

Protecting Panther Habitat

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**“POSITIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL
ORGANIZATIONS REGARDING
PANTHER HABITAT PROTECTION”**

THE PRIMARY ISSUE

This report, required by Section 2(d) of the Endangered Species Cooperative Agreement between the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), is to provide you details regarding the death and handling of a Florida panther. The remains of an 11 year 10 month old female panther, FP83, were collected on **25 March 2011** on US41, approximately 3.2km (2 mi) west of Port of the Islands in Collier County. The cause of death was trauma associated with a vehicle collision. The carcass is currently at the FWC Naples Field Office and will eventually be transported to the Wildlife Research Lab in Gainesville for a complete necropsy. The remains will be archived at the FL Museum of Natural History. This is the **11th panther mortality for 2011** and the 5th road mortality (UCFP157 is not included in the 2011 tally because of the estimated age of the recovered skeletal remains). FP83 was initially marked in the den as a kitten in June 1999 in the Picayune Strand State Forest. She was eventually radiocollared and monitored through July of 2006, when her GPS collar released as programmed.

This information is being provided as required by Section 2(d) of the Endangered Species Cooperative Agreement between the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). It is not intended as a News Release. All information should be considered "pending" until all necropsy results and tests are finalized.

THE PRIMARY ISSUE – cont'd

How best to minimize further mortality of listed species?

How best to manage habitat for recovery and to support a sustainable population?

THE PRIMARY ISSUE – cont'd

Environmental organizations differ in their views of how best to protect remaining habitat for the Florida Panther, to the point of taking opposite taking sides in litigation.

BACKGROUND

The 2006 Babcock Ranch settlement agreement included the preparation of a wildlife corridor study, focused on the Florida Panther.

The study was the basis for a request made in early 2009 by the Conservancy of SW Florida of the U.S. Dept. of the Interior to designate “critical habitat” for the Panther.

BACKGROUND – cont'd

A supplemental petition was filed by the Sierra Club in late 2009, and suit was filed in early 2010 by the Club and by the Conservancy.

Concurrent with these activities, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission launched its Cooperative Conservation Blueprint program, which could obviate the need for habitat designation by the USFWS.

BACKGROUND – cont'd

“The purpose of the Blueprint is to help to conserve the most vital working landscapes and natural habitats while maintaining a sustainable economy and agriculture opportunities. A public-private partnership will create, publish on-line, and maintain a centralized GIS application of common priorities. The Blueprint will help to guide future land use planning decisions and recommend market-based incentives that encourage conservation.”

BACKGROUND – cont'd

Several State-wide conservation organizations have been coordinating with the FWC throughout the development of the Blueprint and the first steps of its implementation, and have aligned with the agency.

Other organizations have aligned with the primary challengers to the USFWS.

BACKGROUND – cont'd

Late Breaking News:

The US District Court (Middle District of Florida) dismissed the suit on 4/6/11.

The Plaintiffs intend to appeal.

PRACTICUM OBJECTIVES

**To Better Understand the Positions of
Environmental Organizations Regarding
Panther Habitat Protection**

To Identify Points of Consensus

To Isolate and Clarify Points of Dispute

STAKEHOLDERS

Critical Habitat Designation:

- **Conservancy of Southwest Florida**
- **Sierra Club**
- **Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility**
- **Center for Biological Diversity**
- **Council of Civic Organizations**

STAKEHOLDERS – cont'd

Cooperative Conservation Blueprint / HCP:

- Florida Wildlife Federation
- Defenders of Wildlife
- Audubon of Florida
- Collier County Audubon Society
 - USFWS
 - FWC

STAKEHOLDERS – cont'd

Not Yet Contacted as part of this phase of the Practicum:

- **Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission**
- **US Fish & Wildlife Service**
- **Major Area Property Owners**
- **Local Government**

PROCESS

- Review of legal documents and literature
- Frame key questions regarding positions and interests
- Survey the participants
- Share initial results
- Conduct follow-up survey
- *(No face-to-face meetings proposed while litigation is ongoing)*
- Prepare report suitable for publication

PROGRESS

- **Survey design completed (and reviewed by NRLI staff)**
- **Three NGO stakeholders respondents declined to participate because of the litigation context**
 - **Have been using the organizations' websites and available literature for defining positions.**
- **Not all “participating” stakeholders have responded timely to the survey**

PROGRESS – cont'd

Stakeholder Interests

- **Substantive interests between the two sides (especially the long-term vision for the region) are fundamentally congruent, but differ slightly in degree**
- ❖ **But Psychological interests are NOT congruent**
- ❖ **And Procedural interests are NOT congruent**

PROGRESS – cont'd

Data Issues

- ❖ **The plaintiffs support the use of the most recent habitat and corridor studies**
- ❖ **The parties in favor of advancing the Cooperative Conservation Blueprint prefer the statewide “CLIP” dataset**
 - **Not fundamentally habitat information in terms of documented corridors and ranges**

PROGRESS – cont'd

Relationship Issues

- The sides share most of the same classes of partners
- The sides share nearly identical approaches (tools) to achieve objectives
- The sides characterize their roles in multi-party initiatives similarly

PROGRESS – cont'd

Values Issues

- The sides share a long-term vision for the region, and share similar fears for the species success if their efforts do not succeed
- The sides differ in their stated preferences for selecting approaches to achieving conservation objectives

PROGRESS – cont'd

Values Issues

- The sides see multiple conservation objectives met through their chosen strategies
- The sides differ in how they view “credibility”
- The HCP organizations will actively reconsider critical habitat designation (and litigation to implement it) if the HCP “fails”

NEXT STEPS

- **Receive surveys from all remaining willing participants (May)**
- **Prepare tables summarizing responses and supporting (June)**
- **Share results with respondents; request clarification or questions about results (July)**
- **Complete analysis and prepare report for NRLI (August)**

Not-so Late Breaking News:

12/12/10, Naples News: Developer building wildlife crossing in east Collier to protect panthers

GOLDEN GATE ESTATES — Environmentalists are wild about a new privately funded road crossing that's expected to save the lives of Florida panthers and other wildlife.

The developer of City Gate Commerce Park in Collier County is paying for the crossing as part of a Habitat Conservation Plan, which it created in partnership with local environmentalists.

More Late Breaking News:

Because of the Sierra Club's success leading the Babcock Ranch Stakeholders Committee, FWC has requested the Club to co-lead its Cooperative Conservation Blueprint discussions for SW Florida and that the Babcock model be a starting point of discussion. The first meeting is scheduled for April 20, 2011.