

Interagency Florida Panther Response Team
Annual Report: 2007-2008
(July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2008)

In 2004, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), National Park Service (NPS), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) established an Interagency Florida Panther Response Team (Response Team) to respond to human-panther interactions. The Interagency Florida Panther Response Plan (Response Plan) was developed to provide guidelines for responding to these interactions and conflicts. Also included in the plan is an outreach strategy that provides goals and objectives for educating the public. The draft Response Plan has been the guiding document for the Response Team since February 2005. An Environmental Assessment of the Response Plan was initiated in 2005 and finalized in October 2008.

The Response Plan requires that the Response Team meet at least once a year to review the past year's activities and suggest revisions to the Response Plan, if needed. The results of the annual meeting are provided in a comprehensive report to the Oversight Committee consisting of the FWS Southeast Regional Director, the FWS Refuge Manager of the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge (FPNWR), the NPS Southeast Regional Director, the NPS Superintendent of Everglades National Park (ENP), the NPS Superintendent of Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP), and the FWC Executive Director. The Oversight Committee will review and approve revisions to the Response Plan, review actions by the Response Team and provide guidance if warranted.

The Response Team met in March 2008 with California Department of Fish and Game Environmental Scientists Steve Torres and Doug Updike. The purpose of the meeting was to address the effectiveness of recent responses to human-panther interactions by team members. Torres and Updike provided presentations on mountain lion management issues in California and visited several sites of panther depredations. Torres and Updike felt our response plan was effective. They emphasized that education and outreach were the most important management tools to reduce human-panther interactions. The Annual Interagency Response Team Meeting was held on October 15, 2008 to review significant human-panther human interactions that occurred during the reporting period and discuss/recommend potential Response Plan revisions for the Oversight Committee to consider. The annual report was finalized and sent to the Oversight Committee on October 31, 2008. Only minor wording edits were received.

Response Plan Revisions

A few minor revisions were made to the Outreach Strategy to update target dates.

The field report and public interview forms were updated based on field experience gained during the reporting period.

HUMAN-PANTHER CONFLICTS

Four classifications of conflicts were documented during the reporting period (July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2008): 12 depredations (10 confirmed, 2 unconfirmed), 4 encounters (3 confirmed, 1 unconfirmed), 1 incident (unconfirmed) (Table 1, Figs.1-3), and several sightings. There have been 10 confirmed depredations/year the past 2 years and there have been 1-3 encounters/year over the past 3 years (Fig. 4). A full listing of interactions reported and investigated can be found in Appendix I.

Sightings

A sighting is defined as a visual observation or fleeting glimpse of a panther from a distance. Sightings, by their very nature, cannot be substantiated unless the animal leaves some sort of evidence, such as tracks that can be verified by researchers, or a clear photograph is obtained. Therefore, most sighting reports lead simply to an education opportunity.

There were two *notable* panther sightings during the reporting period:

- A female panther was entrapped between the fences associated with the wildlife underpass on Corkscrew Rd. just east of Alico Rd in Lee County on 27 October, 2007 and was taking cover from the traffic in a culvert. Due to recent panther road mortalities near the pre-existing end of the fencing, the fence was being extended to include vegetated cover travel routes panthers were using. At the time of the entrapment, the fence on the south side of the road had been extended; the north side extension was still under construction. FWC officers and biologists and Lee County sheriff deputies were dispatched to the scene. A hole was cut in the fence across from the culvert where the panther was hiding. The panther was then flushed out of the culvert and escaped directly and without delay through the hole in the fence. By following tracks, FWC biologists discovered that the panther had walked around the end of the fence on the north side, crossed the road, and was “trapped” by the already extended fence on the south side. The north-side fence extension was completed a few weeks later. Panthers have been documented using the underpass on several occasions since this event.
- Male panther tracks were confirmed at Tomoka State Park, Volusia County, in February 2008. This is the furthest north that the presence of panthers has been confirmed since a male panther was killed on I-95 approximately 20 miles north of the park in June 2005.

Encounters

An encounter is an unexpected direct meeting between a human and a panther in which the panther exhibits nonthreatening behavior. The Response Team classified 4 situations as encounters (Table 1, Figs 1-3). Two panthers were observed in trees and two panthers

were observed on boardwalks on public recreation lands. Three of these were confirmed with physical evidence such as direct observation by panther biologists or by photographs.

