

Interagency Florida Panther Response Team

Annual Report: 2008-2009

(July 1, 2008 – June 30, 2009)

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

National Park Service

RESPONSE PLAN

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 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 Response Plan has been the guiding document for the Response Team since February 2005. An Environmental Assessment for the Response Plan was 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 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 2, 2009 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. The annual report was finalized and sent to the Oversight Committee on November 2, 2009.

RESPONSE PLAN REVISIONS

A few minor editorial revisions were made to the plan, including updates to the target dates in the Outreach Strategy.

HUMAN-PANTHER CONFLICTS

The Response Plan identifies five human-panther interaction classifications: Sighting(s), Encounter, Incident, Threat, and Attack. Panther depredation on domestic animals is addressed separately.

Three interaction types (sightings, depredations, and encounter) were recorded during the reporting period (Table 1). Fewer conflicts were documented this fiscal year compared to previous years (Fig. 1).

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 educational opportunity. Sightings generally 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.

On 29 September, 2008 a 3-month-old kitten (UCFP110) was killed by a vehicle in Everglades National Park near the entrance station. The uncollared mother was reportedly seen by a minimum of four people from 1-15 October, 2008. It was determined that the panther was loitering in the area while attempting to reunite with her lost kitten and did not pose a risk to human safety. Although these sightings were not verified with physical evidence, they were deemed plausible and law enforcement presence was increased during this time to enforce speed limits to enhance protection of the female reported to be in the area.

Two separate sightings at the National Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (CSS), Collier County, were reported in local media and therefore are worth noting. On 13 February, 2009 tourists photographed a panther from the boardwalk while it presumably stalked deer in a nearby prairie. On 12 May, 2009 CSS volunteers videotaped a panther as it walked away on the boardwalk

(<http://www.naplesnews.com/videos/detail/raw-video-panther-strolls-through-corkscrew-sanctu/>).

Encounters

An encounter is an unexpected direct meeting between a human and a panther in which the panther exhibits nonthreatening behavior. One situation was classified as an encounter but was not verified with physical evidence. A Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission biologist working at the Dinner Island Wildlife Management Area reported that he looked outside of the on-site living quarters to investigate why his dog was barking and noticed a panther approaching the porch. The biologist opened the door and yelled and the panther ran off (Table 1).

Depredations

A depredation is classified as domestic livestock or pets being preyed upon by a panther. Seventeen depredation events were reported and the type of predator involved was determined in 11 cases (Table 1). Panthers were confirmed to be responsible in 5 depredation events. Other confirmed predators included bobcat, coyote, and dog (Fig 2). Panthers primarily preyed on goats but a house cat and young colt, approximately 200 pounds, were also killed in the Golden Gate Estates area. Figure 3 shows the locations of the confirmed depredations by panthers.

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.

- The Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge prepare a monthly *Panther Update* newsletter highlighting panther research, management activities and outreach events. This newsletter is distributed to an increasing audience each year.
- The FWC's Florida panther web site was redesigned and includes updated information and new features. The new IP address is www.floridapanther.net.
- FWC gave a presentation to residents of Verona Walk, Naples, FL on living in areas adjacent to panther habitat.
- FWC gave a presentation at Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in Naples, FL on Florida panther use in Belle Meade and Rookery Bay.

- From February 4 – 15, 2009, the NPS, FWC, and the FWS sponsored a “Living with Wildlife” booth at the Collier county fair. In addition to agency personnel, volunteers and members of the Friends of Florida Panther Refuge helped staff the exhibit. Hundreds of people visited the exhibit.
- During March 14-21, 2009, the 4th annual Florida Panther Week was celebrated with a variety state, federal and environmental organizations at various venues throughout southwest Florida. Approximately 5,000 individuals participated in these events. The week culminated with Save the Panther Day at Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge (FPNWR) on March 21 with a record attendance of 336 people.
- Members of Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge provided several presentations in the local area on panthers during the reporting period.
- A new education position for panther outreach was filled by NPS at Big Cypress National Preserve. The incumbent developed a living with wildlife curriculum and conducted several presentations. This position is currently vacant.
- A panther outreach position was advertised for FPNWR, but was never filled due to lack of funds.

CONCLUSION

Fewer confirmed conflicts were documented during the 2008-2009 fiscal year compared to previous years. There were half as many confirmed depredations compared to last fiscal year and no encounters were verified. Assuming the one reported encounter was legitimate, there were still fewer encounters reported. It is difficult to ascertain what combination of factors may be involved with this apparent reduction in conflicts. Some possible reasons include positive impacts of outreach efforts, animal owners practicing appropriate husbandry techniques, fewer hobby livestock owners due to the economy, or fewer panthers frequenting areas where past interactions occurred. Education continues to be important especially as it relates to effective animal husbandry techniques to protect pets and hobby livestock. All interactions provide an education opportunity for living and recreating in areas frequented by panthers.

