

**Panther Capture Activities**  
**January 17 - February 4, 2000**  
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A lot has transpired in this three-week period. We covered a lot of ground working in the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge (FPNWR), Picayune Strand State Forest (PSSF), Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest (OK Slough), the Addition Lands of Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP), Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation (BCSIR), and Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve (FSSP). During this time three panthers were recollared (TX106, #32, and #49), one previously uncollared panther was captured and outfitted with a radio-collar (#82), and one panther died after being hit by a vehicle (#63).

**January 17-21, 2000**

Monday, January 17<sup>th</sup> was a holiday (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day) but since panthers don't recognize holidays, neither do we. Our early morning hunt on the FPNWR was interrupted by a radio call from Darrell in the plane who informed us that #63's collar was in mortality. Male panther #63 was right next to State Road 29. We retrieved his body from the canal that runs parallel to the highway. Not all of the danger zones along SR 29 have benefitted from underpasses yet but one is planned near where #63 was hit. Construction is planned to begin in the next couple of years. When a dead panther shows up next to the road it's usually an "open and shut case" as to what caused the death. However, the necropsy revealed that although #63 was struck by a vehicle, the actual cause of death was drowning. There was also evidence to suggest that he had been in a fight with another panther. So it appears he survived a fight with both a panther and a car only to wind up drowning in a canal. And you think Mondays are bad for you! For more details surrounding the circumstances of #63's death, check out his Field Note.

Female #32 was scheduled to have her collar changed. Normally we could pick any day of the week to do this because she rarely leaves the FPNWR. But as luck (bad luck for us, that is) would have it, she spent this entire week on private land north of the refuge. We didn't catch any new panthers on the refuge this week but we did see tracks of a male and female. Because of the great distances panthers can travel during a night, we can't rule out the likelihood that these tracks were from collared panthers. But there's a good chance the female tracks are from an uncollared panther.

By Friday TX106 had moved to a convenient location in the PSSF to attempt a capture of her and/or her kitten. The dogs began trailing a kitten but as all good panther mothers do, TX106 got between her kitten and the dogs. The dogs treed TX106 and since she was due to be recollared we promptly took advantage of the situation.



### **January 24-28, 2000**

A cold front was passing through the area on Monday as we drove our swamp buggies towards #32 who had returned to the refuge. Cold wind and sporadic rain, heavy at times, accompanied us throughout the day. Number 32 treed relatively high in a cypress tree so we battled with the thorny vines that tried to keep us from our task of inflating the crash bag. Once darted, however, #32 climbed higher to a position where she couldn't fall out. I donned my climbing spikes and began the ascent up the slippery cypress. I tied the rope around her and she was lowered to the awaiting arms of the crew on the ground.



Also on Monday, two Division of Wildlife Management personnel were surveying portions of Okaloacoochee Slough in preparation for the upcoming turkey season. They were lucky enough to see a panther on one of the main grades that runs through the area. They also noticed a hog that appeared dazed. They seemingly inadvertently found themselves amidst a panther trying to catch its dinner. Not wanting to hinder the panther's efforts they moved along. That was all the information we needed.

The next morning we were in the area of the sighting. The dogs soon treed a large female panther in a small oak. Number 82, as she is now known, weighed 124 pounds. She appeared pregnant and if so will likely give birth within a month. Adding to her weight was a belly full of hog, the remnants of which were found nearby. Her hunt the previous day proved successful.



The remainder of this week was spent hunting in the Addition Lands of BCNP. We inadvertently treed a collared panther, #77, which did not need her collar changed. She looked in fine shape as we led the dogs away from the tree. We had trailed her for several miles and she left numerous scrapes indicating that she was in estrous.

### **January 31-February 4, 2000**

We continued our efforts in the Addition Lands this week. On Tuesday we captured #49 without much incident. This female panther is now about 10 years old and is starting to show signs of her age. Although her weight was good, she appeared slender and her teeth were worn.

On Friday Darrell saw TX106 from the air with one kitten. It was in an area we could easily access so we began hauling our equipment to the PSSF. However, by the time we got there (about an hour later) TX106 had traveled another mile and a half south. We reevaluated our departure point as she continued to move south along a canal. She eventually crossed south of Jane's Scenic Drive in FSSP. We eventually decided not to attempt to capture the kitten on this day for several reasons. Throughout the morning they had traveled roughly four miles south from where they were seen from the air. Additionally, this is the first time TX106 had been in this portion of FSSP with this particular kitten. As a result, the kitten was in unfamiliar territory with nothing to "home" in on. It's much better to capture kittens near a kill site where the family unit has a place to reunite. The potential existed (even if small, especially with just one kitten) that if the kitten became temporarily separated from the mother it might try to

return to the site of the last kill which could be more than four miles away. We decided to bide our time.