Some interactions will not fit clearly into a specific category and will have to be evaluated on individual circumstances of the particular situation. This has become most evident when trying to classify accidentally treed panthers. For consistency in reporting, a panther in a tree has been classified as an encounter. These changes have been made and noted in the master database file. This, and similar events, may be revised until the Team reaches a consensus.

- A 1.5 year-old kitten of FP95 was observed in a tree in ENP on the Gumbo Limbo trail on 30 July, 2007 (App. II, photo2). Several tourists found what they believed to be a bird egg on the ground (later identified as a turtle egg) and subsequently looked up for the nest and saw a panther resting on a horizontal branch. ENP personnel temporarily closed the trail. The following morning the panther was gone and the trail was reopened.
- A young, dispersing-aged male panther was chased up a tree on 27th St. S.W. in Golden Gate Estates by the homeowners' dogs on 30 October, 2007 (App. II, photo 3). FWC biologists and law enforcement officers responded. The immediate area was cleared of people and dogs which allowed the panther to come down from the tree and retreat from the area.
- A radiocollared panther (FP142) was observed on the Mahogany Hammock boardwalk in ENP on 20 December, 2007 (App. II, photo 4). Park visitors were returning to the parking area (starting point) when they turned onto a junction in the boardwalk where the loop joins the main boardwalk and noticed FP142 standing on the boardwalk approximately 7 m (20 ft) away looking out across the saw grass. The visitors snapped a few photos and then backed away from the boardwalk junction. After the panther realized people were there, it fled past them on the main portion of the boardwalk into the hammock. FP142 was positively identified by the unique radio-collar she was wearing.
- Another encounter occurred on a boardwalk, this time at the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW) hiking trails on 21 April, 2008. A visitor was walking on the boardwalk when he noticed a panther, approximately 7.6 m (25 ft) away, approaching from the opposite direction. The person stopped and then walked backwards off the boardwalk and waited for several minutes. The panther apparently turned around and returned from the direction it came. This encounter was not verified but assumed accurate based on proximity and description of behaviors.

Incidents

An incident is defined as an unexpected, direct interaction between a human and a panther whereby the panther displays potentially threatening behavior such excessive curiosity, following behavior, or does not immediately retreat when a human takes

offensive actions. One human-panther interaction was classified as an unconfirmed incident because it was not verified with physical evidence:

- A researcher was conducting a songbird survey on the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge on 2 May, 2008 when he noticed a panther standing on the trail. The panther approached this individual to within 6-8 m (20-26 ft) and did not initially retreat when the person yelled and banged on his clipboard. It did move away only after the individual hit some saw palmettos with a dead cabbage palm frond. After finishing his point survey, the man was returning to his ATV when he noticed the panther following him. The panther followed him approximately 30-50 m (98-165 ft). When the individual walked down an overgrown trail he no longer noticed the panther.

According to the Response Plan, incidents are to be reported to the Oversight Committee immediately. However, the researcher did not report this interaction until two weeks later to the refuge staff. Additionally, some team members felt that the interaction should have been classified as an encounter. Eventually it was classified as an unconfirmed incident. Due to the delay in reporting, the lack of confirmation, and the fact that the interaction occurred in an area closed to the public, the incident was not reported to the Oversight Committee.

Depredations

A depredation is classified as domestic livestock or pets being preyed upon by a panther. Twelve depredation events were reported and investigated (Table 1; Fig. 1; App. II, photo 1). Ten of these were confirmed with physical evidence such as tracks near the kill site or an examination of the carcass which revealed unique characteristics to panther-killed prey. Depredations occurred at 8 residences, two of which had repeat depredations 3 times each. There was one case of surplus killing (when multiple animals are killed during a single event) in which 4 sheep were killed. Human intervention during 4 depredation attempts prevented the loss of their animals.

Eleven animals were killed including 5 goats, 5 sheep, and 1 fallow deer. Three animals were injured including a goat, a llama, and a dog. Additionally, an unconfirmed depredation attempt on a calf was interrupted before any physical contact was made by the panther.

OUTREACH

The Florida Panther Outreach Working Group, comprised of state and federal government agencies and non-government organizations, was created in 2006 to develop and promote various types of outreach materials based on the Response Plan's Outreach Strategy. Teleconference meetings were held monthly. Outreach efforts accomplished in the past fiscal year are summarized below.

