

Protecting the Florida Panther and Panther Habitat on Private Lands: Conflicts and Management

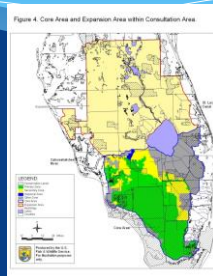
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Management of the Florida Panther

- * 1967: Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*) listed as endangered under the ESA
- * Population estimate: 100 - 180 adults and sub-adults
- * Recovery of the Florida panther:
 - * 3 populations (≥ 240 adults and sub-adults)
 - * Maintain for ≥ 12 years
 - * Secure and protect habitat of sufficient quality, quantity and spatial configuration to support panther in the long run
 - * Natural dispersal of panthers and gene flow

USFWS Pilot Program

- * Eligible lands:
 - * Primary and dispersal zones of the Panther Focus Area
 - * Parcels ≥ 50 acres
 - * Suitable FNAI land use
- * Payments:
 - * Tier 1 lands: \$22.30/acre for burning, mechanical vegetation treatment, invasive control
 - * 190,541 eligible acres
 - * Tier 2 lands: \$4/acre for prescribed grazing plan
 - * 69,194 eligible acres
 - * 10 year contract
- * Safe harbor agreement in the expansion area



Private Landowners' Concerns

- * Payment program:
 - * Institutional commitment and finances may expire in 10 years
 - * Receive 10 years of payments and are left with a lifetime of panthers (land use restrictions imposed by the ESA)
 - * Reporting costs will not be trivial
 - * Landowners (not leaseholders) should decide whether to enroll
 - * Tax credits may be a better alternative to payments
- * Safe harbor agreement:
 - * Details of the SHA must be clearly documented (with opt out)
 - * Must be transferable across landowners and generations
 - * Other at risk species should be included
 - * Collateral damage to neighboring landowners should be considered

Environmental NGOs

- * Payment Program:
 - * No incentive for habitat restoration/protection in perpetuity
 - * Link compensation to actual conservation benefit provided
 - * Important habitat (Zone 2) excluded
 - * 4 tiers: native vs. non-native; covered habitat vs. open habitat
 - * Doesn't address livestock depredation or financial pressure to develop lands
 - * Financing for program not assured (\$4.5 million/year)
- * Safe harbor agreement:
 - * Baseline of zero panthers is not justified
 - * Transient males live north of Caloosahatchee river

Ranchers and Cattlemen

- * Distrust of both the FWC and USFWS:
 - * Accuracy of panther population count
 - * Invasiveness of agency monitoring
 - * Recovery efforts are a poor use of taxpayer monies
- * Florida panther:
 - * Hybrid panther-cougar that is larger, more aggressive, more prolific
- * Livestock depredation:
 - * Calf losses not evenly distributed across ranchers
 - * Impossible to adequately monitor livestock depredation
 - * Cattlemen bear the costs of panther conservation

Cattlemen and Ranchers

- * Problem panthers should be eradicated
 - * Panthers that do not prey on cattle may be left alone
- * Depredation tags
 - * Eliminate problem panthers
 - * Generate revenues
 - * Offset anger and frustration towards agencies
 - * Increase panthers' fear of people
 - * Prevent panther population exceeding carrying capacity
- * Mixed support for per-acre payment for land stewardship
 - * Would not benefit leaseholders

Issues to be Addressed

- * Who should bear the costs of panther conservation?
- * Which mechanism should be used?
 - * Regulation versus incentives
 - * Conservation in perpetuity or flexible conservation approaches
 - * Temporal issues
- * Landowners are heterogeneous
 - * Developers are affected by mitigation under the ESA
 - * Ranchers have an interest in keeping lands working
 - * Ranchers tolerate a certain level of depredation
 - * Ranching lands provide quality panther habitat