



June 20, 2007

Michael Rippe, Director of Transportation Planning  
FDOT District One  
P.O. Box 1249  
Bartow, FL 33831

Bob Janes, Commission Chair  
Lee County Commission  
P.O. Box 398  
Fort Myers, FL 33902-0398

Ken Haddad, Executive Director  
Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Farris Bryant Building  
620 South Meridian Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1600

Paul Souza, Field Supervisor  
South Florida Office  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
1339 20<sup>th</sup> Street  
Vero Beach, FL 32960

**Re: Eleven Panther Road Kills This Year**

Dear Mr. Rippe, Mr. Janes, Mr. Haddad, and Mr. Souza:

Last week, Florida's roads claimed the lives of two more Florida panthers, resulting in eleven deaths for the year and matching last year's record total. The Florida Wildlife Federation (FWF) and National Wildlife Federation (NWF) are deeply concerned over these recent events. At this pace, the best case scenario is that these panther deaths will just barely be offset by panther births. Once other sources of mortality are factored in, panthers will be lucky to hold steady at roughly one hundred individuals—far fewer than that needed for a self-sustaining, viable population.

The sad fact is that most of these injuries and deaths are preventable through sound transportation planning; incorporation of appropriate wildlife crossings, fencing, signage, and buffers along new roadways; retrofitting of existing roadways with these protective devices; and enforcement of speed limits in posted panther speed zones. We now call upon your agencies to show collective leadership in addressing this major threat to panther survival and strongly urge the following actions:

- Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to work with Lee, Collier and Hendry Counties as well as state and federal wildlife biologists to promptly develop and implement a regional wildlife crossing plan;
- FDOT to extend the fencing along State Road 29 near Jerome where two panthers have been trapped and killed on the road due to fencing gaps;
- FDOT to build a proposed crossing and associated fencing on U.S. 41 just east of Turner River Bridge where at least seven panthers have been killed;
- Lee County to work with state and federal wildlife biologists to immediately address the design flaws in the combined fencing and crossing on Corkscrew Road near Alico Road where two panthers have been killed in the past year;
- Lee County to adopt the western most alignment for the extension of County Road 951, thereby avoiding sensitive lands including prime panther habitat;
- Lee County to continue to rebuke overtly politically-motivated efforts to install the Coconut Road Interchange along I-75;
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to effectively veto any efforts to install another interchange along I-75 through core panther habitat, including one recently proposed in conjunction with the Big Cypress Special District development;
- FWS effectively to veto efforts to install the Immokalee Bypass, a major thoroughfare through core panther habitat; and
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and other law enforcement agencies to step up enforcement of posted speed limits particularly in panther speed zones, including along SR 29 which has claimed at least 29 panthers.

The Federations appreciate the work that has been done thus far by FDOT, Lee County, FWC and FWS to protect the Florida panther and we look forward to working with you on the above actions. If we can assist in any way, please contact Nancy Payton (FWF), 239-784-5119, [fwfnaples@earthlink.net](mailto:fwfnaples@earthlink.net) or Laura Hartt (NWF), 404-876-8733, [hartt@nwf.org](mailto:hartt@nwf.org).

Sincerely,



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