

Interagency Florida Panther Response Team

Annual Report: 2018

(January 1, 2018 – December 31, 2018)



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 Team meets annually 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 Florida State Supervisor for Ecological Services
- FWS Project Leader of the Southwest Florida Gulf Coast Refuges
- FWS Florida Resident Agent in Charge
- NPS Superintendent of Everglades National Park (ENP)
- NPS Superintendent of Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP)
- FWC Executive Director
- FWC Director of Law Enforcement

Previous Oversight Committee members included Regional Directors for the NPS and FWS, however, they have delegated their responsibilities to the Superintendents of the BCNP and ENP and to the FWS Ecological Services State Supervisor, FWS Resident Agent in Charge for Florida, and FWS Project Leader for the Southwest Florida Gulf Coast Refuge Complex. These revisions to the Oversight Committee will be incorporated via an Environmental Action Statement for Categorical Exclusion.

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 31 July 2019 to review significant human-panther interactions that occurred during the reporting period and discuss potential Response Plan revisions for consideration by the Oversight Committee.

HUMAN-PANTHER INTERACTIONS AND DEPREDACTIONS

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**

physical evidence of panther activity was found and that occurred within the reporting period 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 tallied when physical evidence, examined by experienced personnel knowledgeable in interpreting panther sign, supports that a panther was involved. During the reporting period, 30 panther depredations contained physical evidence to support a panther was involved (Table 1). There were no encounters, incidents, threats or human attacks (Fig. 1). Four additional depredations were investigated but no physical evidence of panther activity was found. A bobcat and coyote were responsible for 2 depredations (Table 1).

Depredations

A depredation is classified as domestic livestock or pets preyed upon by a panther. Because depredations do not involve direct contact with humans, they pose a low risk to human safety. Physical evidence of panther presence or activity was found at 30 depredation events (some events involved multiple prey animals) in Collier and Hendry Counties (Table 2). Most of these involved hobby farm livestock (“backyard” animals such as goats, sheep, etc.) or pets in the Golden Gate Estates subdivision east of Naples but depredations also occurred in rural areas near Sunniland, Felda, Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation and south Naples (Fig. 2). Goats were the most common hobby livestock taken by panthers (Fig. 3) but other animals included sheep, donkey, miniature horse/pony, cow (calves), pig, goose, rabbit, dog and cat. (Table 3). Additionally, 2 depredations were caused by a bobcat and coyote (Table 1).

Post depredation actions - FWC distributed educational materials to nearby residents following a depredation in residential areas. Packets of information were delivered door-to-door to residents within 1-mile of the depredation location alerting them of the recent activity. Packets contained a notice about recent wildlife activity in the neighborhood, the *A Guide to Living With Florida Panthers* brochure, information on reporting panther sightings to the panther sightings web site, the Defenders of Wildlife safety pen assistance program, the Conservancy of Southwest Florida pen assistance and cattle compensation programs, and a handout on obtaining the Defenders of Wildlife booklet *Florida Panther: A Guide to Recognizing the Florida Panther, It's Tracks and Sign*. Additionally, because bears are active in many of the same areas, the *A Guide to Living in Bear Country* brochure and tips on avoiding attracting bears were also included. Literature was delivered to 418 residences near affected areas. Packets were not redelivered in areas recently canvassed. An informational A-Frame (sandwich board) sign containing Living with Panthers brochures was also deployed along the roadside near depredation locations to advise residents of recent activity and provide additional opportunities to obtain information.

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 for the various entities to share their respective efforts. The Response Team members decided at the last

meeting, held on 14 May 2018, that this report should focus on summarizing outreach directed by the team or the working group. Therefore, summaries of individual agencies and organizations outreach efforts will no longer be summarized here. However, it should be noted that these groups continue to participate at many functions and offer several programs throughout the year.

