

Florida Panthers' future hangs in the balance—does government plan to save the rare cat?

From [Reality Checks with Staci-Lee](#)

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One of the agencies involved in panther protection is the state agency Florida Fish Wildlife Commission (FWC). Every year they receive a budget of about half a billion, you read that right, to conserve and protect the state's imperiled wildlife and water. But they have sordid history of doing the opposite. The commission has always been stacked with hunters and developers never conservationists.



The elusive Florida Panther

The Florida Panther is Florida's official state animal but may not be around much longer if developers have their way. Written on Florida's own Department of State website:

“The most endangered of all Florida's symbols is its state animal, the panther (*Felis concolor coryi*) which was chosen in 1982 by a vote of students throughout the state. The Panther has been protected from legal hunting in Florida since 1958. It has been on the federal endangered species list since 1967 and on the state's endangered list since 1973. The future of this large animal depends entirely on the management decisions that are made today on its behalf. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is responsible for management and preservation of this endangered State Animal, but only with your support will the Florida Panther remain a part of our unique wildlife community.” Would be a tragedy to throw away this species for development we don't need.

Who really sits on FWC's commission (hint they're not conservationists)

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Going going gone. These species may end up being just a memory as they continue to lose their land and life. Clockwise from upper left: crested caracara (Isabel Gottlieb); tricolored bat (Scott Altenbach); Florida panther (fotoguy22); eastern indigo snake (Dirk Stevenson):

Every day it seems there is a new assault on the open space these magnificent animals have called home as long as they have roamed the earth. As developers continue to carve up their dwindling habitat with the apparent blessing of the state, we all lose OUR open space to private holdings. In 2015 one of the Florida Wildlife Conservation (FWC) commissioners came under fire for trying to get panthers on the hunting list.

I remember this battle because it was just another example of the FWC doing anything *but* conservation. Since 2007 I personally watched them:

- allow for a black bear massacre that made national headlines,
- destroy the water and food of manatees with toxic and banned in Europe herbicides
- lie about truth that most sea turtle hatchlings die from light pollution before getting to the water
- and on and on it goes.

In an article from 2015 it states that FWC commissioner ‘**Aliesa Priddy, a third-generation Collier County rancher and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation commissioner who is part of a growing group of ranchers, hunters and landowners who say the Florida panther is nothing special and should be removed from or reclassified on the federal Endangered Species List.**’ It goes on to say that ‘**In her landowner role, she accepted \$3.75 million from the state in 2015 for a conservation easement on part of her land meant to help panthers travel north to the Caloosahatchee River and**

beyond while, in her FWC role, argued against expanding the panther population to areas in central and north Florida.’

Priddy also *took money from the state* designated to protect panther travel corridors while also pushing for development on nearby panther lands. Gosh that sounds like fraud and theft to me doesn't it sound like that to you? I haven't seen any corridors built on Interstate 75 where many panthers are killed.



Aliessa Priddy former FWC Commissioner

Click here to read more about the controversy:

<https://www.news-press.com/story/news/2016/12/16/one-commissioner-stays-center-panther-controversy/88953438/>

It's important to know who is in charge of making decisions about the public's land/water/wildlife. Only an *informed citizen* can make an accurate assessment of a policy or project.

Click here to read about the real FWC in action:

<https://www.realitycheckswithstacilee.com/post/florida-agency-gets-billion-budget-a-nonprofit-but-where-does-the-money-really-go>

Another massive project is coming down the pikes. According to the federal agency U.S. Fish Wildlife Service (USFWS) several already endangered species will be, in their words '*adversely affected*'. Top of the list is the Panther followed by Tricolored Bat, and our bats are already declining due to disease and air pollution, the Indigo Snake and the Crested Caracara.

Going going gone. These species may end up being just a memory as they continue to lose their land and life. Clockwise from upper left: crested caracara (Isabel Gottlieb); tricolored bat (Scott Altenbach); Florida panther (fotoguy22); eastern indigo snake (Dirk Stevenson)

One has to wonder how the staff at USFWS plans to protect these endangered species when they push for development that makes them more endangered. It would be laughable if not so tragic. So far, and I say that having been personally involved in several land use and development battles over the years, this is what is proposed for the 6,675 acres including wetlands :

