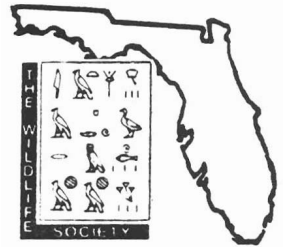


FLORIDA CHAPTER
THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY



1807 N.W. 39th Terrace
Gainesville, Florida 32605
10 December 1986

Mr. David J. Wesley
USFWS--Endangered Species Field Station
2747 Art Museum Drive
Jacksonville, Florida 32207

Dear Dave:

The Florida Chapter of The Wildlife Society, a group of professional wildlife biologists in the state, has reviewed The Florida Panther Recovery Plan and we are submitting our written comments along with this letter. We very much appreciate the opportunity to provide this input and we hope that you will view the comments in the positive manner in which they are intended.

Many professional wildlife biologists believe that the population dynamics and depressed reproductive rates in wild Florida panthers are at a critical, if not emergency, stage right now and several more years of research and traditional management will very likely do little to substantially improve this situation. A major criticism of the Florida Panther Recovery Plan is that it is tentative throughout, with inadequate description of the urgency of the situation. We believe that the recovery of this critically endangered species will require innovation and bold, new approaches rather than just "more of the same." We encourage you to allow the urgency of the situation to be reflected in the wording of the Recovery Plan.

Additional comments are attached--we hope these are useful to you.

Sincerely yours,

Wayne R. Marion
President

WRM/bf

Enclosures

cc: Executive Board
Florida Panther Committee

FCTWS COMMENTS ON THE FLORIDA PANTHER RECOVERY PLAN

pp.5, 24, 26: The implicit assumption is that deer are or should be the primary food base of the Florida panther. Yet on p. 46 (1314) it is noted that the primary food of panthers in FSSP is raccoons. Scats are currently being collected and analyzed at the Florida State Museum, and this work needs to be continued and expanded. The alternative hypothesis that deer are not always the primary prey of the panther nor are they always the best choice for management as a prey species should be acknowledged and tested.

p.11 : pluriclentatum should be pluridentatum. The statement that "hookworm will consume 1/20th of a cc of blood per day" and the following projection of blood loss for the panther is misleading because the 1/20th cc statistic refers to dog hookworm, and nothing is known yet about the effect of the panther hookworm. Also, the term hookworm 'infection' is more appropriate than 'infestation' for an internal parasite.

p.12 : The two captive cougar kittens referred to were not coryi and the species of hookworm was unknown, so this reference also tends to be misleading.

pp. 15-16 : The possibility that hunters and panthers already may be competing for food and game resources in some areas should be acknowledged.

p.16(3.) : Reference? Throughout the report, the use of references was somewhat lax.

p.23 : What is the objective of the cumulative effects model? The impacts listed on pp. 41-42(123.) should be included under 123. on p.23.

p.25(1313.) : Surely enough is known about deer management to begin managing for increased deer populations in some of the areas already studied, e.g. the Bear Island Unit, where the deer herd is considered to be below carrying capacity (p.43[131.]).

p.25(13171 and 13172.) : Why are specific management approaches to increase browse for deer only mentioned for MSIT lands? See above.

p.25(1316.) : It is not clear what is meant by "refining" the APC technique- presumably testing the technique to see if it works in a variety of habitats in Florida. APC's should be compared to other indices of herd condition, such as fat and other health-related indices; no one index should be universally relied upon.

p.27(17.) : The function of the Florida Panther Interagency Committee should be stated. Their most important objective should be to develop a coordinated plan among the various responsible agencies for management of contiguous public lands in south Florida.

p.45(1312.) : The phrase "consistent with other natural resource management objectives" should be deleted. In some cases, existing management objectives may have to change in order to accommodate panther recovery as a higher priority objective.

p.46(1313.) : "similar research should now be conducted in FSSP and BCNP" should read "and other units of BCNP"?

p.68(321.) : Captive bobcat breeding research at Mississippi State University* supports the more conservative approach of capturing non-endangered panther kittens to raise for breeding stock rather than wild adult females. Breeding success (surviving kittens and larger litter sizes) increased the longer the females (some wild caught as kittens and some captive born) were adapted to captive breeding conditions (i.e., pens, diet, human presence, disturbances). In either case, using wild caught kittens or adults to establish captive breeding, a two year duration is not sufficient time to adequately assess this objective.

*Beeler, I. Elizabeth. 1985. Reproductive characteristics of captive and wild female bobcats (Felis rufus) in Mississippi. M.S. Thesis. Mississippi State University. 81 pp.

Implementation Schedule : "Initiate deer studies in EVER" and "Initiate deer studies in N.Fakahatchee Strand and on private lands" are given duration dates of 3 years. These studies should be well-underway or nearing completion in 3 years, not simply initiated.