Outreach Team members with The Naples Zoo, USFWS, and FWC created two large banners to be displayed on a mobile billboard trailer (Fig. 4) that can be towed to high profile areas to bring awareness to drivers in key panther habitat about panther road safety issues. The Panther Crossing banner, designed by The Naples Zoo and funded by USFWS, promotes FWC's messaging about reducing panther vehicle collisions. In conjunction with this, the Naples Zoo created and hosts www.panthercrossing.org which encourages drivers to commit to driving the posted speeds in panther zones. Using proven methods to foster sustainable behavior change, drivers are asked to sign a commitment form that they will drive this way, which is then reinforced by placing a panther crossing sticker (Fig. 5) on their vehicle as a reminder of that commitment. This small step of agreeing to obey a law can affect a person's willingness to do larger efforts in support of panther conservation as they have self-identified as someone who cares about panthers. Naples Zoo created custom panther crossing signs (Fig. 6) for FWC to use at outreach events along with the commitment forms and stickers. This messaging is also reinforced on site at the Zoo by the Florida panther exhibit and at panther-related zoo events like the Conservation Lecture Series, the "Brew for the Zoo" panther conservation event, and the annual Florida Panther Festival (cover photo). A second billboard (Fig. 7) was designed and funded by Naples Zoo advocating for the panther license plate. This design thanks plate owners and encourages them to visit www.thefloridapanther.org which hosts an 8-minute video about the Florida panthers as well as offers numerous resources regarding panthers including methods to reduce home owners authority (HOA) liability risk, keeping pets secure and vaccinated, as well as listing parks where panthers live in nature as well as facilities that care for panthers that can't live in the wild.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Two organizations, The Conservancy of Southwest Florida and Defenders of Wildlife, offer programs to mitigate panther deprecations. Animal owners are made aware of the programs offered by each organization during deprecation investigations. Frequently, both parties will partner with the owner to acquire a predator resistant enclosure thus reducing the cost-share responsibility to a third.

Assistance Programs

The Conservancy of Southwest Florida

The Conservancy of Southwest Florida launched two programs in June 2011 that continue today; a pen building assistance program for small hobby livestock, and a cattle compensation program for free-ranging cattle on small operation ranches. To date, over \$25,000 has been awarded from both programs. More details about these programs can be found by visiting <https://www.conservancy.org/our-work/policy/florida-panther-pilot-compensation-program>.

The *Pen Building Assistance Program* provides funds to assist landowners who have experienced a deprecation from a Florida panther to build a predator-resistant pen to protect their livestock and pets from further potential deprecation. Assistance was provided to three residences, in partnership with Defenders of Wildlife, totaling a contribution of \$1,280.67 from the Conservancy of Southwest Florida.

The *Free-Ranging Cattle Compensation Program* is designed to help compensate small farm operations (300 head of cattle or fewer) that have suffered documented calf losses to panthers. Five owners were compensated for seven calves totaling \$4,193.00 by the Conservancy of Southwest Florida.

Defenders of Wildlife

The Florida office of Defenders of Wildlife manages 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 cost-share program provides construction and retrofitting instructions, labor assistance, guidance on making one's property less attractive to predators, and financial assistance to eligible participants. Funds and assistance totaling \$2,057.66 were provided for 4 new safety pens.

Table 1. Number of human-panther interactions and depredations investigated during reporting period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018.

Interaction Classification	Panther^a	Lacking Evidence^b	Other Predator^c	Total
Depredation	30	4	2	36
Encounter	0	0	0	0
Incident	0	0	0	0
Threat	0	0	0	0
Attack	0	0	0	0
Total	30	4	2	36

- a. Physical evidence that a panther was involved.
- b. No physical evidence was found to clearly determine the type of animal involved. Reasons evidence may be lacking include delays in reporting, evidence being destroyed by other animals or human activity, or environmental conditions or factors. Also includes 1 non-predatory cause (i.e. illness).
- c. Physical evidence that an animal other than panther was involved. Other depredations were caused by a bobcat (1) and coyote (1).

Table 2. Panther depredations in Collier and Hendry Counties, Florida investigated during study period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018. Locations are represented in Figure 2.

