



Panther Tales

www.floridapanther.org

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Spring 2008

Refuge Manager Update

by Layne Hamilton, Refuge Manager

This June, I will celebrate my sixth year as project leader of Florida Panther and Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuges (NWR). During this time one of my greatest joys has been working with the Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge as a vital partner in refuge and panther management. The Friends primarily help with public education and outreach to develop public support for, and understanding of, Florida panthers and the Florida Panther NWR. For example, the Friends of Florida Panther Refuge acquired several large donations to build a foot trail and overlook on the refuge that allows the public to "walk where panthers walk". Long time board member, Ricky Pires initiated the "Panther Posse", an amazing educational program that reaches hundreds of local school children each year, teaching them that panthers are an umbrella species whose existence is important to many other species. In March, the Friends group was instrumental in the success of "Save the Panther Week" activities, a week-long series of events with various partners that highlighted the Florida panther.

However, one of the most important responsibilities of the Friends of Florida Panther Refuge is advocacy, not only for the Florida panther and but also for the Florida Panther and Ten Thousand Islands NWRs. Board member Jeff Carter has actively supported the refuges and Florida panthers through participation in local planning committees and advisory groups. Nationally, there are nearly 250 refuge support groups, including the Friends of Florida Panther Refuge, which advocate for national wildlife refuges with Congress. Because of this advocacy, the National Wildlife Refuge System received the largest funding increase in its history in 2008. Locally, the results of this increase will include filling several critical refuge positions on both refuges, initiating new research projects, controlling more acres of invasive plants, and funding the construction of a small environmental education building and pavilion. In April, Executive Director Tom Murray and President Lisa Östberg traveled to Washington, D.C. and met with local congressional staff to discuss the continuing needs and challenges related to refuge management. With support like this, the Florida Panther and Ten Thousand Islands NWRs will continue to be protected, managed and available to the American people to enjoy for generations to come and Florida panthers will continue to freely roam southwest Florida! Thank you for your assistance, your time, your dedication and your passion!

Layne Hamilton, Project Leader, Southwest Florida Gulf Coast Refuges

Copy this link to your address line of your browser:

The WGCU has produced some of the best videos on the Florida Panther and its plight. You will be blown away with this very professional and time worthy editorial. This article features Lisa Ostberg our new Friends President.

http://wgcu.org/Connect/blogs/regional_getaways/archive/2008/02/25/Regional-Getaways-National-Panther-Wildlife-Refuge.aspx

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We all depend on the Florida Panther

Our mission is.....

- To be an active advocate of the refuge and support its programs.
- To promote a better understanding and appreciation of the endangered Florida Panther and how the existence of this animal can enrich our lives.
- To strive to support and improve the status of the Florida Panther in the wild.





Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge

Volunteer Training 101

Your Best Step Toward Volunteering

On and Off the Refuge

Course Description and Requirements

- Purpose:** To build and train a corps of individuals who will learn about the endangered Florida Panther and the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, subsequently conduct visitor tours of the Refuge and occasionally participate in ongoing public outreach efforts of the Friends group (i.e., educating visitors at public events such as nature festivals and Florida Panther week activities).
- This course is a pre-requisite to Volunteer Training 102, which will be geared toward individuals wishing to make public presentations to community or social groups on behalf of the Friends group and Refuge.*
- Benefits to you:** Through this class, you will learn and be able to educate others about the importance of Florida Panthers and the lands they need to survive. The class will also touch on the importance of the Everglades to us as humans, basics of bird watching and orchid restoration projects conducted on the Refuge. A variety of instructors will participate, and at least one special guest is expected to join us during the course. After graduation, you will be able to explore and participate in a variety of other volunteer opportunities on the Refuge.
- When:** Classes are currently in session and will run through May 31 with "graduation" to be held June 7. Each weekly class will begin no later than 8:30a.m. and will last until about noon: in weeks where training will take place on the Refuge, classes may last until approximately 2:00p.m.
- Where:** Classes will be held at both the Ritz-Carlton Resort, Naples and at the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, which is located 20 miles east of Naples near the intersection of I-75 and SR 29.
- Requirements:** Participants must be at least 18 years of age and will be required to complete a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Volunteer Agreement. Before leading their first visitor tour, volunteers will be required to be certified in CPR and Basic First Aid. Appropriate clothing for Refuge visits will be discussed at the first class meeting. Transportation is not provided, although we will facilitate forming carpools whenever possible.
- Cost:** There is no cost for this class, although membership in the Friends group is suggested. Individual annual memberships cost \$25; student memberships are \$10.
- Registration & Questions** Registration is limited: please register for future courses to ensure a space. Simply contact Lisa Östberg at Lisa.Ostberg@floridapanther.org
- Sponsored by:** The Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge in cooperation with The Ritz-Carlton Beach Resort of Naples and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

We hope to see you at this exciting class in the future!

