

**Third Annual Florida Panther Festival Set To Highlight
How To Live With Florida's State Animal**
Free, Family-Friendly Event Set For November 16, 2013 in Naples, Fla.

Naples, Fla. (November 5, 2013) – Ever wondered what a day in the life of a Florida panther is like? Would you like to learn more about their hunting habits, how they establish territory and how they raise their young? How about going for a ride in a “swamp buggy” in Florida panther territory?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, the third annual Florida Panther Festival on November 16, 2013 at North Collier Regional Park in Naples, Florida is for you.

The Florida Panther Festival is a free, family-friendly event designed to shed light on the plight of the endangered Florida panther through unique interactive activities such as presentations by panther biologists, a Living with Wildlife Pavilion, nature walks, children’s activities, a rural backyard demonstration, exhibits by various conservation agencies and much more.

On the day following the festival, Sunday, November 17, a variety of field trips are available throughout southwest Florida where panthers roam. Various fees apply to field trips.

Get ready to enjoy tasty food and live music! Food vendors will include Fred’s BBQ, Rita’s Italian Ice, Russell’s Clambakes and Planet Smoothie. Scheduled performers include energetic acoustic rock duo The Acoustikats and Darrell House, who writes about the environment in his lyrics.

The Living with Wildlife Pavilion is this year’s star attraction. Visitors can see panther and bear tracking tools and get advice from experts on minimizing human-wildlife conflict. The rural backyard display adjoining the pavilion will show festival-goers what attracts wildlife to our backyards. Guests will learn about safely living near not only Florida’s panthers, but also black bears, coyotes and alligators, too.

“The Living with Wildlife Pavilion shows festival-goers that just a few simple changes can help keep your homes, pets and communities safe in wildlife habitat,” said Defenders of Wildlife Florida program coordinator Shannon Miller. “In turn, education and awareness helps protect wildlife too. Together, we can make Florida a great place to live for both people and the amazing creatures that call our state home.”

Wildlife biologists will make fascinating presentations throughout the day. Presentations include living with wildlife challenges, the stories of panthers living in Big Cypress National Preserve and the role of prescribed fire in managing wildlife. Filmmaker Elam

Stofltzfus will share stories from his 100-day journey across Florida as part of the Florida Wildlife Corridor Expedition.

On-site adventures include “Walk the Panther Mile,” a walk guided by Big Cypress National Preserve rangers. Visitors will uncover the secret life of Florida panthers, learn about their habitat and meet one of the preserve’s panther biologists. This free 1.5 hr walk requires advance registration and takes place two times Saturday morning. (For reservations, visit www.FloridaPantherFestival.com). Free Nature Detective walks will also take place in the afternoon and are open to everyone first-come, first-serve.

"Our goals are for guests to celebrate the Florida panther and to increase their awareness of how to safely coexist with panthers, along with their livestock and pets," said Ben Nottingham, Refuge Manager of Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge.

The Sunday field trips require advance registration. Choices include guided swamp buggy tours, trail hikes, bicycle rides and vehicle tours through and around Southwest Florida’s wonderful conservation lands (where visitors might get lucky enough to see one of these elusive animals) like Big Cypress National Preserve, Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, Picayune Strand State Forest, Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, Babcock Ranch, and a tour of Camp Keais Strand with Orange Jeep Tours.

Various costs apply to the field trips. For more information on the festival or to make reservations for any of the activities, visit www.FloridaPantherFestival.com or call 727-328-3888.

For more information about Florida panthers, visit floridapanther.net.

The Florida Panther Festival is a collaborative effort by organizations including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Collier County Parks and Recreation; the Naples, Marco Island, Everglades Convention and Visitors Bureau; Collier County Audubon Society; Defenders of Wildlife; Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; Audubon’s Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, Big Cypress National Preserve; Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge; CREW Land & Water Trust, and Florida Gulf Coast University’s Wings of Hope Program.

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Media contacts:

Ken Warren, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, (772) 469-4323, ken_warren@fws.gov
JoNell Modys, Naples Marco Island Everglades CVB, (239) 252-2425, jonellmodys@colliergov.net
Shannon Miller, Defenders of Wildlife, (727) 823-3888, smiller@defenders.org