Event #	Interaction Date	Location ^a	Animals Depredated	Comments ^b
1	1/2/2018	Naples - GGE	Calf	1 calf fatal. Evidence: predation method, drag trail.
2	1/9/2018	Naples - GGE	Goat	1 goat fatal. Evidence: tracks, drag trail, cache.
3	1/12/2018	Naples - GGE	Miniature Horse	1 mini horse fatal. Evidence: tracks, predation method.
4	1/17/2018	Naples - GGE	Goat	1 goat fatal. Evidence: predation method.
5	1/18/2018	Naples - GGE	Goose, Turkey	1 goose fatal, 1 goose injured, 1 turkey fatal. Evidence: predation method.
6	1/26/2018	Naples - GGE	Pig	1 pig injured. Evidence: predation method.
7	2/12/2018	Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation	Calf	1 calf fatal. Evidence: predation method, cache, scrape, tracks.
8	2/28/2018	Naples - GGE	Sheep	3 sheep fatal. Evidence: video, predation method.
9	4/21/2018	Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation	Calf	1 calf fatal. Evidence: predation method.
10	5/22/2018	Naples - GGE	Goat	1 goat fatal. Evidence: tracks.
11	5/22/2018	Naples - GGE	Dog	1 Chihuahua fatal. Evidence: tracks.
12	6/3/2018	Naples - GGE	Cat	1 cat fatal. Evidence: home security video.
13	6/7/2018	Naples - GGE	Goat	1 goat fatal. Evidence: predation method.
14	6/21/2018	Naples - GGE	Calf	1 miniature longhorn calf fatal. Evidence: tracks.
15	6/25/2018	Naples - GGE	Donkey	1 donkey fatal. Evidence: tracks, drag trail, predation method.
16	7/30/2018	Naples - GGE	Goat	2 goats fatal, 2 days apart. Evidence: predation method.
17	8/1/2018	South Naples	Goat	3 goats fatal. Evidence: tracks, predation method.
18	8/17/2018	Naples - GGE	Rabbit	1 rabbit fatal. Evidence: tracks.
19	9/5/2018	Naples - GGE	Goat	1 goat fatal. Evidence: tracks, predation method.
20	9/28/2018	Sunniland	Calf	1 calf injured. Evidence: predation method.
21	10/5/2018	Naples - GGE	Horse (Pony)	1 pony fatal. Evidence: tracks, predation method.
22	10/9/2018	Naples - GGE	Pig	1 pig injured. Evidence: predation method.

Event #	Interaction Date	Location^a	Animals Depredated	Comments^b
23	10/15/2018	Naples	Miniature Horse	1 miniature horse fatal. Evidence: tracks, drag trail, predation method.
24	10/16/2018	Naples - GGE	Miniature Horse	1 miniature horse fatal. Evidence: tracks, drag trail.
25	10/17/2018	Felda	Donkey	1 donkey injured. Evidence: predation method. Euthanized by owner.
26	10/18/2018	Naples - GGE	Goat	1 goat injured, 1 goat fatal. Evidence: predation method.
27	10/26/2018	Naples - GGE	Miniature Horse	1 miniature horse fatal. Evidence: drag trail, tracks, predation method.
28	11/13/2018	Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation	Calf	1 calf fatal. Evidence: predation method.
29	12/3/2018	Naples - GGE	Horse	1 horse fatal. Evidence: tracks, predation method. Substandard size horse.
30	12/31/2018	Naples - GGE	Dog	1 dog fatal. Evidence: tracks, cache, predation method.

a. GGE = Golden Gate Estates.

b. Feeding method includes typical panther ambush and feeding traits such as bite marks to the neck or head region, feeding initiated through the chest cavity, and evidence of the ribs being chewed or eaten.

Table 3. Number of domestic animal depredations by Florida panthers during reporting period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018.

Animals	# Animals Killed	# Animals Injured	Total
Goat	11	1	12
Sheep	3	0	3
Donkey	2	0	2
Horse ^a	6	0	6
Cow ^b	5	1	6
Pig	0	2	2
Goose	1	1	2
Rabbit	1	0	1
Dog	2	0	2
Cat	1	0	1
Total	32	5	37

a. Horse breeds included 4 miniature and 2 ponies.

b. All cows were calves.

Figure 1. Number of verified human-panther conflicts and depredations per calendar year. Depredation tallies include radio ear-tagged calf mortalities documented during the UF-IFAS Calf Mortality Study during years 2011-2013.

