

Another Panther Crosses the Caloosahatchee River

Another Florida panther has crossed the Caloosahatchee River! Panther #74, a 2-year-old male, forded the river the weekend of 8-9 May 1999 near where #62 crossed just over a year ago. The Caloosahatchee River (which runs from Lake Okeechobee to the Gulf of Mexico at Ft. Myers) was thought to be a deterrent to panther movements. Panther #62, in April 1998, dispelled this myth by swimming across the river approximately 7.5-8 miles east of LaBelle near the Ortona Lock and Dam. We suspect he crossed close to where an old railroad grade formerly bridged the river. Panther #74 also crossed in the same vicinity as #62. Both of these cats were dispersing from their natal ranges in search of new territory to call home.

Shortly after #74 was collared on 12 November 1998, he made a 9-day excursion from the Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation (BCSIR) to the Bear Island campground (19 miles) and then returned. He stayed near the BCSIR until early February when he finally dispersed from the area. He traveled northwest crossing the L-28 interceptor and feeder canals and quickly crossed north of County Road 846. He proceeded through Okaloacoochee (OK) Slough (a state forest east of State Road 29 near Felda in Hendry County) and by late February was located just south of SR 80 about 3 miles east of Goodno, 38 miles from the BCSIR. Throughout March and April he continued to utilize the area between OK Slough and the Caloosahatchee River. He crossed SR 29 at least 4 times as he explored new territory. His most westward location was in an area between Buckingham and Ft. Myers Shores 4 miles east of I-75 on 2 April 1999. On the flight of Friday, 7 May 1999 he was a mile south of the river near Goodno. The following flight on Monday we discovered he had crossed the river and found him 11 miles away in Fisheating Creek near Palmdale. This area is approximately 76 miles from where he was born. He seems to have settled down, at least for the time being, and has remained primarily in the area north of Fisheating Creek. He has utilized an area bounded on the south and west by Fisheating Creek, to the east by the Harney Pond Canal and has traveled north to within 7 miles of SR 70. He has crossed US 27 a minimum of 5 times in his travels so far. We will continue to provide updates on the saga of #74's dispersal.

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