

Interagency Florida Panther Response Team

Annual Report: 2011-2012

(July 1, 2011 – June 30, 2012)



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

National Park Service

INTRODUCTION

An Interagency Florida Panther Response Team (Response Team) was established by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), National Park Service (NPS), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in 2004 to respond to human-panther interactions. The Response Team developed the Interagency Florida Panther Response Plan (Response Plan) to provide guidelines for responding to human-panther interactions and conflicts. Also included in the plan is an outreach strategy that provides goals and objectives for educating the public. The Response Plan has been the guiding document for the Response Team since February 2005. An Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Response Plan was finalized in October 2008. The Environmental Assessment and Response Plan (Appendix C of EA) is available for download at <http://www.fws.gov/verobeach/MammalsPDFs/R4FWSPantherEAFinal.pdf?spcode=A008>.

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 Project Leader of the Southwest Florida Gulf Coast Refuges, 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 Annual Interagency Response Team Meeting was held on October 4th, 2012 to review significant human-panther interactions that occurred during the reporting period and discuss/recommend potential Response Plan revisions for the Oversight Committee to consider.

RESPONSE PLAN REVISIONS

No revisions to the response plan were suggested this year.

HUMAN-PANTHER INTERACTIONS AND DEPREDATIONS

The Response Plan identifies five human-panther interaction classifications: Sighting(s), Encounter, Incident, Threat, and Attack. Panther depredation (preying on domestic animals) is addressed separately because it does not involve direct interaction with a human. Definitions, associated panther behaviors, risk factor, and Team response of each interaction type are detailed in the Response Plan (available through the link provided in the Introduction). Only those interactions and/or depredations where a panther was confirmed to be involved and that occurred within the fiscal year of this report will be summarized below. All interactions and depredations investigated by the Response Team during the reporting period are listed in appendix I.

An interaction or depredation is considered confirmed when evidence, examined by experienced personnel knowledgeable in interpreting panther sign, supports that a panther was involved. One human-panther interaction type (sighting) and nine panther depredations were confirmed this fiscal year (Table 1). There were no verified encounters, incidents, threats or human attacks. Confirmed depredations

dropped substantially from last fiscal year and were similar to previous years (Fig. 1). Additionally, 6 depredations, 3 sightings, and 3 encounters were unconfirmed due to lack of evidence (Table 1). Two depredations were confirmed to be caused by other predators (1 bobcat, 1 dog) and 1 encounter was confirmed to involve a bobcat (Table 1).

The Response Team met on 18 May and discussed repeated depredations and sightings at a residence in Golden Gate Estates (event #13 in Table 2) to determine what management actions were necessary as stipulated in the Response Plan. The resident experienced 6 depredation events between 1 April and 18 May, 2012 (losing a total of 6 goats, 1 goose, 1 turkey). The last depredation (turkey) was judged as inconclusive due to a degraded carcass condition and a lack of other distinctive evidence. Additionally, the panther was sighted by the resident and a nearby neighbor 3 times between these dates. The Response Team reviewed and discussed the timeline of events, the resident's actions, the panther's movement patterns based on camera trap evidence, the possibility that the panther was pregnant (based on photographs), and the challenges of radiocollaring the panther. Camera monitoring continued through 14 June and the panther was not documented after 9 May. The Team concluded that the panther's activity was consistent with the way females move around their home range and depredations were no longer an issue after the resident's animals were secured. Therefore, capture and/or relocation was not warranted.

Sightings

A sighting is a visual observation or fleeting glimpse of a panther from a distance. Sightings pose a low risk to human safety but may become important if repeated sightings occur in the same vicinity. Causes for repeated sightings will be investigated to determine if further management actions are warranted. 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 educational opportunity. The Response Plan is not intended to act as a sightings database but sightings that are confirmed through a field investigation or are otherwise noteworthy may occasionally be reported. Numerous sighting reports are reported to the Response Team agencies. Often times the information is dated making field investigations unnecessary and any concerns can be simply handled over the phone.

One sighting was confirmed (Table 1). A panther was observed walking through a back yard in Golden Gate Estates from a distance of about 100 feet. A field visit was conducted because of the residents' concern for the safety of her horse. Panther tracks were found to corroborate the sighting.