- On 3 November, 2007, Defenders of Wildlife, along with many volunteers, distributed 1,050 information packets to households in eastern Golden Gate Estates and portions of Belle Meade that have the highest incidence of conflicts with panthers. The information packets included FWC information; "A guide to living with Florida panthers" brochure, Florida Wildlife magazine January/February 2007 with an article on FWC panther research, Florida panther fact sheet, "If You See A Bear In Your Community" and "Feeding Bears Hurts Bears" fliers, "Bear Your Responsibility" magnet; Big Cypress National Preserve information; "Protecting Your Property from Wildlife Damage" flier that includes Mountain Lion Foundation plans for livestock enclosures; Collier County information; livestock enclosure permitting information; Defenders of Wildlife information; announcement of Defenders of Wildlife publication "Guide to Recognizing the Florida Panther, its Tracks and Sign;" Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge information; Panther Update, October 2007; 2008 Florida Panther Week events flier.
- On 11 February, 2008, FWC and FWS staff met with Collier County Commissioner Jim Coletta to provide him with a copy of the Response Team's annual report and to discuss any concerns that he may have about panther depredations. Commissioner Coletta was very pleased with the outreach efforts that the team and partnering non-government organizations have accomplished during the past year.
- During 8-15 March, 2008 the FPNWR and Friends of Florida Panther Refuge hosted the 3rd Annual Florida Panther Week. Activities included events at the Naples Zoo, Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, Big Cypress National Preserve, CREW, and the Naples Preserve. To recognize Florida's official mammal, Governor Crist declared March 15th "Save the Florida Panther Day" which was celebrated at FPNWR with swamp buggy, birding and plant tours and a photography workshop. Nine partnering agencies and organizations and over 2,200 people participated in the week's activities.
- A Public Information Meeting on living with panthers and bears was held at the Corkscrew Elementary School in the Orange Tree Community on 28 April, 2008. The event was videotaped and replayed several times on the Collier County government channel.
- New outreach and education positions were advertised with the FPNWR and BCNP. These positions are expected to be filled next fiscal year. Part of their duties will involve living with wildlife outreach.
- Panther awareness signs (Fig. 5) measuring approximately 3 ft. X 5 ft. were created and will be erected next fiscal year at kiosks on 5 Wildlife Management Areas throughout southwest Florida. Wildlife Management Areas where these signs will be erected include the CREW Marsh, Dinner Island Ranch, Fisheating Creek, Picayune Strand, and Spirit of the Wild.
- A panther exhibit from Arthur R. Marshal Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge's old visitor center was transferred to the Collier County Extension Service office to be used as an outreach tool with adult and youth groups that utilize this facility. This exhibit complements the demonstration livestock pen that was built at the extension service facility last year (June 2007) by Defenders

- of Wildlife and volunteers to educate the public about protecting livestock and pets from large predators.
- The FWC had a lifelike taxidermic mount prepared from a road-killed panther, UCFP87. This portable exhibit is used by various government and non-government organizations at special events (ex. Collier County Fair, Panther Day at Naples Zoo) to educate the public about Florida panthers. When not in use the exhibit can be viewed at the Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center.
 - *Panther Update* is published monthly by the Friends of Florida Panther Refuge. This two-page document highlights capture team activities, interesting facts about panthers, and activities for public participation. The flyer is dispersed primarily by email and available on the Friends web site (www.floridapanther.org) but hard copies are available at various sites around Collier County.
 - *Field Notes* are published on Panther Net, the FWC's Florida panther web page (www.myfwc.com/panther). Field Notes contain information from FWC panther biologists on panther births, deaths, capture activities, and other material of interest.

CONCLUSION

Conflicts, especially depredations, have risen in the urban-wildland interface. As people continue to populate Golden Gate Estates and others areas bordering occupied Florida panther habitat, instances of sightings, encounters and depredations will likely continue. Educating hobby livestock and pet owners about proper husbandry practices and precautions is an ongoing priority. Following initial response to reported depredations, the team does not conduct follow up with individuals who experienced depredation events to determine if suggested best management practices were followed. However, in several cases where appropriate measures were enacted (i.e. J. Cisneros built a predator deterrent structure; S. Sistrunk resumed housing animals in predator proof enclosures) problems were eliminated. Additionally, educating people that recreate in or live near areas used by panthers is important. Observing recommended guidelines will promote a peaceful coexistence between humans and panthers. Citizens bear the responsibility to use the knowledge available to them to ensure the safety of themselves, their pets and livestock, and ultimately preservation of the Florida panther.

Table 1. Human-Panther Conflicts, 1 July, 2007 – 30 June, 2008. See Figs. 1-3 for location of event #.

