



FLORIDA GAME AND FRESH WATER FISH COMMISSION

QUINTON L. HEDGEPEETH, DDS
Miami

MRS. GILBERT W. HUMPHREY
Miccosukee

THOMAS B. KIBLER
Lakeland

JOE BRUNER
Destin

JULIE K. MORRIS
Sarasota

ALLAN L. EGBERT, Ph.D., Executive Director
VICTOR J. HELLER, Assistant Executive Director

NAPLES OFFICE
566 Commercial Blvd.
Naples, Florida 34104-4709

10 November 1997

Florida Panther Management
and Research Cooperators

Dear *Sonny*

I have enclosed the Florida Panther Capture Plan for 1997-98 that I developed based on the input I received from our meeting on 2 October 1997. In a nutshell, we have 10 recollarings and 11 kittens of collared female panther (5 F1 progeny) to capture this season. Other tasks include managing the reproductive output of TX101, exploring the reproductive health of panther #54, and pursuing uncollared panthers. I have offered a tentative time-line for these activities, however, this schedule is subject to change. There has been one additional task added to the schedule since our meeting; on 22 October, Roy McBride treed a ♂ kitten (5-7 months-of-age) of panther #49. This panther did not exhibit "typical" denning behavior and thus was not detected.

I am looking forward to a productive capture season this year. With the help of all cooperators, I anticipate accomplishing all of our goals.

Sincerely,

Darrell Land

FLORIDA PANTHER CAPTURE PLAN FOR 1997-98

4 November 1997

Field personnel from Everglades National Park, Big Cypress National Preserve, Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve, Picayune Strand State Forest, Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge and the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission met on 2 October 1997 to determine needs for the upcoming panther capture season. The following summarizes our needs and planned activities with respect to F1 and panther kitten captures, recollarings, and pursuits of uncollared cats.

There are 21 panthers and 7 female Texas cougars radio-collared; 10 of these cats will need new radio-transmitters (see attached Table). Seven of 18 radio-collared females have produced at least 11 kittens of various ages that need to be radio-instrumented. Five of these kittens (1♂, 4♀) are F1 progeny.

We recognized that radio-instrumentation of F1 progeny is our highest priority, and developed a tentative time-line for capture activities accordingly. We will commence capture activities with the advent of cooler autumn weather, hopefully late October or early in November. Our goals for this fall include capturing the 3 F1 kittens of TX105 (Everglades National Park) and TX101 (Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation) and recollaring as many of the 10 cats as possible. These F1 kittens are 12 and 10 months-of-age, respectively, so it is imperative to capture these offspring prior to their dispersal. In addition to their kittens, TX105 will be recollared and we will implant a contraceptive into TX101. TX108, also residing in Everglades National Park, will be captured this fall if she does not den by early November.

TX101 has produced a total of 4 kittens, 2 of each sex, and resides in the Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation's big game hunting pen where she continually preys upon their imported ungulate stock. We have been informally advised by the Tribe that they would like TX101 removed from their property when her 2 kittens become independent, perhaps early in 1998. We will catch TX101 and implant her with a contraceptive to assure that she does not conceive a third litter of Florida panther kittens in anticipation of a formal request. This contraceptive implant should be considered experimental, as we evaluate the technique for other management applications.

Early in 1998, any panthers not recollared this fall will be captured as soon as possible. Handling of panther female #48 should be delayed until her radio-instrumented male kittens (#62 and #64) become independent. These 2 males should be fitted with adult collars at some point after independence as well. We will strive to have most of the recollarings completed by mid-January and proceed with captures of uncollared cats (dispersed F1's and other panthers) as well as the litters of #40 (1 ♂), #49 (at least 1 ♂), and #56 (2♂, 2♀).