Please feel free to share or forward this course information to others who might be interested.



Meet the Refuge Staff!

Meet Larry Richardson, Wildlife Biologist

Larry Richardson is the wildlife biologist at Florida Panther Refuge. Larry was raised in California, with a short stint in American Samoa. He pursued a Bachelors and Masters degree from Utah State and Mississippi State Universities in Wildlife Management and Ecology. Prior to his job with Fish and Wildlife Service, Larry was a firefighter for the Forest Service, a fisheries tech for California Fish and Game, a park ranger with the Utah Division of Parks and a wildlife biologist for the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources and Army Corps of Engineers.

The Florida Panther Refuge was just a few months old when Larry showed up at its doorstep in August, 1989. Todd Logan, then the Refuge Manager, was the only employee at the time. "It's great helping to start a new refuge," says Larry reflecting on his 18+ years in southwest Florida. "Everyday is exciting because you know you are building something we all need for our future." For the first few years many documents had to be written; the Fire Management Plan, Wildlife Inventory Plan, Florida Recovery Plan, and so on. But to put all those things together, Larry had to be in the field looking, listening and sizing up one of the most beautiful pieces of property the State of Florida still holds relatively wild and unspoiled. It became a time to fall in love with what nature really offers us. He has shared this love with his wife and two daughters, now grown.



Coming here primarily to manage habitat for the endangered Florida panther, Larry has found his job diversified and sometimes a bit hectic. "The rapid changes occurring in and around the Refuge reflect the myriad processes that each of us have to contend with in life," Larry states. "As busy as we all are on the Refuge, it only emphasizes the urgency that we do our jobs the best we can, because, ultimately, there is more than the loss of one of America's most endangered species at stake. We find our culture and creature comforts at risk, too." Larry reflects on how far we have come as a Refuge, thinking the best days are in front of us. It's because there are more of us, likeminded and dedicated in making a difference. Most importantly, that as a group we have given the land, the panther and all plants and creatures a voice; and others are listening.



Panthers on the Hill



Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge president Lisa Ostberg and executive director Tom Murray joined more than 150 "Friends Group" volunteers supporting national wildlife refuges in meeting with their legislators on Capital Hill on April 7 to promote an annual budget of \$5.14 per acre for the refuge system in fiscal year 2009. These refuge advocates sought to expand Congressional support and draw attention to the Refuge System's crippling \$3.6 billion funding backlog.

True Friends of the Florida Panther

The following is the history of Barb and Leo Giangiulio's interest and support of the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge.

They have been members of Friends of the Florida Panther for 8 years, since 2000. About 5 years ago, they took a trip to Naples and contacted Friends about taking a tour of the refuge and they were referred to Wildlife Biologist Larry Richardson. "Well he was only too happy to take us" says Leo, "and we were also accompanied by Connie Bransilver for a fantastic afternoon riding in a swamp buggy and hiking through the pristine Everglades of the Refuge. The thing that impressed me the most was the total peace and untouched beauty.....the natural sounds around us were intoxicating. I never tire of reliving that day in the photos that I took."

Leo, an accountant, is now retired from Unisys Corp. He is an Administrative Assistant with the same company. This year he will be celebrating his 10th anniversary as a docent at Elmwood Park Zoo, in Norristown, PA. This has added immeasurable richness to his life. "We are big cat lovers and belong to several wildlife organizations, especially those that support the survival of cougars and Florida panthers. We especially enjoy activities that we can share, so you will often find us gardening, cooking, swimming in our backyard pool, visiting zoos, going to Phillis games or just spending a few days at Cape May, NJ."

"Our future plans hopefully include a move to the Naples area where I would like to add my volunteer services in support of the Refuge. Since we feel that the future of the Florida Panther is so important, we are remembering the Refuge in our will."

Anyone that would like to follow the generous gesture of Leo and Barb should contact:

[Tom Murray, Executive Director](#)
[Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge](#)
[3660 Tollgate Blvd. Suite 300, Naples, FL 34114](#)



[Barb & Leo Giangiulio, with their Chester and Louise.](#)



Whole Foods & Friends Partner for Panthers

The 270 Whole Foods stores located in the US, Canada, and the UK are dedicated to helping non-profit organizations in their local communities that have grand intentions along with small budgets. Meeting that criteria on both scores, in April the Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge were delighted to be selected as environmental partners for 5% Days at the Naples and Palm Beach Garden stores and the beneficiaries of a wine tasting at the Coral Springs store. The Coral Springs store hosted "Raise a Glass to Raise Money for Endangered Panthers" where \$3 for each drink ticket was donated to the Friends. At the 5% Days, the Panthers and the Florida Panther Refuge, received 5% of the days net store sales at the Naples and Palm Beach Gardens stores. The company's motto: "Whole Foods, Whole People, Whole Planet" describes them very well.