Event #	Interaction Date	Location ^a	Animals Depredated	Comments
Depredations				
1	09/27/2007	4590 Benfield Rd	1 Goat	Unconfirmed. No carcass. FP146 nearby.
2	11/17/2007	2600 Jenkins Way	1 Goat (injured)	Confirmed. Male tracks.
3	11/19/2007	6259 Everett St	1 Fallow Deer	Confirmed. Male tracks.
4	12/15/2007	214 Redbird Ln.	1 Goat	Confirmed. Male tracks.
5	12/18/2007	214 Redbird Ln.	1 Goat	Confirmed. Male tracks, FP146 nearby, photo-captured in pasture.
6	12/29/2007	630 Pioneer Trail	1 Goat	Confirmed. Carcass examined.
7	01/08/2008	214 Redbird Ln.	1 Goat	Confirmed. Male tracks.
8	05/25/2008	4831 12th Ave. S.E.	1 Dog (injured)	Confirmed. Male tracks.
9	05/31/2008	4360 16th Ave. S.E.	4 Sheep	Confirmed. Carcasses examined.
10	05/31/2008	4360 16th Ave. S.E.	1 Llama (injured)	Confirmed. Male tracks.
11	06/01/2008	4360 16th Ave. S.E.	1 Sheep	Confirmed. Carcass examined, photo-captured at cache site.
12	06/09/2008	4835 30th Ave. S.E.	1 Calf (stalked)	Unconfirmed. No observable sign. Calf was untouched.
Encounters				
13	07/30/2007	ENP, Gumbo Limbo trail		Confirmed. Photo. 1.5-yr.-old kitten of FP95.
14	12/20/2007	ENP, Mahogany Hammock boardwalk		Confirmed. Photo. Female FP142.
15	04/21/2008	CREW Hiking Trails		Unconfirmed. No site visit due to delayed report.
16	10/30/2007	140 27th St. S.W.		Confirmed. Photo. Uncollared subadult male.
Incident				
17	05/02/2008	FPNWR		Unconfirmed.

a. ENP = Everglades National Park; CREW = Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed; FPNWR = Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge.

Figure 1. Human-Panther Conflicts FY2007/2008, Naples area.

