

Florida Panther



http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/species_images/doc3663.jpg

The Florida panther is Florida's state animal. Male Florida panthers can get as large as 150 pounds, and be 7 feet long from nose to tail. Females are smaller, from 50 to 100 pounds, and about 6 feet long. Florida panthers used to live in many southern states, but Florida is the only state in which they are currently found.

The Florida panther is one of *the most endangered* mammals on Earth. There are about 100-160 adults in the only known breeding population. Placed on the Endangered Species List in 1967. The Florida panther is an "umbrella species." That means that when large areas of land are set aside for Florida panther habitat, many other plants and animals benefit from the panther's protection and the protection of its habitat.

Panthers can live in all kinds of places, such as forests, prairies and swamps. However, they need lots of room to hunt – one panther needs from 75 square miles (for females) and 200 square miles (for males) to find enough to eat. Because they need so much room, Florida panthers' biggest threats are humans: cities, houses, pollution, and roads (where they are often killed in collisions with vehicles). Also, because there are so few of them, it is difficult for them to produce and raise healthy young.

William Bartram did not count the number of panthers that he saw in Florida in the 18th century, but he did say that they were "plentiful." We cannot say that today! But there is reason for hope. People are restoring panther habitat so that panthers can have enough room to hunt and breed. In addition, in 1995, scientists introduced eight female Texas cougars into Florida panther habitat. Texas cougars and Florida panthers are very closely related, and will naturally mate. These cougars and panthers produced kittens that are legally considered Florida panthers. These kittens bring some new genes into the population, which means that more Florida panthers may successfully breed together again.

Questions

1. What have you learned about the Florida panther?
2. Do you think the Florida panther needs to be "rescued"? Why or why not?
3. How would you represent what you have learned about the Florida panther in an art work?