

News Release

Dept. of the Interior
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
S. Florida Ecological Services Office
1339 20th Street
Vero Beach, Fl 32960
Phone: (772) 562-3909
Fax: (772) 778-5498
<http://www.fws.gov/verobeach/>

\$15,000 REWARD OFFERED IN HUNT FOR FLORIDA PANTHER SHOOTER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 9, 2009

Contact: Ken Warren, (772) 562-3909, x323

VERO BEACH, Fla. – A reward of up to \$15,200 is being offered by a diverse group of organizations for information that leads to an arrest and/or a conviction in the shooting death of a Florida panther.

The panther was found on April 21, 2009 near the Hendry Correctional Institute on private property bordering the Big Cypress National Preserve, in Hendry County, Fla. The panther is believed to have been shot within a week prior to its discovery. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) special agents and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) investigators are jointly investigating the case.

There are only about 100 Florida panthers left in the world. The Florida panther is protected under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA), which currently lists the species as “endangered.” This means the Florida panther is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. The ESA makes it unlawful for a person to take a listed animal without a permit. Take is defined as “to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect or attempt to engage in any such conduct.” If convicted criminally, the federal penalty is up to one year of imprisonment, \$100,000 fine per individual or \$200,000 per organization. In addition, State of Florida Statute 372.0725 makes it a third degree felony to kill or wound any species designated as endangered or threatened. The state penalty is up to five years in jail and/or up to a \$5,000 fine.

“The FWC encourages anyone with information that leads to an arrest in this case to come forward, so we can bring the person or persons responsible for this crime to justice,” said FWC Capt. Jeff Ardelean. “It is our agency’s mission to protect and preserve the rare and magnificent panther, the state’s official animal, for future generations.”

Anyone with information regarding this case should call the USFWS's Office of Law Enforcement, in Fort Myers, Florida at (239) 561-8144. Those wishing to stay anonymous should call the FWC's Wildlife Alert Line at 1-888-404-3922.

The USFWS contributed \$5,000 to the reward fund and the FWC contributed \$1,000. Other contributors to date are:

The Humane Society of the United States and The Humane Society Wildlife Land Trust;
The Bergeron Family of Companies;
The Florida Wildlife Federation;
Defenders of Wildlife;
The Everglades Coordinating Council;
The Florida Airboat Association; and
Big Cypress Sportsmen's Alliance.

“The outpouring of support shows how much the people of Florida care about the Florida panther and all of our natural resources here. We're grateful to everyone who contributed to this reward fund and are hopeful that this reward will inspire someone to come forward with information that helps us solve this case,” said Andrew Aloise, resident agent in charge of law enforcement for the USFWS.