



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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INTERIOR SECRETARY LUJAN ANNOUNCES PURCHASE OF SOUTH FLORIDA LANDS FOR NEW NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan announced today that the Department of the Interior is completing acquisition of 25,000 acres of land in south Florida to protect the critically endangered Florida panther.

The \$10 million purchase establishes the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, which will be managed by Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The new refuge is located east of Naples, Florida, adjacent to the Big Cypress National Preserve.

"The Florida panther is one of our country's most endangered species," Lujan said. "It is a symbol of wilderness amidst the booming development of South Florida. Citizens across our Nation have followed the panther's battle for survival, and this new refuge will help ensure the long-term preservation of the species. I also would like to thank Governor Bob Martinez and Congressmen Sid Yates (D-Illinois) and Ralph Regula (R-Ohio) for their interest and assistance in acquisition of the lands for this wildlife refuge."

Congressman Yates is the chairman of the House Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee, and Congressman Regula is the ranking minority member of that subcommittee.

The Florida panther is among the Nation's most critically endangered mammals, with only an estimated 30 to 50 animals left. The new refuge also will provide habitat for at least six other endangered or threatened species including the wood stork, snail kite, bald eagle, red-cockaded woodpecker, peregrine falcon, and Eastern indigo snake.

An additional 5,000 acres will be included in the refuge through a land exchange initiated by the Interior Department and authorized by Congress. That exchange, now in process, also will add lands to the Big Cypress National Preserve and establish the Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge in Florida.

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