- 10,000 homes
- up to 240 hotel rooms

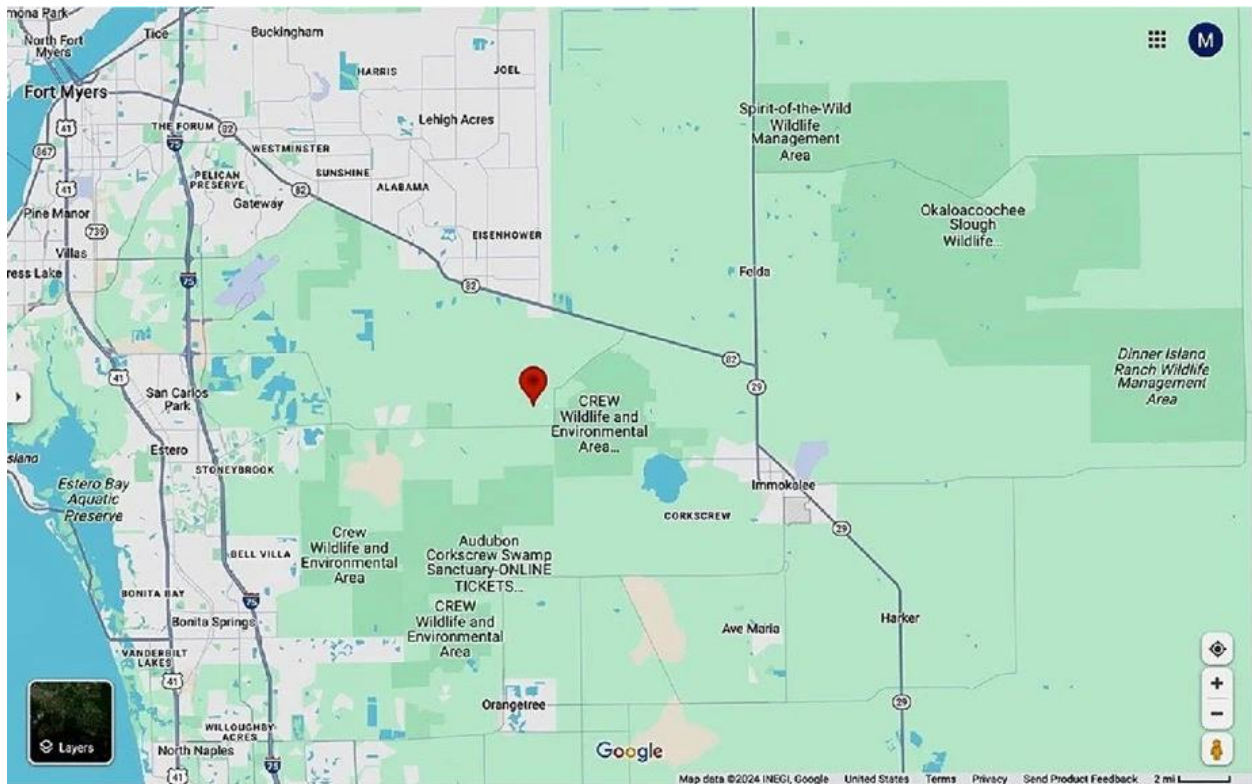
- 700,000 square feet of commercial space
- Could end up being more you never know how the wheels get greased

The project requires filling in critical wetlands and it should be noted that Florida like the rest of the country is always in a quasi drought and has been for years. Why would anyone fill in wetlands when so many waterways have already dried up? Florida has very polluted water that is constantly sprayed with many herbicides and its running out of water. The joke will be on new homeowners when the water runs out.....and it will. Let the buyer beware.

The developers are the Cameratta Companies located in Estero, Florida. They have already filed for a Clean Water Act 404 permit to fill the wetlands. It's almost a guarantee the Army Corp of Engineers will approve it. In 2016 a lawsuit was filed against CEO Joseph Cameratta to stop another development that no doubt destroyed the fragile environment which is now the 1361 acre Corkscrew Farms. Back when Rick Scott was Governor lots of \$\$\$ was spent by lobbyists to dismantle its growth management agency Dept of Community Affairs. This forces local municipalities to fight to keep their open space from being paved over by rich often out of state developers. It's hardly a fair fight.

Click here to read about how the Kingston Project slows the building of wildlife corridors designed to protect wildlife from death by development: <https://news.wgcu.org/top-story/2024-05-09/southwest-florida-subdivisions-poised-to-clog-wildlife-corridor>

According to the nonprofit fighting to protect the panther and their habitat, The South Florida Wildlands Association ‘**The red marker shows Kingston virtually surrounded by public lands established to protect habitat for the Florida panther and the many wildlife species which share its habitat. Kingston will place a massive hole in the middle of this interconnected landscape.**’



In 1973 the landmark Endangered Species Act was signed into law. It was suppose to give legal protection to species on the decline, especially from hunting, pollution and development. The Kingston Project is one example, in a long line, that the ESA was suppose to stop for the sake of saving species we share the planet with. Here is what the ESA is charged with doing though rarely enforced -