Depredations

A depredation is classified as domestic livestock or pets being preyed upon by a panther. Because depredations do not involve direct contact with humans they pose a low risk to human safety.

Fourteen depredation events (some events involved multiple prey animals) were confirmed to be caused by panthers in Collier and Hendry Counties (Table 2). Eight depredations involved hobby livestock ("backyard" animals such as goats, sheep, etc) in Golden Gate Estates and six depredations involved calves on commercial cattle ranches. Additionally, seven depredations were unconfirmed due to lack of evidence and two were caused by other predators (1 bobcat and 1 dog) (Table 1). Other predators (vulture, coyote, bear) were responsible for 6 additional commercial calf losses (C. Jacobs, UF-IFAS,

unpublished report). Goats and sheep accounted for the majority of hobby livestock losses due to panthers but a horse was also preyed upon. No radiocollared panthers were involved in any of the depredations.

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.

- A 4 x 9 in. card titled Safe Roads for People and Panthers (App. III) was developed for FWC law enforcement officers to hand out to motorists stopped for exceeding speed limits in posted reduced nighttime panther speed zones in Collier, Lee, and Hendry counties. The cards contain information on the importance of observing posted speed limits, safety tips for driving through wildlife habitat, and contact information if a road-injured or killed panther is observed. The card can be viewed by visiting the Florida Panther Net website at http://www.floridapanther.net.org/images/uploads/safe_roads_FINAL_w-ADA.pdf
- About 35 people attended a free public workshop hosted by the FWC on Living with Wildlife that focused on panthers, black bears, and coyotes at the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) Extension Office near Golden Gate Estates on October 6, 2011. Speakers focused on what hobby livestock owners and residents in the urban-wildland interface can do to minimize conflicts and safely coexist with these carnivores. The meeting can be viewed at the following site, http://collier.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=4&clip_id=1017
- The first annual Florida Panther Festival was held on October 29, 2011 at the North Collier Regional Park in Collier County and was a success with over 1000 people attending. The festival theme was to promote the safe coexistence of people, pets, livestock and panthers by fostering community appreciation of the Florida Panther and Florida's unique ecosystems that serve as panther habitat. The festival included family-oriented education and entertainment activities focused on Florida panther conservation and awareness, including children's games and crafts, music, speaker presentations, trail walks, livestock enclosure displays, living with wildlife pavilion, over 30 environmental exhibitors, arts and craft sales, food vendors, and field trips to panther habitat and conservation areas the day before the Festival. A review of the festival and details about the next one can be found by visiting www.floridapantherfestival.com.
- Defenders of Wildlife held a workshop on December 10-11, 2011 to train 30 Panther Citizen Assistance Taskforce (PCAT) volunteers to assist Defenders' Florida staff and agencies in carrying out panther outreach. PCAT volunteers disseminated information on living responsibly with panthers through presentations at schools, manned tables at festivals, and helped distribute information door-to-door at community outreach days. PCAT volunteers represented Defenders at events in Lake Alfred, Orlando, Pembroke Pines, Hollywood and North Port, venues that provided the opportunity to disseminate information about panthers. In May 2012, Defenders organized a panther and bear door-to-door community outreach day in Lee County. Volunteers in the communities of Bella Terra in Estero and Palmira Golf Club in Bonita Springs reached more than 800 homes.

