

Big Cypress

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Big Cypress
National Preserve

Florida Panthers — What you need to know



The Florida panther is a symbol of the ever shrinking natural areas within the state. Those that live near, or frequently travel through, panther habitat can implement a variety of measures to insure that we continue to exist in close proximity with these animals.

Panthers are primarily found in the southern portion of Florida, but were once found extensively throughout the Southeastern United States. They are closely related to mountain lions —also known as cougars and pumas. These cats are powerful predators that prey on deer, hogs and other wildlife and play a role in maintaining a healthy ecosystem.

Human encroachment into panther habitat may increase the likelihood and potential severity of human/panther encounters. Human behaviors, such as feeding animals that panthers prey upon also set a stage for conflict; feeding increases densities of prey animals, which in turn attracts predators such as panthers.

Generally, panthers are quiet and elusive. They tend to live in remote areas with plentiful deer and adequate cover. As human development increases, panthers may become more accustomed to humans in and around their habitat.

The size of a panther's home

range depends on terrain and the amount of food available. Panthers will defend their territories, killing other cats that attempt to occupy the same area — one reason that relocation of panthers rarely succeeds.



To report a Florida Panther sighting within Big Cypress National Preserve — contact 305-242-7740. In an emergency call #NPS on your cell phone.

If You Live in or Visit Panther Country

Make your property or camp safer for humans and less friendly to panthers by taking the following precautions. Encourage your neighbors to do the same.

- ***Make noise when you're outside.*** Make noise during the times when panthers are most active, dusk to dawn.

- ***Install outside lighting.*** Lighting will allow you to see if a panther is present.

- ***Closely supervise children,*** when they are playing outdoors in panther habitat. Do not let them play in vegetation that could provide hiding or stalking cover for panthers.

- ***Trim landscaping.*** Trim or remove vegetation to eliminate hiding places for panthers and forage for prey animals such as deer, especially around children's play areas. Make it difficult for panthers to approach unseen.

- ***Do not feed wildlife.*** Feeding deer, raccoons, birds and other wildlife can also attract panthers. Store garbage securely. Plant shrubs that deer don't like to eat, which will discourage concentrations of the panther's chief prey. Contact the University of Florida Cooperative Extension Service for landscaping ideas and publications.

- ***Control pets.*** Roaming pets are easy prey and can attract panthers. Bring pets in at night. If you leave your pet outside, keep it in a kennel with a secured top. Don't leave pet food or water outside, which can attract prey animals.

- ***Secure livestock.*** Place livestock in sheds or barns at night and close doors to outbuildings.

- ***Stay clear of a kill.*** Panthers cover their kill and come back to feed on it for two or three days following the kill. If you find what looks like a panther kill, stay clear because the panther may return.



The estimated population of Florida panthers is between 80 - 100. As little as 10 years ago the population was estimated at 30 - 50.

The successful increase within the population is due, in part, to a genetic restoration effort that took place between 1995 and 2003.

If You Encounter a Panther

- **Hiking in panther country.** When you walk or hike in panther country, go in groups and make noise to reduce the risk of surprising a panther. Keep children close to you and within sight. Talk to them about panthers and teach them what to do if they encounter one.

- **Never approach a panther.** If you come upon a panther, what appears to be a panther kill or see panther kittens, be alert and move away from the area. Most

panthers will try to avoid a confrontation; give them a way to escape.

- **Do not run from a panther.** If a panther confronts you, do not run—it may trigger the animal's instinct to chase and attack. Instead, face the panther, stand upright and back away slowly. Pick up small children so they won't run.

- **Appear larger.** Raise or wave your arms slowly and speak firmly to the animal.

Open your jacket if you are wearing one. If the panther behaves aggressively, throw objects at it. You want to convince the panther that you are not its prey and that you are dangerous.

- **If attacked, fight back.** Panthers are sometimes driven away by prey animals that fight back. Humans have fought off mountain lions in the west successfully with rocks, sticks, caps and jackets, garden tools and even their bare hands.

Most visitors rarely get more than a glimpse of a panther in the wild because the cats tend to avoid people. Although the chance of encountering a panther is rare, it is possible — especially if you are out between dusk and dawn.

There has never been a recorded attack on a human by a Florida panther. Encounters with the cats may increase as the panther population grows, and humans continue to move into panther habitat.

Drive Safe - Save Wildlife

Vehicle accidents are a major cause of death within the Florida panther population. Between 2000 and 2005 more than 35 panthers were killed by cars.

Drive with care through panther habitat, especially during dawn, dusk and night hours.

Obey special posted speed zones in areas that panthers are known to frequent.





The United States Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission partner to monitor and track the health of the Florida panther population.

The three agencies are the primary stewards of large tracts of panther habitat. The agencies also work closely with landowners, communities and others that may experience recurring panther encounters. The agencies are committed to public education to help people learn how to behave responsibly and live safely in proximity to panthers.

Special Thanks to the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

This publication printed with support from donations to Big Cypress National Preserve.