Table 1. List of depredations and encounters investigated during fiscal year 1 July 2008 – 30 June 2009. Confirmed panther depredation locations (panther depredation event #) can be found in Figure 3.

Panther Depredation Event # ^a	Interaction Date	Location	Interaction Type	Confirmed predator	Animals Depredated	Comments
1	7/16/2008	4848 30th Ave SE	Depredation	Panther	Goat	Confirmed male panther by tracks. Killed 3 goats, partially ate 2 goats. East of Desoto Blvd.
	8/11/2008	445 10th Ave SE	Depredation	Unconfirmed	Goat, chicken	FWC Officer responded. Owner reported seeing panther eating goat. Phone messages unreturned. West of Desoto Blvd.
	9/3/2008	2820 16th Ave SE	Depredation	Unconfirmed	Goat	Dead goat already buried but feeding description of "ribs chewed through" consistent w/ panther feeding method. However, since the carcass was not inspected by a Response Team member it's being classified as "unconfirmed." West of Everglades Blvd.
	9/11/2008	2940 18th Ave SE	Depredation	Dog	Goat, sheep	Found dog tracks leading under fence. Grizzled black dog hair collected from barbed wire. West of Everglades Blvd.
	9/15/2008	2820 16th Ave SE	Depredation	Dog	Goat	Dog tracks present in pen. West of Everglades Blvd.
2	9/29/2008	2290 28th Ave SE	Depredation	Panther	Horse	Male panther tracks present. Young colt, 7 mo old, 200 pounds. Investigated, confirmed by R. McBride
	10/2/2008	3935 30th Ave SE	Depredation	Unconfirmed	Geese	8 geese; 3 missing, 5 killed. Suspect panther based on canine puncture size and distance apart but some evidence indistinct. No tracks to indicate predator type. West of Desoto Blvd.
	10/14/2008	2141 B Road, Palm Beach Co	Depredation	Unconfirmed	Goat	Suspect dogs based on description of kill.
3	10/31/2008	1170 Keri Island Rd	Depredation	Panther	Goat	Confirmed by presence of panther tracks.
4	12/29/2008	4125 22nd Ave SE	Depredation	Panther	Cat	Male panther confirmed by tracks.
5	2/20/2009	3420 24th St SE	Depredation	Panther	Goats	Confirmed by tracks, hair collected from fence, and feeding method.
	3/2/2009	3764 22nd Ave SE	Depredation	Unconfirmed	Dog	Dog breed was miniature fox terrier. Bloody paw marks on porch are that of larger animal but unidentifiable. Proximity of observer to animal and size of paw marks lend to suspicion of panther although unconfirmed.
	3/12/2009	7041 Livingston Woods Lane	Depredation	Bobcat	House cat	House cat cached. Canine puncture size indicate bobcat, not panther.

Panther Depredation Event # ^a	Interaction Date	Location	Interaction Type	Confirmed predator	Animals Depredated	Comments
	3/27/2009	7329 Riverside Dr. Punta Gorda	Depredation	Bobcat	Goat	Canine puncture diameter and distance apart consistent with bobcat.
	6/1/2009	425 5th St SW	Depredation	Dog	Goat	Numerous dog tracks throughout pen.
	6/8/2009	15081 Oak Tree Dr	Depredation	Unconfirmed	House cat	No sign to make determination. Off Auto Ranch Rd.
	6/24/2009	1858 Richards Ln	Depredation	Coyote	Goat	Verified by tracks
	10/14/2008	21425 CR846	Encounter	Unconfirmed	NA	Observed by FWC DIR biologist. (Dinner Island WMA)

a. Event # corresponds to numbers in Fig. 3.

Figure 1. Number of confirmed human-panther conflicts by fiscal year.

