



Credit: Mark Conlin

Beginning to return from the brink of extinction, **Florida Panthers** represent an important American comeback story. There are roughly 100 panthers estimated in the wild today, but their population is mostly limited to southern Florida – a mere 5% of their historic range. In order for this species to fully recover and flourish, they will need protected pathways to disperse northward. This past November, exciting news that a female panther crossed the Caloosahatchee River made headlines for two reasons: (1) female panthers have not made it north of this river in 40 years and (2) while males have made

it across, without females there too, the panther population cannot grow – now there is a chance for this species to reclaim their former range.

This news is encouraging, but without designated corridor protections, possible through a **National Wildlife Corridors Bill**, the fate of this species will remain tenuous. Florida Panthers need corridors for dispersal – that time in each panther’s life where they leave their mother to make it out on their own. Because they have such large home ranges – males needing up to 200 square miles – their survival hinges on their ability to move from protected area to protected area through wildlife corridors. These corridors would provide them the ability to access suitable habitat and give them an alternative route around cities and towns – making it far easier for humans and panthers to coexist peacefully.

A Wildlife Corridor for Panthers

The Florida Wildlife Corridor Project is one such opportunity that would benefit panthers. Through the implementation of wildlife corridors and road crossings on major highways, Florida Panthers would have a safe passage from southern protected areas such as Big Cypress National Preserve, Everglades National Park, and Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge northward to protected areas like Apalachicola National Forest, securing this species for future generations. Florida Panthers are a classic tale of an American comeback – and by supporting the National Wildlife Corridors Bill, this species will continue to represent this important national story.



Camera trap evidence of a female panther who crossed the Caloosahatchee River. Courtesy of Florida Fish and Wildlife

Now is the time to support a National Wildlife Corridors Bill to protect and reconnect our national heritage. For more info, contact Susan Holmes, Policy Director at susan@wildlandsnetwork.org.