- In March 2012, a variety of state, federal, and environmental organizations celebrated the 7th annual Florida Panther Week. Over 5,000 people participated in these events throughout southwest Florida. This celebration spanned most of the month starting with the Save the Panther event at Naples Zoo on March 5 and culminating with Save the Panther Day at the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge on March 20. Approximately 200 people participated in the refuge event which featured tours focusing on the panther, presentations about panther field work, exhibits by panther support groups, and a livestock protection pen.
- The FWC's Florida panther web site (www.floridapanther.net) was regularly updated with information on panther births, mortalities, and news.
- The Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge published the monthly *Panther Update* newsletter that highlighted panther research, management, and outreach activities. Newsletters are available on several websites including the Friends of the Panther Refuge website (www.floridapanther.org) and the FWC's Florida panther web site (www.floridapanther.net) among others. Publication was suspended in May 2012 pending a search for a new editor.
- Big Cypress National Preserves' environmental education program, SWAMP (Swamp Water And Me Program), is a hands-on, curriculum-based program provided to 6th grade students at public and private schools in Collier County. Students are visited by a ranger in the schools and then take a field trip to Big Cypress National Preserve where they can develop an appreciation and awareness of Florida panthers and the habitat they depend on. In FY2011-12 229 programs were conducted that reached 5,939 participants (children and parents).
- Florida Gulf Coast University's "Wings of Hope" is an environmental education program and is an integral part of the environmental humanities curriculum at FGCU. University students share their knowledge with 3rd - 5th grade students, known as the "Florida Panther Posse," in Collier and Lee Counties. Through the Florida Panther Posse, elementary students develop reading, writing, science, geography, math, and research skills while working through "challenges" focused on Florida panther life history information and water conservation issues. The program reaches over 450 university students and 4000 elementary students yearly. Additionally, elementary students educate at least two other people about panthers and their habitat, thus spreading awareness to an additional 8000 people per year.
- The Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge biologist gave several presentations to approximately 295 people at the Naples Photography Club and audiences at J.N. Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge about the Florida panther.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Florida panther depredation management issues also are being studied and mitigated by other means. Although the Response Team is not directly involved with these studies, they are mentioned for an awareness of the breadth of activity occurring on this issue.

Commercial Cattle Depredation Studies

In late 2010, the FWC received reports of panthers killing calves on some commercial cattle ranches in Collier and Hendry counties. Husbandry techniques that are effective for backyard hobby livestock, such

as securing livestock at night in a barn, are not practical for large-scale ranches. Cattle ranches often encompass hundreds of acres and can provide abundant prey and ample cover for panthers. Keeping these privately owned lands as active cattle ranches and managing those lands in ways that benefit wildlife, including panthers, is vital to the long-term survival of the panther. In order to address landowner concerns, a small working group was created. This group consisted of ranch owners, the President of the Florida Cattlemen's Association, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Defenders of Wildlife, the USFWS, and the FWC. The group explored the idea of creating a fund that would compensate cattle ranchers for losses of calves from panthers. Additionally, in the spring of 2011, two research projects were developed and necessary funding was secured. The University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences (UF IFAS) directed a study to investigate survival of calves on two ranches on which panther use has been documented. The FWC initiated a study of panther prey selection patterns on and adjacent to private ranch lands. Both studies are ongoing but year one summaries are provided below.

UF IFAS Calf Mortality Study

The primary goal of this study is to determine mortality factors of young calves equipped with radio-transmitter ear tags. Calves were tagged on the JB Ranch and Immokalee Ranch. The JB Ranch encompasses 450 acres. Ninety-eight calves were radio ear-tagged between 11 Sept. 2011–1 Feb. 2012. Monitoring ceased when calves were rounded up for market on 15 April 2012. During the monitoring period panthers were confirmed to have killed four calves (4%). An additional depredation of a nontagged calf was confirmed after the UF-IFAS study period. The Immokalee Ranch encompasses 1,500 acres. The first 108 calves born were radio-ear-tagged between 7 Nov. 2011–8 December 2011. Monitoring ceased when calves were rounded up by 5 April 2012. Panthers were confirmed to have killed one calf (1%). These confirmed panther depredations are included in the totals summarized in Table 1.

FWC Panther Prey Selection Study

The primary goal of this study is to assess predation by Florida panthers on domestic livestock and wild prey associated with south Florida ranchlands by visiting GPS cluster sites. Two male Florida panthers (FP183 and FP189) were wearing GPS radiocollars during the initial phase of FWC's panther prey selection study. No panthers were targeted for collaring on the ranches during calf tagging activities because of concerns of biasing results. Several GPS-cluster sites were investigated and neither panther preyed on calves (FWC, unpublished data). FP183's home range encompassed primarily public lands (Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park). Twenty-four GPS cluster sites were visited between 27 Oct-9 Dec 2011 (42 days) and 7 kills were found consisting of 5 deer (71.4%) and 2 armadillos (28.6%). FP189 utilized private lands centered around and including the JB Ranch. Seventy-nine GPS cluster sites were visited between 6 Sept-14 Dec 2011 (98 days) and 18 kills were found consisting of 9 armadillos (50%), 4 raccoons (22.2%), 3 opossums (16.7%), 1 coyote (5.6%), and 1 deer (5.6%).