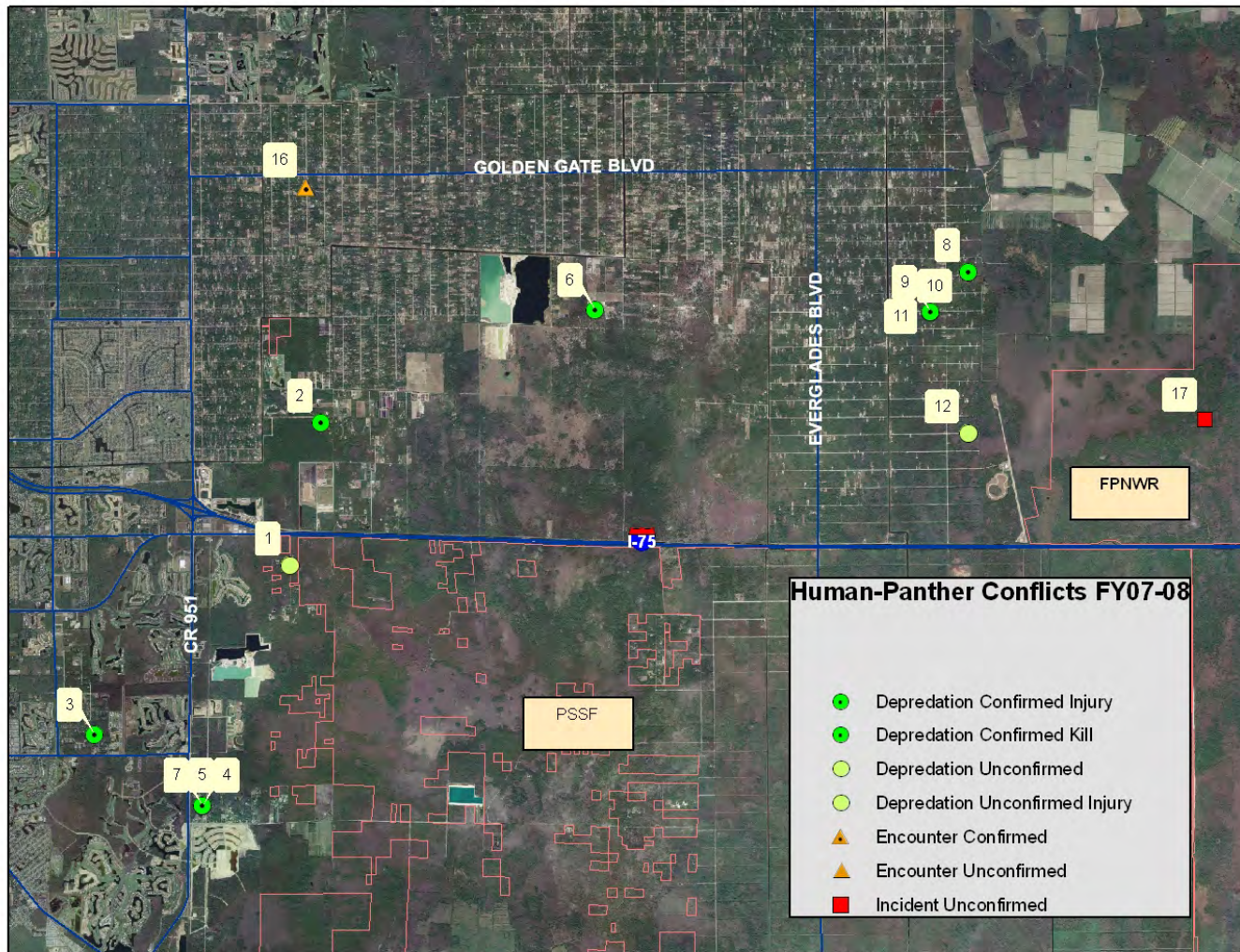


Figure 2. Human-Panther Conflicts FY2007/2008, ENP.

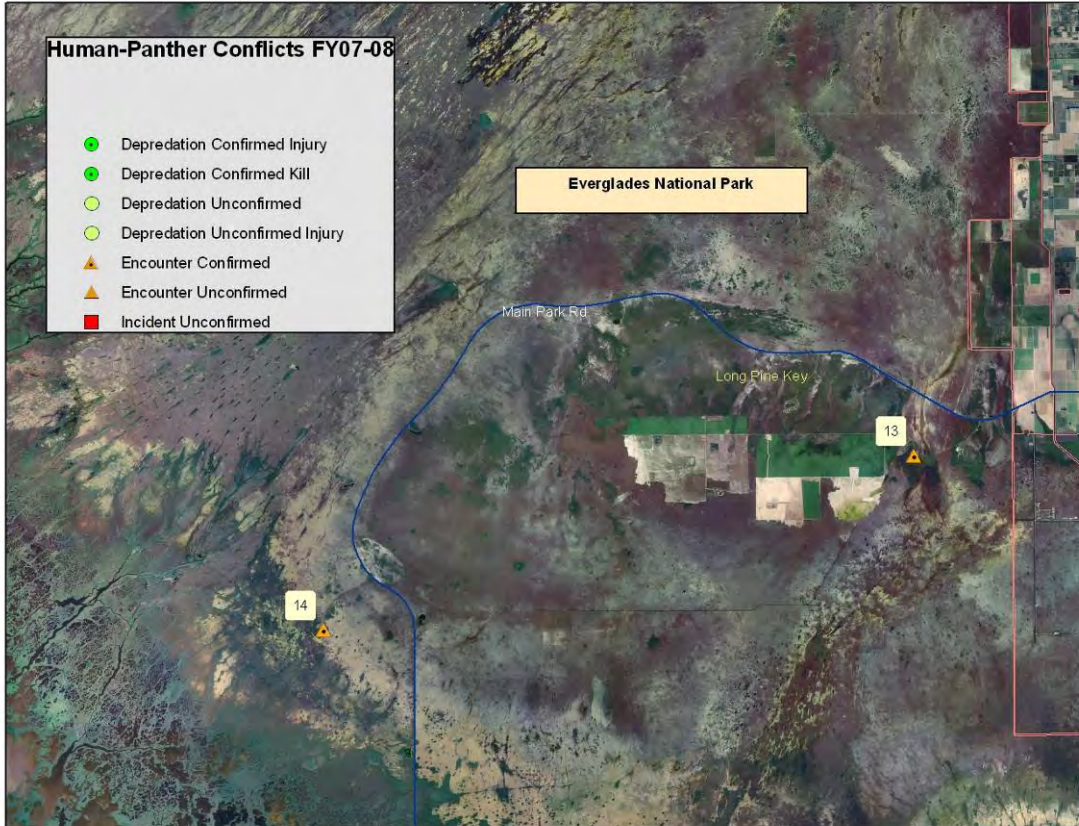


Figure 3. Human-Panther Conflicts FY2007/2008, CREW.