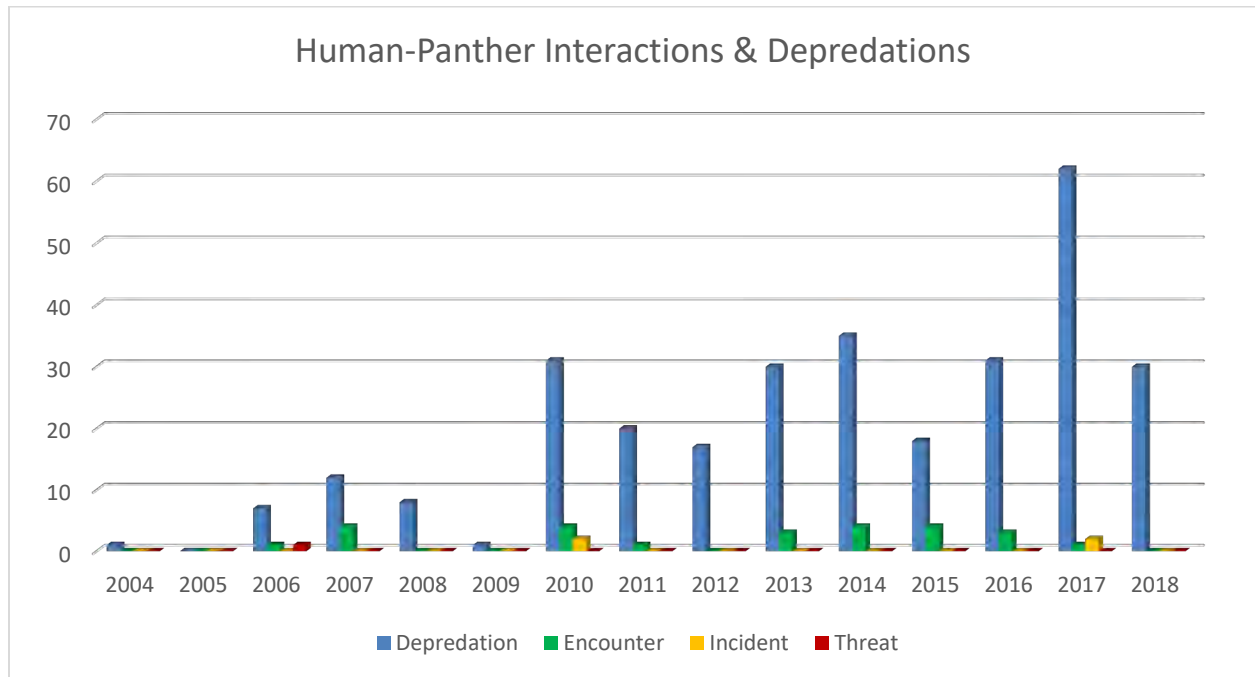


Figure 2. Panther depredations in Collier and Hendry Counties, Florida during reporting period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018. Event numbers corresponds to event numbers in Table 2.