Lisa Ostberg, President of Friends and Jordan receive check from the Manager of Whole Foods Palm Beach store.

Thank you Whole Foods for your generous support.



RITZ-CARLTON AND FRIENDS FORM EXCITING NEW PARTNERSHIP

Recently our Friends group was invited by the Ritz-Carlton Beach Resort in Naples to partner with them in a very special endeavor called "Give Back Getaways", which will allow Ritz-Carlton guests an exceptional opportunity to assist in our efforts to preserve and protect Florida panthers and their habitats, by participating in a one-day volunteer experience at the Refuge. The Getaway experience we have designed will be quite unique: where else can one walk in the paths of one of the most endangered creatures on the planet while doing volunteer work that can truly make a difference in the hopes for panther survival? Through the Give Back Getaway program, this and other experiences on the Refuge will become possible.

One of the most exciting parts of this partnership involves volunteers. Many staff members of the Ritz (always referred to as "ladies and gentlemen") have joined other Friends' volunteers to form our charter class of Refuge Ambassadors. A group of about 15 volunteers is currently enrolled and actively participating in a five-session training program called Volunteer Training 101, with graduation to be celebrated on June 7th.

Through this training program, each volunteer will become proficient in educating refuge and Ritz-Carlton guests about Florida panthers and their habitats, as well as other research and work done on the Florida Panther Refuge. By graduation day, each will be certified in CPR and First Aid and be ready to guide and work with the first Ritz-Carlton group of guest participants on June 21st. As follow-up programs are designed, our new Ambassadors will also be able to continue their learning through sessions on topics such as bird-watching, photography, conducting bird and animal tracking surveys and a variety of other topics.

For the Ritz-Carlton guests participating in the program, not only will they learn about Florida panthers and the Refuge, they will indeed participate in volunteer activities during their time on the Refuge. Projects are likely to include trail cleanup activities such as the removal of harmful invasive species such as Brazilian pepper and Cogon grass, but other projects such as making and erecting trail markers, wood duck houses, and a host of other activities which will be designed to allow the guest to "give back" to panther habitat, the Refuge and the environment.

As you might imagine, we are very excited about this opportunity. For all of us (The Friends group, Ritz-Carlton ladies and gentlemen, Ritz-Carlton guests, and the Refuge itself), this is a "win-win-win-win" endeavor as everyone will benefit, particularly Florida Panthers. For us in particular, we not only have a great opportunity to educate visitors from around the world about Florida panthers and their plight, but we will be building a trained corps of volunteers which will enable us to conduct in-depth tours of the public trails and certain other non-public areas of the Refuge on a regular basis.

Future training classes will be scheduled and will be posted on our website. We hope that you will consider joining a class to become one of our next Ambassadors!



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Panther Tales is published for the members of the Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge, 501©(3) non-profit organization. Please notify us of any name or address changes.

Visit our web site at www.floridapanther.org

Do You Have A Special Skill?

The Friends group is looking for volunteers with skills in general office work, fundraising, event planning, grant writing, public outreach, auto mechanic and volunteer coordination.

Contact Tom Murray for more information
(tom.murray@floridapanther.org)



Our Board Members. Picture taken at the Annual Meeting.

Join the Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge

Yes, I want to join! I want to help the Panther and the Panther Refuge.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Sign me up as a member:

\$25 - Individual

\$40 - Family

\$150 - Supporting

\$10 - Student

\$500 - Corporate

Please enclose check and mail to:

Friends of the FL Panther
Refuge c/o U.S. Fish &
Wildlife Service, 3860 Toll-
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Naples, FL 34114

Thanks for your support!

Your membership entitles you to receive this informative newsletter, and helps to support projects of the Friends group. Consider giving a gift membership to a friend!



PANTHER WEEK

We had over 2,000 contacts made during Panther Week 2008 -

Thanks to all our partners that supported us!!!! Sponsored by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Friends of Florida Panther Refuge, Big Cypress National Preserve, and Friends of Fakahatchee Strand

3/8 At Naples Zoo **1,800 people** enjoyed meeting Panther Biologists, talking to partner organizations, getting their faces painted and more.