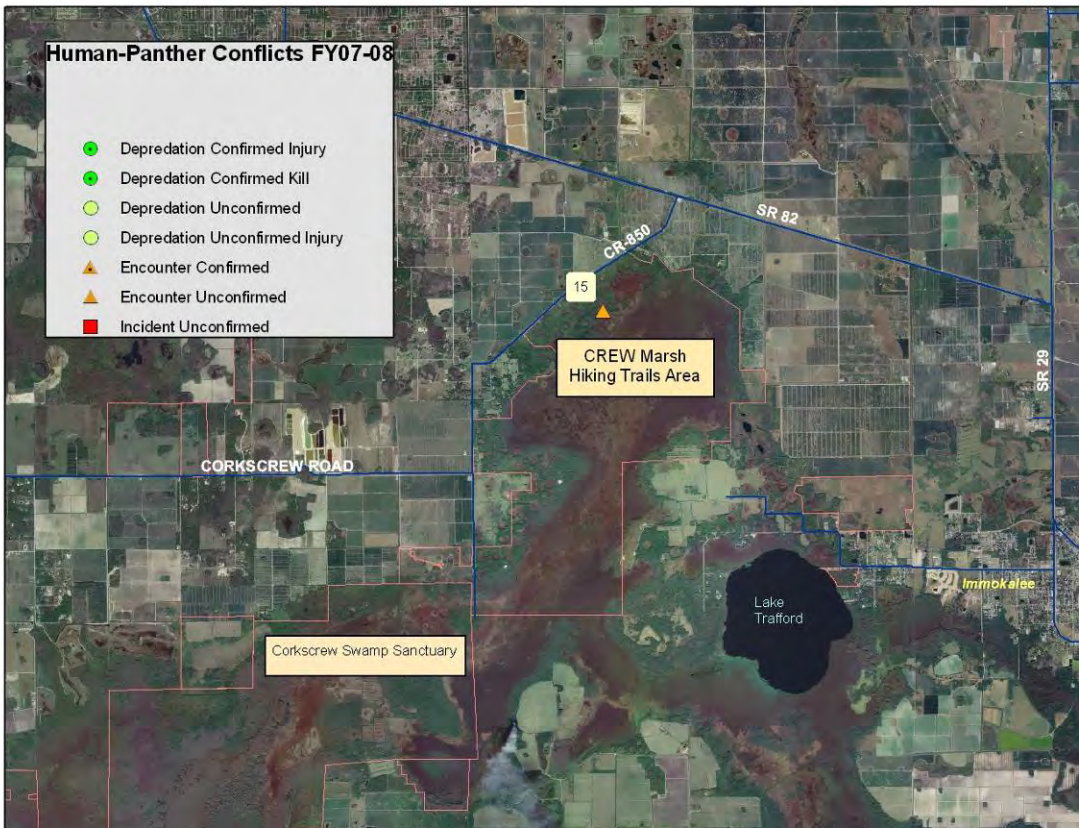


Figure 4. Confirmed Human-Panther Conflicts, fiscal years 2003/2004 – 2007/2008.

