



Florida Panther

Safety on the Farm and Ranch



Where to expect a panther on agricultural lands:

- Panthers travel along vegetated corridors.
- Commonly use trails and roads.
- May cut across more open areas using darkness as cover.
- In any location where there is available prey (domestic and/or wild species)

It's not uncommon to encounter panthers in orange groves. They use them to hunt their primary prey – deer and hogs – that also use orange groves for cover.

Cattle ranches provide good panther habitat. Lots of native vegetation provide plenty of cover for resting, hunting, and denning. Ranches are usually good deer habitat, and where there are deer, there are panthers. Panthers occasionally kill calves, but they are not a major part of their diet.

In general, panthers are more active during dusk and night, although it is not uncommon for them to be active and walking around during the day.

Panthers are very curious animals. They may sit and watch you for quite a while, which is not dangerous and does not mean that they've lost their fear of people.

Eventually they'll get bored and move off on their own. They want very little to do with us and do not view humans as prey.

Avoid a negative encounter with a panther:

Do not run. Running could trigger a "chase response" from the panther.

- Make sure they do not feel trapped, such as if you happen upon one near a barn or around a lot of equipment. Back away and give them room to escape.
- Appear large. Stand upright and do not bend down. Bending down can make you look smaller, like prey.
- Make gestures that indicate you are not prey and that you may be a danger to the panther. Raise your arms. Open your jacket. Throw stones, branches or whatever you can reach without crouching or turning your back.
- Travel in groups.
- If attacked, fight back. People have survived puma attacks by fighting back.

Make a panther feel unwelcome:

- Make noise – yell, clap, bang on something, honk horns.
- Throw things – whatever is handy.
- Use bear spray.

There has never been a verified panther attack on a human in Florida. In western states, where attacks by pumas have occurred very rarely, potential victims have fought back successfully with rocks, sticks, caps, jackets, garden tools and their bare hands. Since large cats usually try to bite the head or neck, try to remain standing and face the animal.

Where practical, keep chickens, goats, hogs or other livestock (and pets such as cats and dogs) in enclosed sheds or barns at night.

Deer, raccoons, and wild hogs are prey for the Florida panther. By feeding deer or other wildlife, you may inadvertently attract panthers. Wildlife food such as unsecured garbage, pet foods, and vegetable gardens may also attract prey.

Remove vegetation that provides cover for panthers. Remove plants that attract wildlife (especially deer). By attracting them, you naturally attract their predator — the panther.

If you have a human safety concern involving a Florida panther, contact FWC's Wildlife Alert Hotline 1-888-404-3922. Help by providing photos and cover the tracks to preserve them.

It is illegal to kill a Florida panther.

Assistance Programs

The Conservancy of Southwest Florida Pen Building Assistance and Free-ranging Cattle Compensation Programs

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Services Administration Livestock Indemnity Program

For more information about the Florida panther: www.myfwc.com/panther