



Living With Wildlife in the Southeast

Coexisting With Florida Panthers



COURTESY DAVID SHINDLE

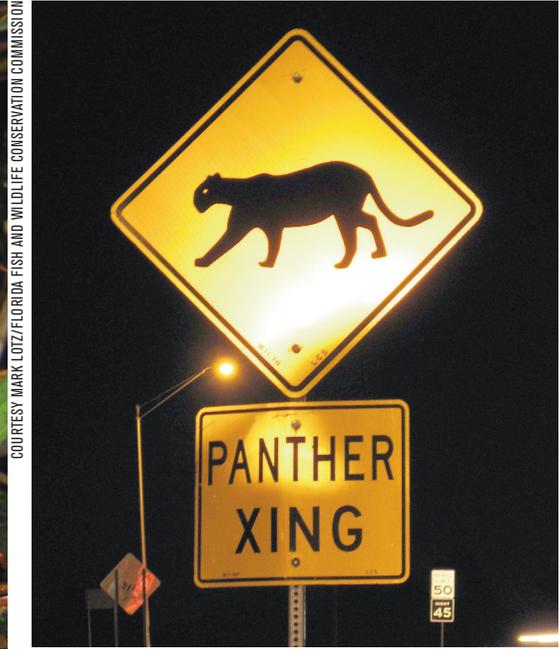
From the Florida Keys and Everglades in the south to the Panhandle in the northwest, the Sunshine State is home to some of the country's most diverse and special ecosystems—and most extensive development. As human communities encroach on the wild lands that remain, people are coming into closer and closer contact with wildlife, including the endangered Florida panther. As a result, collisions with motor vehicles and conflicts with livestock hinder panther recovery and decrease human tolerance for sharing the landscape with this top predator. Defenders recognizes that helping people coexist with the Florida panther is vital to building the acceptance and support needed to save the species.

Through partnerships, education, research support, public outreach and advocacy, Defenders is working to foster understanding of Florida panthers and to help people share the landscape with these endangered predators.

Limited space

Florida panthers historically roamed the forests and swamps of eight states throughout the Southeast. Persecution, hunting, clear-cutting and other human activities associated with European settlement and expansion caused panther numbers to drop precipitously. Thanks to state and federal protections, the population has increased from a low of perhaps 20 individuals a few decades ago to an estimated range of 120 to 230 adults in south Florida. With most of these animals in a single breeding population with limited range in the state's southern tip, Florida panthers remain one of the most imperiled animals in the world.

Public lands in south Florida are not extensive enough to support the existing panther population. These wide-ranging predators need a connected network of public and private lands to find territory, prey and mates and to expand their range northward. With their habitat usurped by housing projects and fragmented by roads, panthers on the move frequently encounter people, livestock and motor vehicles.



COURTESY MARK LOTZ/FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

© SUSAN C. MORSE

Clockwise from left: A panther kitten waits for its mother, a radio-collared female that biologists are tracking, to return to the family den. A sign alerts drivers to be on the lookout for panthers. Defenders' volunteers erect a predator-resistant enclosure designed to keep pets and small livestock safe at night when panthers are most active.

Coping through coexistence

With reports of panther depredations on livestock on the rise, and collisions with motor vehicles now the leading human cause of panther deaths, strategies to coexist with these rare felines are more important than ever. Through partnerships, education, research support, public outreach and advocacy, Defenders is working to foster understanding of Florida panthers and to help humans and panthers share the landscape. We've already made significant progress:

- Participated on the Florida Panther Recovery Team's Transportation SubTeam to identify solutions for reducing road mortality and opportunities to address and improve landscape connectivity. Defenders has improved road safety for panthers by facilitating implementation of slower nighttime speed zones and the installation of wildlife underpasses and fencing; securing funding for panther crossing signs and high-tech motion sensors that detect large animals approaching the road and warn drivers to slow down; and advocating for conservation-minded transportation planning that considers the dangers motor vehicle traffic and habitat fragmentation present for panthers.
- Funded and installed predator-resistant enclosures for pets and small livestock, hosted workshops, initiated demonstration projects, and distributed materials to homeowners in rural areas on responsible practices for safely coexisting with panthers.
- Recruited and trained volunteers for the Panther Citizen Assistance Taskforce (PCAT), a group of citizen scientists and



© LISA ÖSTBERG

activists who share information on protecting pets and small livestock and respond to inquiries about panthers.

- Participated on the Florida Panther Outreach Team to help lead efforts to provide information and assistance to people who share the landscape with panthers and other wildlife.
- Served on the Florida Panther Recovery Implementation Team to help improve panther coexistence and incentive programs.
- Provided support and trail cameras to University of Florida researchers investigating panther depredations on private lands.
- Helped initiate the annual Florida Panther Festival, an event held in collaboration with other nonprofits, government agencies and businesses to build acceptance for panthers.
- Supported and provided training for wildlife professionals on the human dimensions of panther conservation and recovery.

Successful coexistence efforts like these are essential for the growth and northward expansion of the Florida panther population that are necessary for the recovery of the species.



FLORIDA OFFICE
Ph: 727.823.3888
efleming@defenders.org

To learn more about Defenders' coexistence work, visit
www.defenders.org