Assistance and Compensation Programs

The Conservancy of Southwest Florida launched two one-year pilot compensation programs in June 2011 and both programs have been extended another year. The Free-Ranging Cattle Compensation Program is designed to help compensate small farm operations that have suffered documented calf losses to panthers. The Pen Building Assistance Program provides compensation funds to assist landowners who wish to build a predator-resistant pen to protect their livestock and pets from potential loss by panthers. More details about these programs can be found by visiting www.conservancy.org/pilot. Program information was sent to 37 residents that had confirmed panther depredations. Nine individuals responded; one was

interested in the cattle compensation program and 8 were interested in the pen building compensation program. However, only one person submitted an application and received funding through the pen building assistance program. This person has not reported any additional depredation issues.

The Florida office of Defenders of Wildlife initiated a Predator-Resistant Enclosure Program to assist residents wishing to protect their pets or hobby livestock by housing them in predator-resistant enclosures at night when predators are typically most active. The program provides construction and retrofitting instructions, labor assistance, guidance on making one's property less attractive to predators, and financial assistance to eligible participants. Applications and more information are available by contacting defendersofwildlifeflorida@defenders.org or searching "Defenders Panther Citizen Assistance Taskforce" on facebook.

SUMMARY

There were no confirmed encounters, incidents, threats or human attacks. The Response Team confirmed other sighting reports but only one was investigated by the Response Team because of the resident's concern for their animals and timeliness of the report. Five of the known calf depredations recorded were discovered as part of the UF IFAS Calf Mortality Study which is a complicating factor when interpreting depredation numbers each year.

Table 1. Summary of human-panther interactions and depredations investigated during fiscal year 1 July 2011 - 30 June 2012. Confirmed/unconfirmed relates to confirmation of panther.

Interaction Classification	Confirmed	Unconfirmed	Other	Total
Depredation	14 ^a	6	2 ^b	22
Sighting	1	2	1 ^c	4
Encounter	0	3	1 ^d	4
Incident	0	0	0	0
Threat	0	0	0	0
Attack	0	0	0	0
Total	15	12	3	30

- a. Number of confirmed panther depredations includes 5 radio-tagged calves discovered during UF-IFAS study (C. Jacobs, UF-IFAS unpublished report). Unconfirmed and other predator losses from IFAS study not reported.
- b. Other depredations include 1 caused by bobcat and 1 caused by dog.
- c. Other sighting was fox.
- d. Other encounter was bobcat.

Table 2. Confirmed panther depredations in Collier and Hendry County, Florida investigated during fiscal year 1 July 2011 - 30 June 2012. Includes 5 depredations from UF-IFAS study. Corresponding event # locations represented in figure 2.

Event Number	Interaction Date	Address / Location	City / Area ^a	Animals Depredated	Comments
1	8/8/2011	3420 12 th Ave SE	Naples / GGE	Goat	Uncollared, sex undetermined. 1 goat fatal. Evidence: tracks, attack method.
2	9/1/2011	2260 28 th Ave SE	Naples / GGE	Goat	Uncollared male. 2 goats injured. Evidence: tracks, attack method. Repeat location.
3	10/22/2011	JB Ranch	Immokalee/JB Ranch	Cow	Uncollared male. 1 calf fatal, 20-days-old.
4	11/10/2011	2890 10 th Ave NE	Naples / GGE	Sheep	Uncollared male. 5 sheep fatal. Evidence: tracks, attack/feeding method.
5	11/15/2011	3611 16 th Ave NE	Naples / GGE	Goat	Uncollared male. 2 goats fatal. Evidence: tracks, attack/feeding method.
5	11/23/2011	Immokalee Ranch	Immokalee/Immokalee Ranch	Cow	Uncollared male. 1 calf fatal, 6-days-old.
7	12/4/2011	JB Ranch	Immokalee/JB Ranch	Cow	Uncollared male. 1 calf fatal, 25-days-old.
8	12/8/2011	2480 8 th Ave NE	Naples / GGE	Goat	Uncollared male. 2 goats fatal. Evidence: tracks, attack method.
9	12/20/2011	JB Ranch	Immokalee/JB Ranch	Cow	Uncollared male. 1 calf fatal, 46-days-old.
10	12/25/2011	230 Jung Blvd	Naples / GGE	Horse	Uncollared, sex undetermined. Horse fatal. Evidence: tracks, attack method.
11	12/31/2011	4070 16 th Ave NE	Naples / GGE	Sheep	Uncollared male. 2 sheep fatal. Evidence: tracks, hair.
12	1/6/2012	JB Ranch	Immokalee/JB Ranch	Cow	Uncollared male. 1 calf fatal, 3-mo-old.

