

revise the recovery plan for the endangered Florida panther, *Puma (Felis) concolor coryi*. The Service established a Recovery Team comprised of key individuals and scientists involved in the Florida panther recovery program to guide the revision process. Additional opportunities for public review and comment will be available when the revised plan is in draft form.

DATES: Comments from all interested parties must be received by March 2, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Comments and materials concerning the recovery plan revision should be sent to Dennis B. Jordan, Recovery Team Leader, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 110450, Gainesville, Florida 32611-0450. Copies of the current recovery plan are available at the same address. Comments and materials received will be available for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the above address.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Dennis B. Jordan at the above address, (telephone 352/846-0546; facsimile 352/846-0841).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Restoring endangered or threatened animals or plants to the point where they are again secure, self-sustaining members of their ecosystems is a primary goal of the Service's endangered species program. To help guide the recovery effort, the Service is working to prepare recovery plans for most of the listed species native to the United States. Recovery plans describe actions considered necessary for conservation of the species, establish criteria for recognizing the recovery levels for downlisting or delisting them, and estimate time and costs for implementing the recovery measures needed.

The Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) (Act), requires the development of recovery plans for listed species unless such a plan would not promote the conservation of a particular species. Section 4(f) of the Act, as amended in 1988, requires that a public notice and an opportunity for public review and comment be provided during recovery plan development. The Service will consider all information presented during a public comment period prior to approval of each new or revised recovery plan. The Service and other Federal agencies will also take these comments into account in the course of implementing approved recovery plans.

Release

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Revision of Recovery Plan for the Florida Panther

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of intent to revise recovery plan.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announces its intent to

The species considered in this recovery plan revision is the Florida panther, *Puma (Felis) concolor coryi*. Historically ranging throughout most of the southeast U.S., the Florida panther has been reduced to a single known wild population estimated to number 30 to 50 adults. This population utilizes approximately two million acres of habitat on public and privately owned lands in south Florida. Threats to the panther are generally related to factors associated with its habitat—availability, destruction, modification, fragmentation, contamination and the types and levels of human activities taking place within habitat areas; and, demographic and genetic factors associated with isolation, population reductions and inbreeding within the small population.

Previous Federal Action

This proposed revision represents the second major revision of the recovery plan since its initial approval by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on December 17, 1981. The first major revision was approved on June 22, 1987. Additionally, a minor revision to incorporate a task to address genetic restoration and management was approved on March 13, 1995.

Public Comments Solicited

The current Recovery Team elected to expand involvement in the revision process to include other entities; those considered to be potential "stakeholders" in the panther recovery program. Potential stakeholders may represent interests of Native Americans, landowners, conservation organizations, hunters, agriculture, timber, animal rights, property rights, public agencies, education/public outreach, development/real estate, etc.

The Service solicits written input regarding suggested recovery actions/tasks that should be considered in drafting the revised recovery plan. All comments received by the date specified above will be considered prior to drafting the revised plan. Additional opportunities for public review and comment will be available when the revised plan is in draft form.

Authority

The authority for this action is Section 4(f) of the Endangered Species Act, 16 U.S.C. 1533(f).

Dated: December 11, 1997.

David Hankla,

Field Supervisor.

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