3/11 At Naples Preserve After School Program **30 kids and adults** participated and learned about tracking panthers, making plaster of paris footprints and more!

3/13 At Fakahatchee Strand Swamp Walk **14 people** participated in a walk led by Mike Owen and Karen Relish.

3/14 At Big Cypress National Preserve Rangers led **10 folks** out on a 14 mile hike to learn about panther tracking and more!

3/15 **SAVE THE PANTHER DAY** - Refuge Open House had over **120 people** came out to enjoy the day with the Friends group. Right are people riding the Swamp Buggy at the Panther Refuge.



A Tale of Determination

While doing research for a school project, nine year old Jordan learned that the Florida panther is facing extinction. When she found the Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge, she became a member, for she felt just as strongly as they do about helping these beautiful cats.

When Jordan presented her project to her class, it was the first of many speeches she would make about the crisis that the panther faces. Jordan asked her friends to join her "Panther Power Team," conducting meetings where the team brainstormed about ways they could help the panther and made posters and bookmarks with messages about the panther. Jordan talked about the panther to everyone she met and her enthusiasm was contagious. Some people gave her money, which she put into a special jar. She even wrote an article about the panthers, which was published in a newspaper.

Jordan told her mom that she wanted to meet with the manager of Whole Foods to ask if the store would let her set up an information table. They found out that Whole Foods has a fundraising program and got an application. With the help of Tom Murray, Jordan and her mom filled out the application and were very excited when it was approved. New Friends President Lisa Ostberg made a new educational display for the event.

Jordan's mom asked their synagogue to do a "Mitzvah of the Month" on behalf of the panther. Throughout that entire month, Lisa's display stood prominently in the synagogue along with a variety of panther literature. Whenever she was there, Jordan brought along other teaching tools from Lisa, like a radio collar and toy panther kitten. Jordan made many speeches to the Religious School children and the entire congregation. Jordan's desire to save the panther helped motivate the congregation to mail out over 1,000 advocacy letters to Washington, D.C. Jordan used some of the money she had collected to buy the envelopes for this letter writing campaign, while the synagogue made the copies of the letters and fliers advertising the upcoming Whole Foods event.

At last, the day of the Whole Foods event arrived. Jordan finally had her table at the store and an opportunity to reach hundreds of people. Lisa drove over for the event and Jordan's mom, dad and grandparents were there to help as Jordan and Lisa handed out green panther bracelets, signed up new Friends' members, and spread the word about the panther. Some customers even gave them money and they collected over \$100. It was an awesome day and when they found out a few days later that the Friends' share of the store's sales was over \$4,000, they were thrilled.

Soon after, Jordan and her parents took a trip to Naples to visit the panther refuge. Lisa and Tom took them on a three hour walk through this special place. It was an experience they will never forget. The next day, Jordan participated in the Friends' Panther Posse, run by Ricky Pires. And Jordan, who thought she knew everything about the Florida panther, learned even more.

Time will tell if the Florida panther survives as a species. But Jordan knows that her desire to do whatever she can to help them will never die.



Jorden with Lisa Ostberg, President of the Florida Panther Refuge.



Florida Panther Posse



Female panther using a wildlife crossing.

Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission Panther team and Panther Tracker, Roy McBride, asked the Florida Panther Posse to place a motion camera under the Corkscrew Road/Alico Wildlife underpass to monitor Florida panthers. The Posse was successful with the above photo of an uncollared female Florida panther using the wildlife underpass.

The posse has cameras in the Florida Panther Refuge and CREW lands to help monitor populations and the health of the Florida panther and other wildlife that lives with the panther.

FFWCC and the Florida Panther Refuge thanks the Florida Panther Posse (4th & 5th grade students) for being such a part of research with the survival of the Florida Panther. Two new cameras were purchased this month by the Posse's "Pennies for Panthers". Cameras cost \$450.00 each.

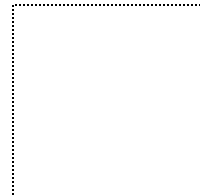
The Florida Panther Posse program was created and presented by FGCU "Wings of Hope" program and supported by the Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge, FWCC, South Florida Water Management District's "Grant of Hope", Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, Collier County Audubon Society, FWF, CREW Lands, Naples Zoo, Collier & Lee County schools, Woodward, Pires, & Lombardo Law Firm, and Senator Burt Saunders.

A "Partnership" of Hope & Education for the Florida Panther and its habitat.

www.fgcu.edu/cas/wingsofhope "See the Posse in action and more panther/wildlife photos"

**Friends of the
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Please give notice of any name or address changes.