

# News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **AGENCIES PARTNER TO PUSH FOR MORE WILDLIFE CROSSINGS IN SW FLORIDA**

VERO BEACH, Fla. – With the signing of a new Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), county, state, and federal agencies have joined forces to “bridge” the way to a safer future for the endangered Florida panther and other wildlife species in Collier County.

Collier County, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), the Florida Dept. of Transportation (FDOT), the National Park Service’s Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) are working together to help facilitate the construction of wildlife crossings as future funding allows.

“Florida panther conservation represents one of the greatest conservation challenges in the United States today. Challenges of this magnitude are not solved by one person or one organization, but by many people working together to achieve a common vision,” said Paul Souza, Field Supervisor of the USFWS’s South Florida Ecological Services Office. “The partnership outlined in this MOA will help address the threat to panthers posed by traffic,” added Ken Haddad, Executive director of the FWC.

“Fifteen panthers were killed on Florida roads in 2007 and six have been killed on roads this year. It’s an unfortunate situation and something we all need to address. The department is pleased to partner with environmental agencies and continue with important steps to protect Florida’s panther,” said Dick Combs, District 1 Director of Transportation Development, Florida Department of Transportation.

This effort will build upon the work to construct crossings that has been completed to date. Several wildlife crossings have been built in Collier County, most notably on State Road 29 and Interstate 75. Other crossings are in the planning phase along important corridors in southwest Florida. One key crossing is being planned on County Road 846 in eastern Collier County in partnership with private landowners, the Florida Wildlife Federation and other organizations. In addition, FDOT is working closely with the National Park Service, FWC, USFWS and the Defenders of Wildlife to plan a new crossing in Big Cypress National Preserve.

“The crossing being planned for the Turner River area of Big Cypress National Preserve along Highway 41 is a prime example of the partnership approach to conservation that will ultimately be responsible for the preservation of endangered species such as our Florida panther,” said Pedro Ramos, Acting Superintendent of BCNP.

“The Florida panther calls Collier County home and we believe that partnerships are needed to conserve this endangered animal. This agreement marks the culmination of an effort requested by Collier County and solidifies a relationship to help find common sense solutions,” said Jim Coletta, Collier County’s District 5 Commissioner.

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