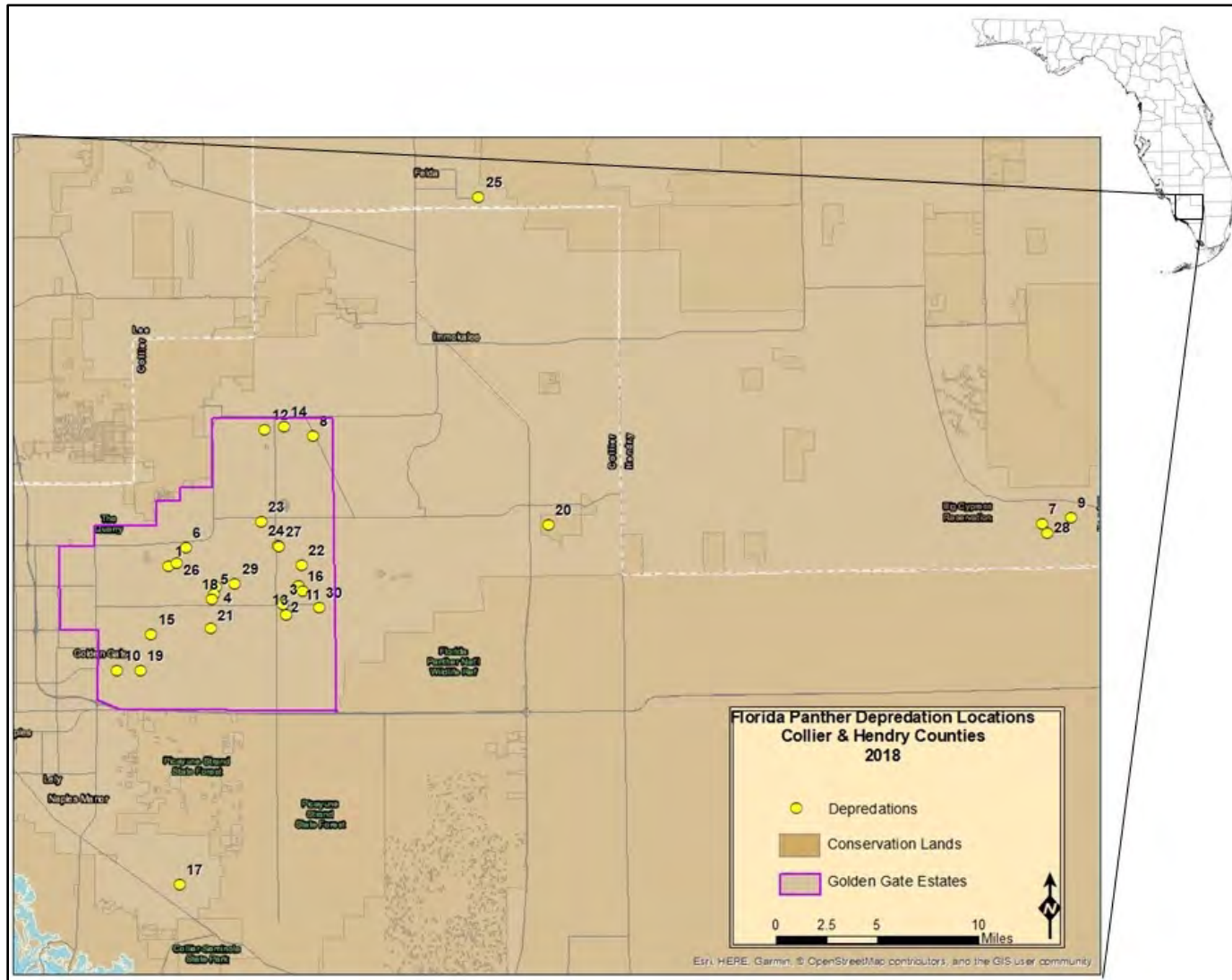


Figure 3. Proportion of domestic animal species involved in panther depredations during reporting period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018.