The only remaining dependent-age F1 progeny requiring handling would be the 2 ♀ kittens of TX107 (born 5/97). These cats reside primarily in the Monument Unit of Big Cypress Nat. Preserve (north of US 41 and south of I-75). There are several other capture needs in this area, namely recollaring of female #55, capturing #55's ♂ kitten (born 9/97), and hunting for uncollared panthers. The timing of these activities should be delayed until water has receded adequately for tracking surveys the NPS-BCNP plan to conduct. We tentatively plan to provide a minimum of 2 contiguous weeks of effort to accomplish these captures.

Towards the end of "good" capture season weather, most likely some time in March, we are planning on treeing panther #61, the independent F1 ♀ in ENP that was held in captivity this past summer. If she appears to be in good shape and her collar does not need resizing, a capture may not be necessary. Other capture-related activities may need to be scheduled for later dates to resize collars on newly-captured kittens to accommodate their growth.

We also discussed the possibility of conducting a complete reproductive exam of male panther #54. There is some question as to his ability to impregnate females, however, his available mate choices have not been in

prime reproductive vigor themselves (2 are reproductively senescent, and 2 have failed to produce kittens from 3 or more sires). Panther #54 was recently in the company of TX106, a female that has produced a kitten in Florida, so we will watch for denning activity in mid- to late December. If she fails to den, we may opt to capture #54, place him in a temporary facility to await a complete reproductive exam. We will not hold #54 longer than our permitted 45 days and if he does not respond well to captivity, we will release him immediately.

Finally, we discussed those who are essential staff at captures and the need to restrict participation in captures to experienced people. The houndsman, GFC veterinarian, and a senior GFC biologist (Biological Scientist III or above) will be required at all captures. Other necessary personnel will be a designated tree climber, an assistant to the veterinarian, and other people to man safety gear as needed. Most captures can be safely conducted with 4-7 people, including the flexibility of accommodating a land manager representative. Adoption of these mutually-agreed upon limits greatly increases both panther safety and capture efficiency. There may also be times when we are committed to taking members of the media with us, but all non-experienced people shall be briefed about the upcoming activities and advised as to appropriate behavior.

The preceding plan will require 20 or more panther captures, a rather ambitious goal. We are in a good position to accomplish these goals because of a full-time houndsman and experienced veterinarian stationed in Naples and the assistance that is committed by field staff of the involved agencies. We should be ready to respond quickly to capture opportunities as they occur.

prepared by: Darrell Land, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission

(attachment)

LIST OF ALL RADIO-INSTRUMENTED FLORIDA PANTHERS AND TEXAS COUGARS AS OF 10/08/97

Panther	last capture	recollar?	kittens?	born on date
#09	1/21/94	no ¹		
#11	5/15/95	yes ²	no	
#16	3/4/96	no ³		
#19	1/9/96	no ³	no	
#23	2/12/96	no ³	no	
#32	2/19/97	no	no	
#36	3/26/97	no	no	
#40	5/21/96	no ³	yes (1♂)	5/97
#45	1/12/95	yes		
#46	3/13/96	no ³		
#48	1/9/95	yes	no	
#49	2/4/97	no	yes (1 ♂, ??)	?
#51	12/26/97	no		
#54	12/16/96	no (reproductive exam?)		
#55	3/7/96	yes	yes (1♂)	9/97
#56	3/7/97	no	yes (2♂, 2♀)	6/97
#57	1/31/95	yes	no	
#59	3/27/97	no		
#60	1/15/97	yes (98 lbs)		
#61	6/23/97	yes?(late)	no	
#62	8/18/97	no (fall 98)		
#63	4/13/97	no		
#64	5/24/97	yes		
TX101	12/17/96	yes (contraception)	yes (1♂, 1♀)	12/96
TX103	4/11/97	no	no	
TX104	1/23/97	no	no	
TX105	6/16/95	yes	yes (1♀)	9/96
TX106	12/18/96	no	no	
TX107	1/10/97	no	yes (2♀)	5/97
TX108	7/11/95	yes	no	

¹ too old to handle; transmitter out 8/19/97

² last capture for this cat; should be fitted with long-life transmitter

³ based on 3 year recollaring schedule