Event Number	Interaction Date	Address / Location	City / Area^a	Animals Depredated	Comments
13	4/15/2012	2480 8 th Ave NE	Naples / GGE	Goat	Uncollared female. 2 goats fatal. Evidence: attack/feeding method, trail camera photos. Investigation with cameras continued for 2 months (4/15-6/14). One additional goat confirmed during investigation period. Repeat location.
14	6/8/2012	7007 SR29	Immokalee / JB Ranch	Cow	Uncollared, sex undetermined. 1 calf fatal (estimated weight 275-375 lbs.). Evidence: attack/feeding method. Commercial ranch. Repeat location.

a. GGE = Golden Gate Estates

Figure 1. Number of confirmed human-panther conflicts by fiscal year. FY11-12 depredations includes data from UF-IFAS study.

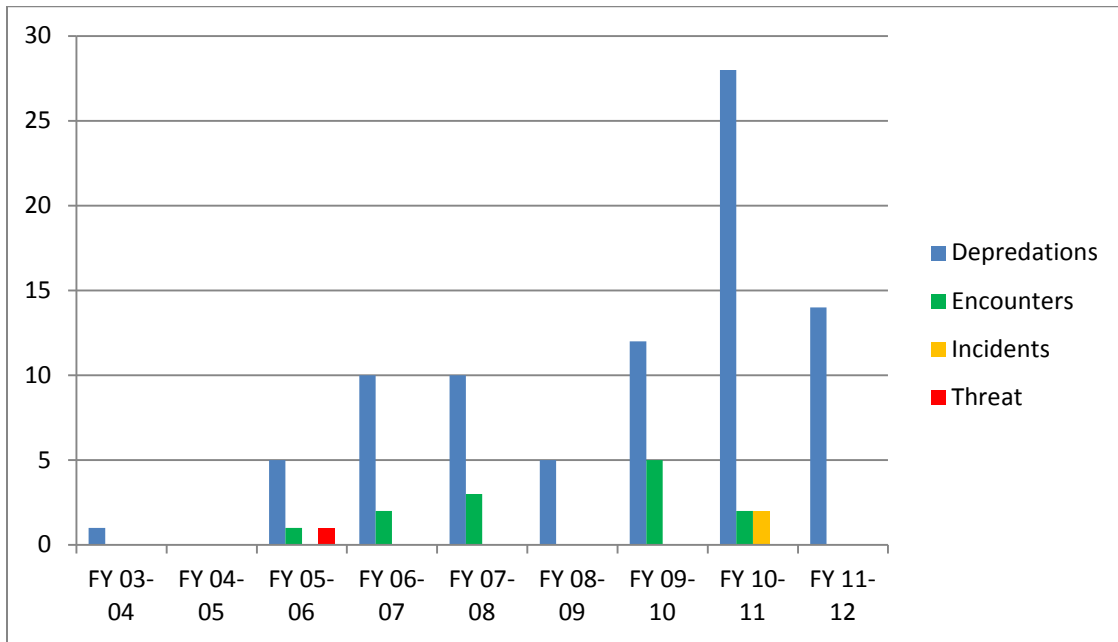
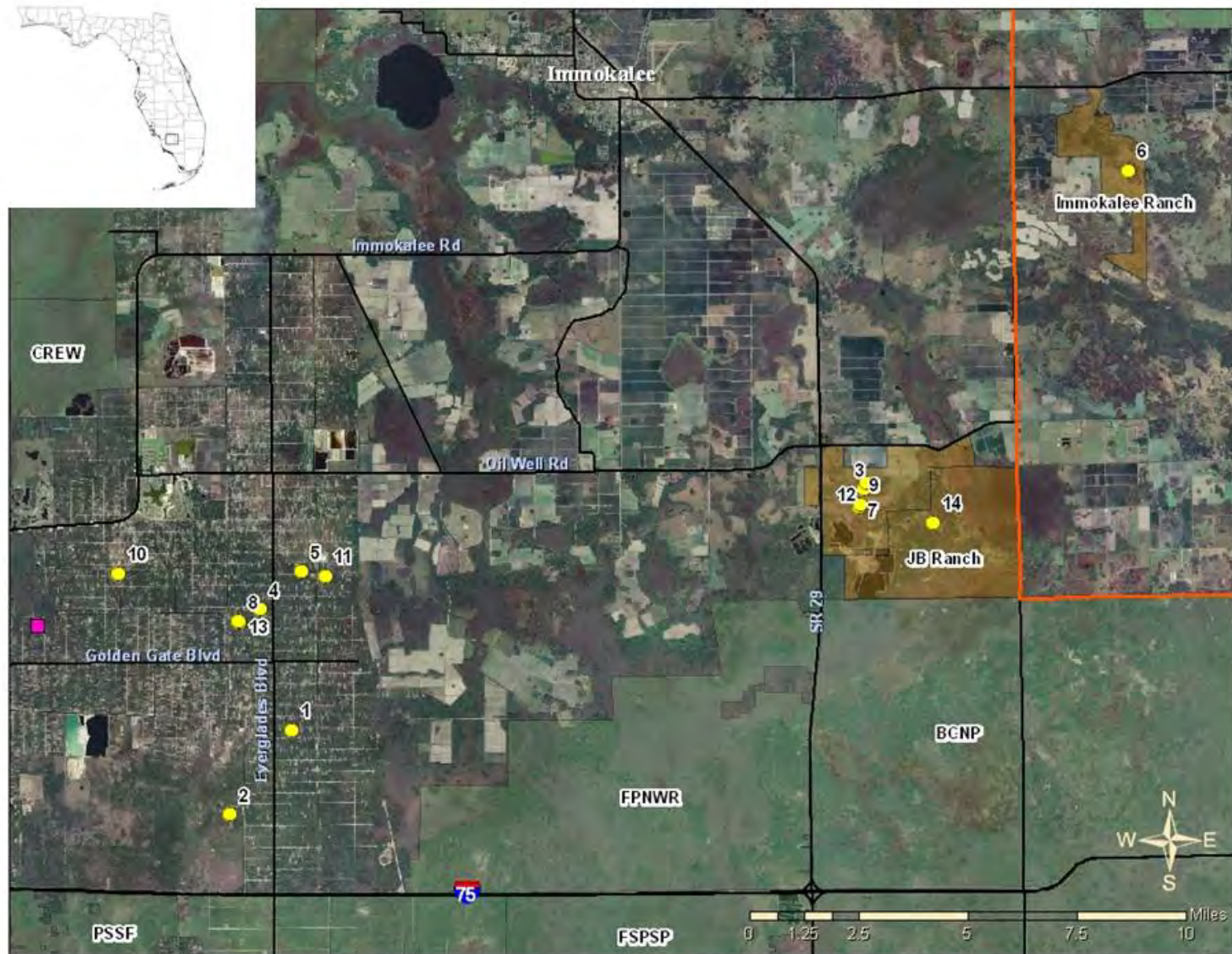


Figure 2. Confirmed panther depredations (yellow circles, event numbers corresponds with Table 2) and human-panther interactions (pink square, 1 sighting) in Collier and Hendry Counties, Florida during fiscal year 2011-2012. Includes data from UF-IFAS study.



Appendix I. List of depredations and human-panther interactions received by the Florida Panther Response Team during fiscal year 1 July 2011 – 30 June 2012.