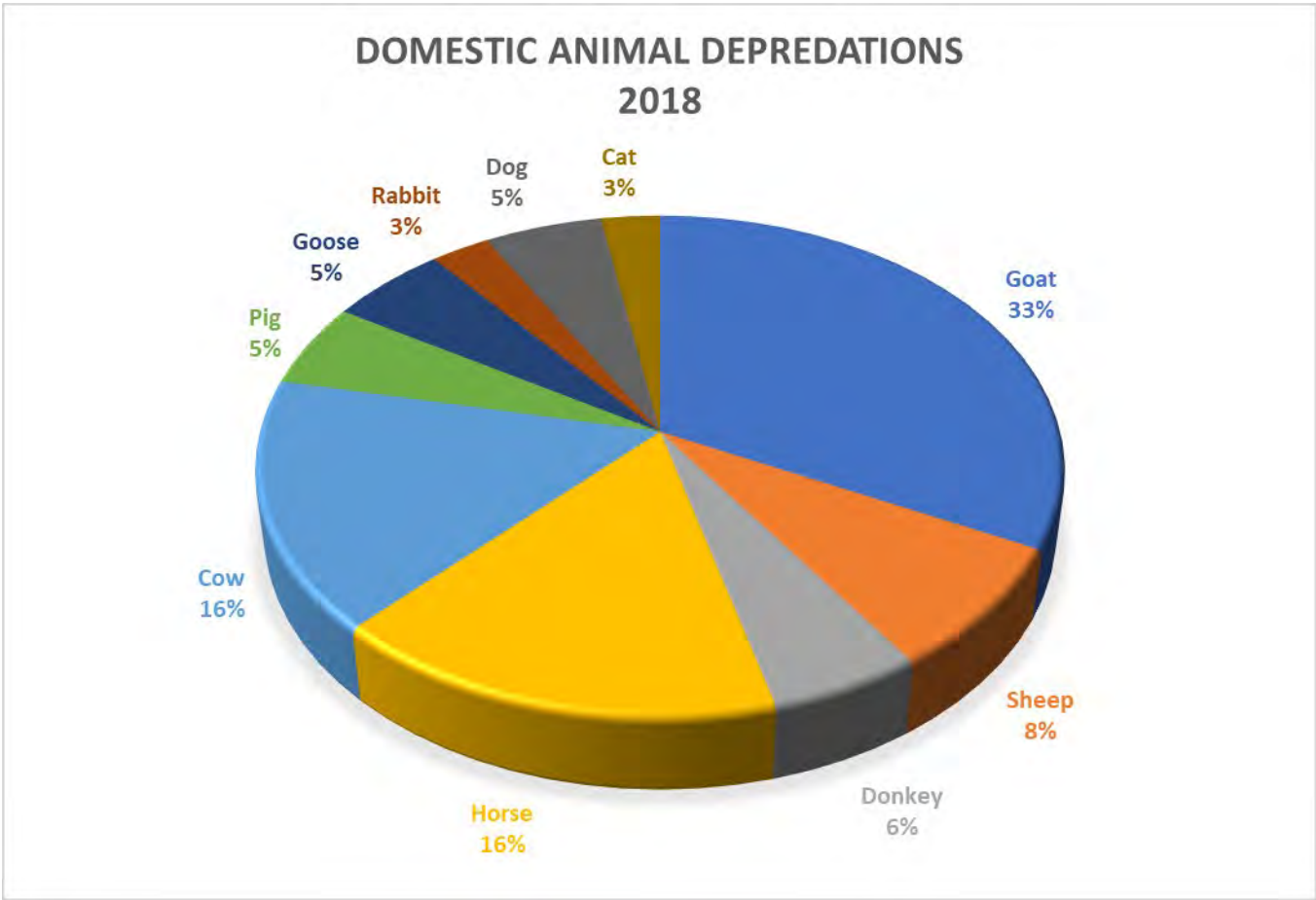


Fig. 4. Mobile billboard design promoting the prevention of Florida panther road mortality. These double-sided billboard trailers can be towed to key areas bringing awareness to motorists.



Figure 5. Example of decal drivers place on vehicle as a reminder of their commitment to drive safely through panther zones.



Figure 6. Custom metal panther crossing sign created by Naples Zoo for use at outreach events to highlight panther awareness programs.



Figure 7. Mobile billboard design funded by Naples Zoo advocating for the panther license plate. This banner can be placed on the billboard trailer in conjunction with the panther crossing banner.



Appendix I. List of depredations and human-panther interactions received by the Florida Panther Response Team during reporting period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018.

Interaction Date	Location	County	Interaction Type	Animals Depredated	Predator
1/1/2018	Seminole Indian Reservation	Hendry	Depredation	Cow (calf)	Non-predator
1/2/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Cow (calf)	Panther
1/9/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Goat	Panther
1/10/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Goat	Coyote
1/12/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Horse (miniature)	Panther
1/16/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Chickens, turkey	Bobcat
1/17/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Goat	Panther (FP236)
1/18/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Goose, turkey	Panther
1/26/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Pig	Panther
1/25/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Cat	Unknown
2/12/2018	Seminole Indian Reservation	Hendry	Depredation	Cow (calf)	Panther
2/15/2018	East Naples	Collier	Depredation	Chicken	Unknown
2/28/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Sheep	Panther
4/21/2018	Seminole Indian Reservation	Hendry	Depredation	Cow (calf)	Panther
5/18/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Goat	Unknown
5/22/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Goat	Panther
5/22/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Dog	Panther
6/3/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Cat	Panther
6/7/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Goat	Panther
6/21/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Cow (calf)	Panther
6/25/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Donkey	Panther
7/30/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Goat	Panther
8/1/2018	South Naples	Collier	Depredation	Goat	Panther
8/17/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Rabbit	Panther
9/5/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Goat	Panther
9/28/2018	Sunniland	Collier	Depredation	Cow (calf)	Panther
10/5/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Horse (pony)	Panther
10/9/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Pig	Panther

Interaction Date	Location	County	Interaction Type	Animals Depredated	Predator
10/15/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Horse (miniature)	Panther
10/16/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Horse (miniature)	Panther
10/17/2018	Felda	Hendry	Depredation	Donkey	Panther
10/18/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Goat	Panther
10/26/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Horse (miniature)	Panther
11/6/2018	Sunniland	Collier	Depredation	Cow (calf)	Unknown
11/13/2018	Seminole Indian Reservation	Hendry	Depredation	Cow (calf)	Panther
12/3/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Horse (pony)	Panther
12/31/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Depredation	Dog	Panther
8/28/2018	Golden Gate Estates	Collier	Sighting	Goats	Panther