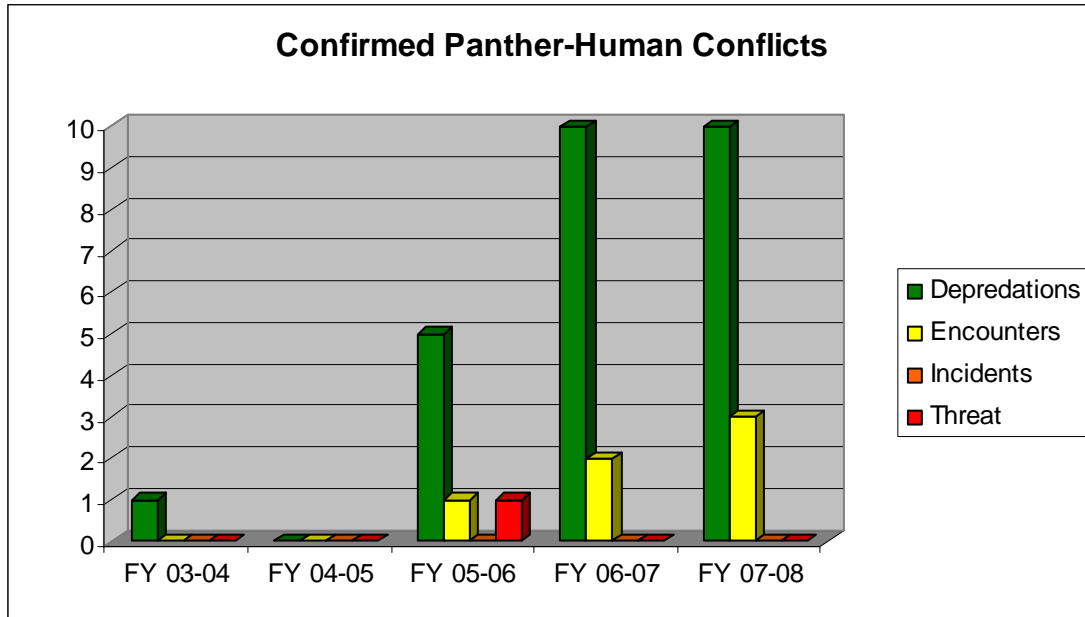


Figure 5. Panther awareness sign (specific to CREW) posted at FWC Wildlife Management Areas in southwest Florida.

In the presence of panthers

CREW Wildlife and Environmental Area is special because it is one of the very few places where rare Florida panthers still live. This area was purchased in part to protect this panther habitat.

Panthers live here because these pine forests and hardwood hammocks provide the shelter and food (deer and hogs, mostly) they need to live and raise their kittens.

Unless you are very lucky, you will probably never see a panther in the wild. Panthers usually rest during the day hidden in thickets of palmetto. At dusk they begin to travel and hunt.

But, if you are very observant, you may be able to spot tracks and scrapes left behind by one of Florida's last panthers.

⚠️ Panthers are large, powerful cats. For safety's sake, when visiting, hike with a friend. If you should see a panther:

- Do not run
- Give the animal space to escape
- Look large; raise your arms and speak loudly
- Pick up small children
- In the unlikely event you are attacked, fight back!

The sign also features a map of Florida highlighting the CREW Wildlife and Environmental Area in the southwest, and silhouettes of a Florida panther, bobcat, and house cat.

Appendix I. List of interactions reported and/or investigated during fiscal year 1 July 2007 - 30 June 2008.

Interaction Date	Location ^a	Name	Interaction Type	Confirmed predator	Animals Depredated	Panther Involved	Comments
7/30/2007	ENP, Gumbo Limbo trail	M. Alvarado	Encounter	Panther	NA	1.5-yr-old kitten of FP95	Panther first observed resting in oak tree by tourists, later confirmed by S. Bass and other ENP personnel. Trail closed for day and panther gone without incident next day. Photo obtained. Tracks found during consultant survey and emailed to D. Land. R. McBride confirmed that the tracks appeared to be of a female panther and kitten.
8/9/2007	Kaicasa, SE of Immokalee	K. Willet	Sighting (tracks)	Panther	NA	Uncollared female and kitten	No carcass or evidence of predator found. FP146 approx 1/4 mi away during flight that day.
9/27/2007	4590 Benfield Rd SW 70th St, Trenton, FL,	Benfield	Depredation	Unconfirmed	Goat	Unknown, possibly FP146	Regional leadership involved.
10/19/2007	Gilcrest CO FSPSP Jane's Scenic Dr.	T. Tourville	Sighting	Unconfirmed	NA	Unknown	Observed for 10 minutes
10/22/2007		J. Bozzo	Sighting	Unconfirmed	NA	Uncollared	Panther trapped between fence by underpass on Corkscrew Rd. Cut hole in fence and flushed through to south side. Have photos.
10/27/2007	Corkscrew Rd underpass 4910 Tallowood Way, Naples	Lotz, Criffield	Sighting	Panther	NA	Uncollared female (tracks)	Unknown
10/28/2007		H. Owen	Sighting	Unconfirmed	NA	Unknown	Panther treed by Carrillo's dogs. Came down and left area after being in tree about 4 hours. Have photos.
10/30/2007	140 27th St SW	D. Carrillo	Encounter	Panther	NA	Uncollared male	Sistrunk's heard commotion and interrupted attack when turned on lights. Goat survived.
11/17/2007	2600 Jenkins Way, Naples	S. Sistrunk	Depredation (attempt)	Panther	Goat - injured	Uncollared	Male panther. West of CR951.
11/19/2007	6259 Everett St	B. Flowers	Depredation	Panther	Fallow Deer	Uncollared	Found tracks.
12/15/2007	214 Redbird Ln	J. Cisneros	Depredation	Panther	Goat	Uncollared	FP146 close by when investigated. Got pictures of FP146 returning in pasture that night.
12/18/2007	214 Redbird Ln ENP, Mahogany Hammock boardwalk	J. Cisneros	Depredation	Panther	Goat	FP146	Barnes got picture of FP142 on boardwalk and provided to us. ID verified by radio collar type. We called Edgar after seeing report on news. Confirmed depredation but not "stalking" he reported.
12/20/2007		M. Barnes	Encounter	Panther	NA	FP142	Reported 2 panthers of different size but could only find tracks to verify one male panther present but looked smaller than FP146 tracks to Lotz; FP146 ~0.5 mi away at time.
12/29/2007	630 Pioneer Trail	J. Edgar	Depredation	Panther	Goat	Uncollared	Mr. Eckhardt is Operations Mgr, passing along 3 recent sightings reported by residents in past 2 week (~Jan 1-10)
1/8/2008	214 Redbird Ln	J. Cisneros	Depredation	Panther	Goat	Uncollared	
1/10/2008	Forest Glen Country Club	G. Eckhardt	Sighting	Unconfirmed	NA		