Interaction Date	Location Address	City	County	Interaction Type	Animals Depredated	Confirmed Predator
8/8/2011	3420 12th Ave SE	Naples	Collier	Depredation	Goat	Panther
8/8/2011	2961 28th Ave SE	Naples	Collier	Encounter	NA	Unconfirmed
8/22/2011	1470 Rock Rd	Naples	Collier	Depredation	Goat	Unconfirmed
8/22/2011	2371 28th Ave SE	Naples	Collier	Sighting	NA	Unconfirmed
9/1/2011	2260 28th Ave SE	Naples	Collier	Depredation	Goats	Panther
11/4/2011	18301 Nalle Rd	Ft. Myers	Lee	Depredation	Turkey	Bobcat
11/10/2011	2890 10th Ave NE	Naples	Collier	Depredation	Sheep	Panther
11/12/2011	1481 18th Ave NE	Naples	Collier	Depredation	Goat	Dog
11/15/2011	3611 16th Ave NE	Naples	Collier	Depredation	Goat	Panther
12/8/2011	2480 8th Ave NE	Naples	Collier	Depredation	Goat	Panther
12/25/2011	230 Jung Blvd E	Naples	Collier	Depredation	Horse	Panther
12/31/2011	4070 16th Ave NE	Naples	Collier	Depredation	Sheep	Panther
1/8/2012	BCNP - Bear Island Unit	Naples	Collier	Encounter	NA	Unconfirmed
1/10/2012	811 15th St NW	Naples	Collier	Depredation	Dog	Unconfirmed
1/20/2012	3470 Everglades Blvd S	Naples	Collier	Depredation	Goat	Unconfirmed

Interaction Date	Location Address	City	County	Interaction Type	Animals Depredated	Confirmed Predator
1/25/2012	1311 31st St SW	Naples	Collier	Depredation	Horse	Unconfirmed
3/20/2012	3800 8th Ave SE	Naples	Collier	Encounter	NA	Unconfirmed
3/28/2012	388 16th Ave NE	Naples	Collier	Encounter	NA	Bobcat
4/15/2012	2480 8th Ave NE	Naples	Collier	Depredation	Goat	Panther
5/9/2012	3230 20th Ave NE	Naples	Collier	Depredation	Chicken	Unconfirmed
5/15/2012	2410 8th Ave NE	Naples	Collier	Sighting	NA	Unconfirmed
5/18/2012	2480 8 th Ave NE	Naples	Collier	Depredation	Turkey	Unconfirmed
6/2/2012	3440 19th Ave SW	Naples	Collier	Depredation	Goat	Unconfirmed
6/3/2012	40001 SR9336	Homestead	Miami-Dade	Sighting	NA	Fox
6/8/2012	7007 SR29	Immokalee	Collier	Depredation	Cow	Panther
6/22/2012	670 13th St NW	Naples	Collier	Sighting	NA	Panther

Appendix II. Photographic evidence from select depredation events.



Photo 1. Drag mark and male panther tracks at 2260 28th Ave SE in Golden Gate Estates. Depredation event #2.



Photo 2 Female panther returning to cache site at 2480 8th Ave NE in Golden Gate Estates. Depredation event #13.

Safe roads for people and panthers



Observe posted speed limits.

The Florida panther is a federally endangered species and every individual is important for the panther's survival. Wildlife underpasses have helped, but they are not practical in all areas. That is why reduced nighttime speed zones exist where panthers are known to frequently cross roads. By obeying posted speed limits you can help ensure the survival of this critically endangered species and avoid personal injury and property damage.

Can you spare a minute?

At 45 m.p.h. a car travels three-fourths of a mile in one minute. Driving through a three-mile-long panther zone would only take an extra minute at 45 m.p.h. compared to traveling at 60 m.p.h.

Be aware when driving.

- Areas where panthers frequently cross roadways are marked with warning signs.
- Panther activity is greatest between dusk and dawn when visibility is lowest. Driving slower allows you time to react.
- Watch for an animal's eyeshine at night. Use caution if road reflectors "disappear," this means an animal is in front of them.
- Scan the road and shoulder ahead. If you see a panther cross the road ahead of you, slow down, there could be others.



Fast Facts

- Road kills are a leading cause of death for Florida panthers and black bears.
- Entire litters have died in vehicle collisions.
- The average cost of a speeding ticket issued in a nighttime panther speed zone often exceeds \$200.
- Excessive speeds result in a mandatory court appearance.

If you hit a panther or if you see an injured or a road-killed panther,

- Call the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's toll free Wildlife Alert hotline immediately at 1-888-404-3922.
- If you cannot remain at the site, give detailed location instructions. Your information could help biologists rescue the animal.
- Do not approach if the panther is injured, for your safety as well as the animal's.
- Watch the animal from a safe distance, preferably from inside your vehicle, until help arrives.



Learn more at MyFWC.com/Panther