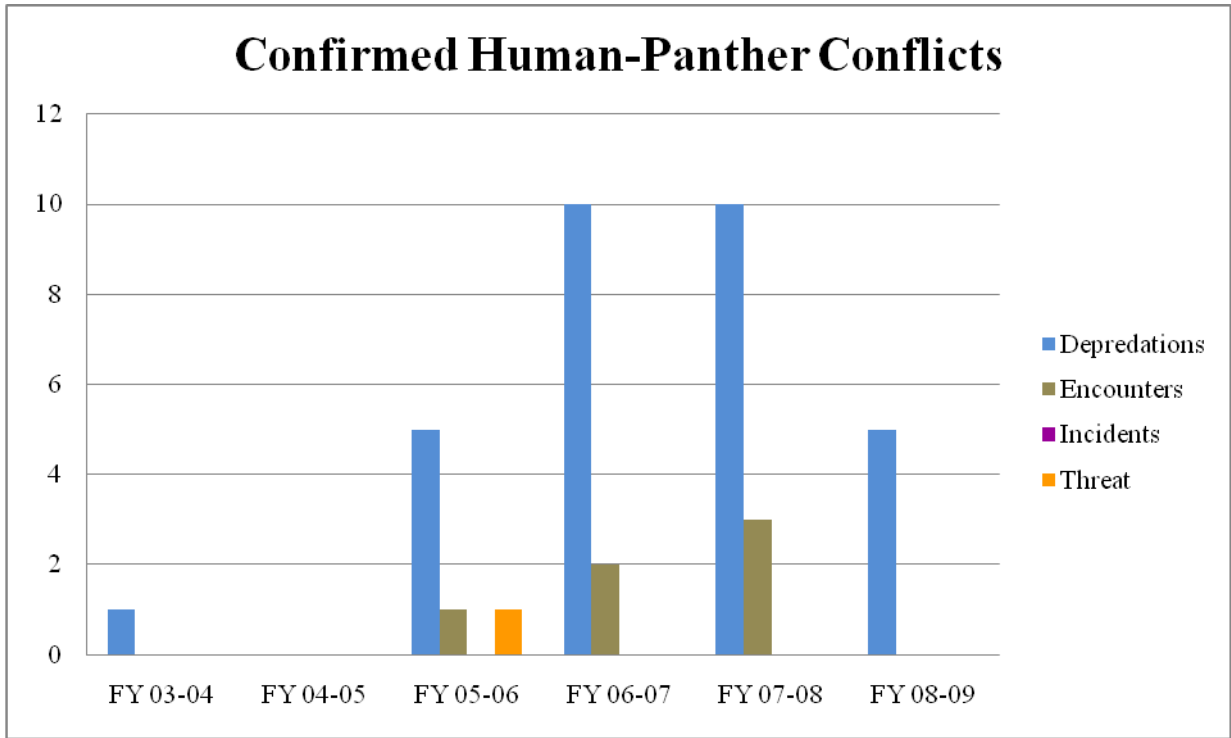


Figure 2. Number of confirmed depredation events by species for fiscal year 2008-2009.

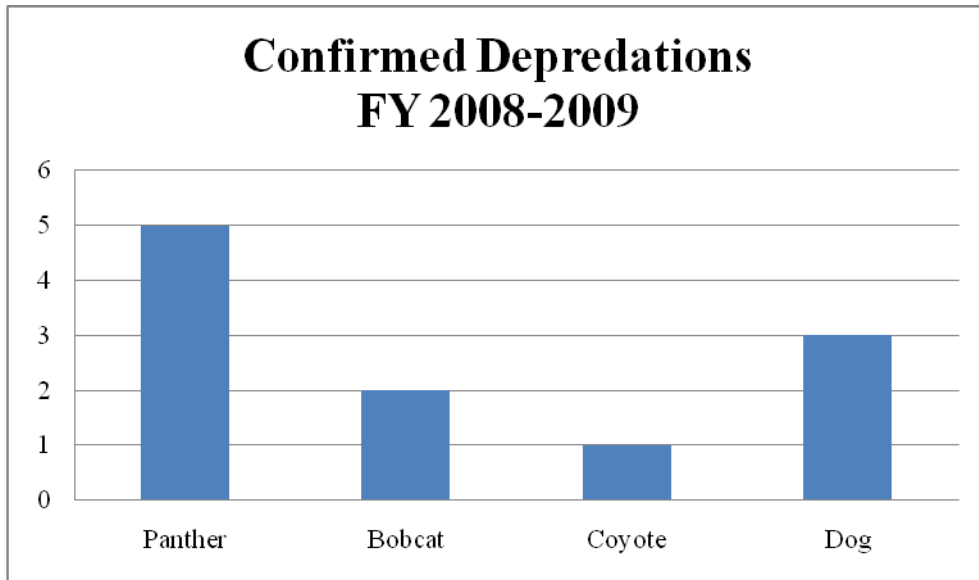


Figure 3. Confirmed panther depredation locations in Golden Gate Estates, FL area, fiscal year 2008-2009.