Interaction Date	Location ^a	Name	Interaction Type	Confirmed predator	Animals Depredated	Panther Involved	Comments
2/17/2008	Tomoka State Park, Volusia Co.	J. Lohde	Sighting (tracks)	Panther	NA	Uncollared	Photos received of tracks, clearly male panther
2/25/2008	BCNP, Cook's Camp	J. Woods	Sighting	Panther	NA	Uncollared	Check station operators took photo of panther walking through yard from inside trailer
4/21/2008	CREW Hiking Trails	A. Monroe	Encounter	Unconfirmed	NA	Uncollared	25' at closest point, encountered on boardwalk, unconfirmed but likely, panther calmly retreated
5/2/2008	FPNWR, Unit 8 (west side) 4831 12th Ave	C. Frey	Incident Depredation (attack)	Unconfirmed	NA	Uncollared	This person was doing bird survey on refuge. Identification of panther likely based on distance and duration of observation but unverified. Reported by FWS.
5/25/2008	SE (E of Desoto)	C. Wicker		Panther	Dog - shepherd mix	Uncollared	Tracks confirmed. Dog attacked but not killed.
5/30/2008	14870 Alico Rd	Susie (no last name)	Depredation	Bobcat	Goats	None	Evidence confirming bobcat
5/31/2008	4360 16th Ave SE (w of Desoto)	L. Aleman	Depredation	Panther	Sheep, llama attack	Uncollared	Initial report about panther attacking llama on 5/31. When investigated, learned of sheep killing previous day. Carcasses show evidence of panther predatory habits. Mother and kitten reported attacking llama. Could not verify that claim with evidence. Possibly same panther that attacked Wicker dog 4 blocks away previous week (speculating).
6/1/2008	4360 16th Ave SE (w of Desoto)	L. Aleman	Depredation	Panther	Sheep	Uncollared	Single sheep dragged off property and cached. Set up cameras, captured young male.
6/9/2008	4835 30th Ave SE (E of Desoto)	T. DiCarlo	Depredation (preattack)	Unconfirmed	Calf, 1 mo old	Uncollared	Cow bell on calf alerted owner to activity. When observed, let dog out and chased panther away. Calf never touched. Could not find evidence, heavy rain before arrival.

a. BCNP = Big Cypress National Preserve, ENP = Everglades National Park, FPNWR = Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, FSPSP = Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park

Appendix II. Photographic evidence of depredations and encounters.



Photo 1. Panthers preying on hobby livestock is preventable yet constitutes the most frequently reported conflict (event #11). Photo courtesy FWC.



Photo 2. Eighteen month old kitten of FP95 resting in a tree near the Gumbo Limbo trail in Everglades National Park (event #13). Photo courtesy ENP.



Photo 3. A dispersing aged male panther takes refuge from harassing dogs on 27th St. SW in Golden Gate Estates (event #16). Photo courtesy FWC.



Photo 4. FP142 on the boardwalk at Mahogany Hammock in ENP (event #14). Photo courtesy of Mike Barnes, ENP visitor.