16 U.S. Code § 1531 - Congressional findings and declaration of purposes and policy

The Congress finds and declares that—

(1) various [species](#) of fish, wildlife, and [plants](#) in the [United States](#) have been rendered extinct as a consequence of economic growth and development untempered by adequate concern and [conservation](#);

To read more about the ESA click here: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/endangered-species-conservation/endangered-species-act#:~:text=The%20Endangered%20Species%20Act%20of,habitats%20both%20domestically%20and%20abroad.>

To read more about the Kingston Project click here:

https://www.lakeonews.com/labelle/stories/development-threatens-wildlife-habitat,67094?fbclid=IwY2xjawEWFzRleHRuA2F1bOIxMAABHUvxSLIweqpV9uh4IFUHmJXkDjCogL5cJHvIxV37gaWSJfyW1zvJCyA2XA_aem_70tCxpjC2aF_F4EVw0x5ZQ

How many (or few) panthers did you say we still had left?

It's impossible to ever get a true population count of species least of all an elusive nocturnal one. The agreed population estimate is between 120 and 240 surviving in the wild, says USFWS. According to state FWC records about 27 are killed every year mostly by speeding cars. However in 2016 there were 42 panthers killed and 33 killed in 2014 while only 20 reported in 2020. Keep in mind this is what is reported there are always unreported deaths. For such a small population with ever increasing human growth encroaching on them that is a lot to lose every year.

This new development is **‘estimated to have the potential to kill up to 21 panthers a year according to a study by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.’** That would bring the annual kill rate closer to 40 a year which is about 1/3 to 1/4 the population. This is from the agency given hundreds of millions to protect endangered species. This is not conservation nor sustainable and all because there are too many people and too little land for any other species. Plain and simple.

Click here for state death data:

https://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/wildlife/panther/pulse/?utm_content=&utm_medium=email&utm_name=&utm_source=govdelivery&utm_term=campaign

“I’m asking for prayers for the panther, and the Panther Nation. If you guys keep making room for more people, more people keep coming. And if you guys let them, they're going to destroy every square inch of this place before they're satisfied,” said Garrett Stuart, an environmental consultant and biologist who runs the Eco Preservation Project.

Click here to listen to what Floridians think about how this affects the panthers, water quality and way of life by the good groups fighting the battle.

"Prayers for the panther": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BS2oX6D4AsA>

How do we save a species few are truly trying to help?

First it requires everyone opposed to this to speak up and demand answers from the government your taxes pay for. Support the nonprofits fighting to stop this behemoth project and save the many endangered species we share this planet with and the water quality so many people hope is safe to drink. Demand accountability from the government, something in short supply these days. Don't buy homes that have filled in wetlands and cause the death of other species.

Be wary of 'environmental/conservation' groups who secretly or not so secretly support the very things that go against conservation. These nonprofits have helped pave the way, literally, for the Kingston project claiming the development was inevitable:

- Audubon of Western Everglades
- Audubon Florida – former director Eric Draper left for a state job appointed by Gov Desantis who is pro development
- Defenders of Wildlife - click here to read how phony this once legitimate conservation group was that supports hunting <https://www.realitycheckswithstacilee.com/post/fall-from-grace-from-saving-wildlife-to-exploiting-them-for-cash>
- Florida Wildlife Federation – affiliate of National Wildlife Federation that supports hunting

Click here to send a quick message to those in charge of permitting

<https://secure.conservancy.org/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=191>

**To take action and voice your concerns about the panthers, wildlife, water quality, traffic please contact the following

USFWS - US Fish Wildlife Service - federal agency paid to protect wildlife. **Robert Carey**, Division Manager, Environmental Review and Consultations -
email Robert_carey@fws.gov or phone 352.749.2453

USACE - US Army Corp of Engineers - federal agency in charge of permitting to fill wetlands **Stephen Fleming** Jacksonville District in charge of permitting
email Stephen.J.Fleming@usace.army.mil or phone 239.334.1975 ext. 0003.

Lee County, FL Board of Commissioners (where the project will be sited):

<https://www.leegov.com/bocc>

Collier County, FL Board of Commissioners (borders the project):

<https://www.colliercountyfl.gov/government/board-of-county-commissioners>

FWC (Florida Fish Wildlife Commission) - state agency paid to protect wildlife and water:

<https://myfwc.com/about/commission/commissioners/>

FDEP (Florida Dept Environmental Protection) - state agency paid to protect public land:

<https://floridadep.gov/divisions>

*For more information of the fate of the panther and if you would like to help save them click here

South Florida Wildlands Association: <https://www.southfloridawild.org/>: Conservancy of Southwest Florida

<https://conservancy.org/bad-idea-resurrected-take-action-on-detrimental-development-plan/>: Don't let this species go extinct that would be a tragedy for all of us



A group of wild Cats...