

# USACE Natural Resource Management

## Mammals



### Florida Panther

### FAST FACTS

**REASONS FOR CURRENT STATUS:** The Florida panther is a subspecies of the mountain lion. In 1967 the USFWS listed this subspecies as endangered. Historically this subspecies' range included Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Today it is restricted to less than 5% of its historic range with only one breeding population located in south Florida.

The panther continues to face threats stemming from an increasing human population. Limiting factors include habitat availability, prey availability, and lack of human tolerance. Potential panther habitat throughout the Southeast continues to be affected by urbanization, residential development, road construction, conversion to agriculture, mining and mineral exploration, and lack of land use planning that recognizes panther needs. (USFWS)

**MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION:** In addition to listing the Florida panther, the USFWS developed a recovery plan for the subspecies which was revised for the third time in 2008. The recovery strategy for the panther is to maintain, restore, and expand the panther population and its habitat in Florida. Additionally, the plan calls for the reintroduction of two additional, viable populations within the historic range outside of south and south-central Florida. Public perception of panthers must be improved for successful recovery.

**HABITAT NEEDS:** Monitoring and tracking efforts have found that panthers occupy forested habitat types which are interspersed with other habitat types that are used in proportion to their availability.

- Panthers require large, contiguous areas to meet their social, reproductive, and energetic needs.
- Panther habitat selection is related to prey availability. Habitats which increase prey vulnerability to stalking and capturing are selected more frequently.
- Dense understory vegetation provides important resting, feeding, and denning cover. Telemetry studies have shown that panthers typically do not return to the same resting site each day, with the exception of denning females or panthers near kill sites for several days. (USFWS)

**Appearance:** This is a large cat with a long tail. The coloration varies greatly among individuals. Upper parts range from pale brown to rusty, while under parts may be dull white or buffy. The tail tip, back of ears, and sides of nose range from dark brown to blackish. Mature males are nearly 7 feet in length from nose to tip of tail and weigh between 102 and 154 pounds. Females are much smaller with total length of around 6 feet and weigh from 50 to 108 pounds. (USFWS)

*Photos: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

*Natural Resource Management (NRM)*

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**USACE NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ROLE:** According to the Engineering Research and Development Center's Threatened and Endangered Species Team Cost Estimates, the USACE has expended over \$1,300,000 on efforts related to the Florida panther since 2006. These funds have predominantly come from the Planning and Program Management and Regulatory Business Lines. Expense types include Coordination and Determination, Site Visits and Inspections, In-house Research, and Inventory, Survey, and Monitoring efforts.

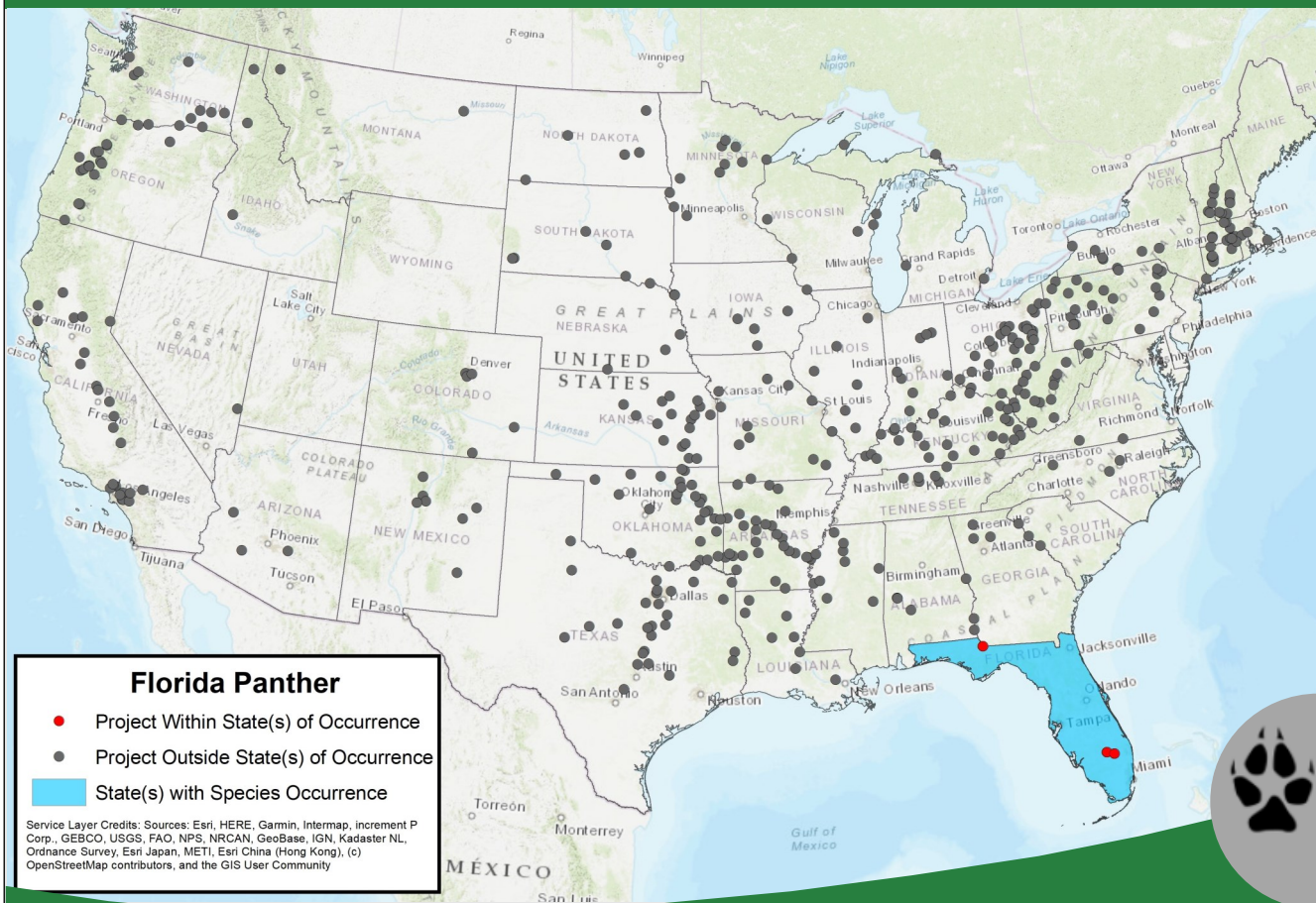
**WHAT IS USACE NRM DOING:** With a reduced and restricted range, the Florida panther was only listed by three projects in the FY20 NRM Assessment. One project in the Vicksburg District of the Mississippi Valley Division, the Yazoo Backwater Project, was listed to have rare occurrences of the panther. Additionally, two projects within the Jacksonville District of South Atlantic Division are noted to have the potential for this species to occur.

In 2012, a radio telemetry study found that collared panthers had crossed the Caloosahatchee River near a disposal easement owned by USACE. Through a collaborative effort of federal, state, and private organizations, USACE easements were relocated from the 1,278 acre area in order to preserve this critical panther crossing.

In 2013, a recently released female panther was found to have given birth to a kitten near the Picayune Strand Project. This project connects surrounding state and federal lands, including nature preserves and wildlife areas. The USACE works carefully in this region to ensure that all current and proposed work can be carried out without negatively impacting the Florida panther or its habitat.



*Photo Above:* The Picayune Strand Restoration Project kitten being processed by Florida Wildlife Commission biologist, Mark Lotz in 2013. Processing includes sexing, weighing and measuring, administering vaccinations and deworming, and inserting a microchip transponder.



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 Source: Map provided by Ashleigh Boss, ORISE Fellow, Institute for Water Resources

