

News bulletin  
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## **Long Extinct Eastern Cougar to be Removed from Endangered Species List Correcting Lingering Anomaly**

*Cougars in the East are Florida panthers, released or escaped captives, or animals dispersing from the West*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is removing the extinct eastern cougar subspecies (*Felis concolor cougar*) from the Federal List of Threatened and Endangered Wildlife, correcting a lingering anomaly that listed the species despite it likely having gone extinct many decades before the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was even enacted. Data from researchers, 21 states and Canadian provinces across the subspecies' former eastern North American range indicate the eastern cougar likely disappeared forever at least 70 years ago.

The removal of the extinct subspecies from the endangered species list will take effect February 22, 2018. Extinct animals and plants cannot be protected under the Endangered Species Act, which is meant to recover imperiled wildlife and plants and their habitats. Additionally, under law, the eastern cougar listing cannot be used as a method to protect other cougars.

During a 2011 review of the subspecies' status under the ESA, and subsequent 2015 proposal to delist, no states or provinces provided evidence of the existence of an eastern cougar population, nor did analysis of hundreds of reports from the public suggest otherwise. While many suspected cougar sightings are probably mistakenly identified bobcats or other animals, cougars do occasionally occur in eastern North America, but they are cougars of other subspecies: either Florida panthers, animals dispersing from western populations, or animals that have been released or escaped from captivity. The conclusions are based on a review of more than 100 credible studies dating back to 1900.

Accounts suggest that most eastern cougars disappeared in the 1800s, killed out of fear for human and livestock safety and were victims of massive deforestation and overharvesting of white-tailed deer, the cougar's primary prey. The last records of eastern cougars are believed to be from Maine (1938) and New Brunswick (1932).

Wild cougar populations in the West have been expanding their range eastward in the last two decades. While individual cougars have been confirmed throughout the Midwest, evidence of wild cougars dispersing farther east is extremely rare. In 2011, a solitary young male cougar traveled about 2,000 miles from South Dakota through Minnesota, Wisconsin and New York,

and was killed on a Connecticut highway. A cougar of unknown origin was also killed in Kentucky in December 2014.

The Service's removal of the eastern cougar from the endangered species list does not affect the status of the Florida panther, a separate cougar subspecies listed as endangered, and all other cougars that may be found in Florida, which are protected under a “similarity of appearance” designation to aid in protection of the Florida panther.

Additional information about eastern cougars, including frequently asked questions and cougar sightings, is available at: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/ecougar>.