northwest corner where the horse trails are... about a mile south of I-75" added Lotz.

The entire Picayune Strand was once planned to be part of the largest subdivision in the world: a subdivision which would have ultimately destroyed a prime wetland area of the Western Everglades beyond repair. Fortunately for panthers and other wildlife, the original developers of the land went bankrupt and the state worked intensively for many years to purchase the land back from thousands of individual land-owners.

Work began several years ago to remove residential structures and continues today with the removal of 260 miles of paved roads. The new pumping station will allow for the removal (or plugging) of several canals, which will ultimately prevent water from draining off and allow the return of once-natural wetlands.

Today, with restoration well under way, the early success of the Picayune Strand restoration project stands proudly as a icon of hope for the future recovery of not only Florida panthers, but for the entire Florida Everglades ecosystem.

*In this remarkable photo of a mother panther followed by her two kittens, the second kitten almost seems to be jumping for joy. The restoration of the Picayune Strand is indeed good news for Florida panthers.*

Photo by Darrell Land, FWC

## Another Deadly Month for Panthers on Local Roads

This past month brought the deaths of two Florida panthers on local roadways. On April 15, the remains of UCFP140, a young male (1-2 years of age), were recovered from Interstate 75 at mile marker 117, just north of the Bonita Beach exit. On April 29, a female kitten, UCFP141 was discovered on Church Road near the Hendry County landfill. These two deaths bring the year to date count for known panther deaths to seven: four occurring in vehicular mishaps, two as a result of intra-specific aggression, and the other of unknown causes.

## Friends Trail Cameras “Capture” Panthers

Friends volunteers recently placed and are monitoring two remote trail cameras on the Refuge. These new cameras shoot still photos and video 24 hours a day: during the day using natural light to produce color images and at night using infrared light to produce black & white images. So far the cameras have captured videos of several different panthers (individuals and pairs, including FP113 and her kitten traveling together), bears, deer (including one doe with a tiny fawn), opossum, a coyote and many of one of the Refuge’s most prolific species: Osceola turkey.

### What People Are Doing

*April 16:* the Naples Daily News published the editorial “**The Way We Were**” regarding over-development of southwest Florida, submitted by local resident B. Dewey Watson. <http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2010/apr/15/letters-editor-april-16-2010/>

*April 19:* FWC issued a news release surrounding the story “**FWC reports encouraging news for Florida panthers.**” [http://www.myfwc.com/Newsroom/10/south/News\\_10\\_S\\_PantherBirths.htm](http://www.myfwc.com/Newsroom/10/south/News_10_S_PantherBirths.htm)

### What You Can Do

**Adopt A Panther.** The Friends group has kicked off its Adopt A Panther Program! Through a unique new program, you can become a symbolic adoptive parent of a Florida panther in the wild. Choose from several adoption options starting at \$25, and help the Friends continue our work to support the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge & promote the protection and preservation of Florida panthers in the wild through education, outreach and political advocacy.

[http://floridapanther.org/adopt\\_a\\_panther.html](http://floridapanther.org/adopt_a_panther.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.floridapanthernetwork.org/>  
**Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP)** <http://www.nps.gov/bicy/index.htm>  
**Defenders of Wildlife (Defenders)** <http://www.defenders.org>  
**FGCU “Wings of Hope” Florida Panther Posse** <http://www.fgcu.edu/CAS/WingsofHope/index.html>

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