



FWC creates more family hunting opportunities

Four wildlife management areas have added “family hunts” to their lists of hunting opportunities for next season. Those areas are Andrews and Devil’s Hammock, both in Levy County; Dinner Island Ranch, in Hendry County; and Lafayette Creek, a new area in Walton County. Matanzas, in St. Johns County, ran a successful pilot program last year and will offer family hunts next season as well.

To participate, youths must be between the ages of 8 and 15, and adults must be more than 18 years old. Youths must hunt under the supervision of the adult, and adults may only hunt in the presence of at least one youth.

The family hunt format is a weekend hunt, intended to provide mentoring adults and youths with exclusive opportunities to hunt together on public lands. One adult and up to two youths can take part in these opportunities by obtaining a no-cost family quota hunt permit.

To apply for these family hunts, interested parties must submit applications June 20 – July 7 at any license agent, county tax collector’s office, or online at MyFWC.com/license. Family quota hunt permit worksheets will be available in early June at MyFWC.com/hunting.

Florida panther found dead in Lee County

An apparent collision with a vehicle on I-75 in Lee County has claimed the life of another endangered Florida panther. According to Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) biologists, five panthers have died so far in collisions on the state’s roadways in 2006.

On Feb. 27, FWC dispatchers received a call from the Lee County Sheriff’s Office reporting a panther had been struck and killed on I-75 about one-half mile north of SR 82. FWC law enforcement officers arrived to find the lifeless body of an uncollared male panther laying in the median.

Male panthers are most often the victims of highway accidents. Panther habitats are generally occupied by a single, dominant male and one or more females. The dominant male kills, injures or chases out all other males competing for his breeding territory. Because dominant males already occupy most breeding territories, lesser males are forced to wander in a vain effort to find a breeding territory of their own.

At times, these travels take them far away from the breeding population centered in Collier, Hendry and western Miami-Dade counties. Typically, panther territories consist of largely undisturbed tracts between 30 and 100 square miles. Statewide, the panther population is about 80-100 animals.

The biggest threats to panthers are loss of habitat and habitat fragmentation. The Florida Panther Research and Management Trust Fund provides money for panther research projects and is funded through the sale of Florida panther license tags. For additional information on panthers, visit MyFWC.com/panther/.



Charlie Heidecker

Wild turkeys returned to Everglades National Park

A team of wildlife biologists from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) used bait and rocket nets to catch 19 Osceola turkeys at private ranches for release in the Long Pine Key section of Everglades National Park.

The relocation project, designed to strengthen the wild turkey population in the park, is a joint effort by the National Wild Turkey Federation, Everglades National Park and the FWC.

Because the birds can become stressed and overheat during a capture in warm weather, the team worked in temperatures under 65 degrees, according to Larry Perrin, coordinator of FWC’s Wild Turkey Program. The healthy birds were released soon after their capture. Each bird was marked with wing tags, and 10 birds were fitted with small radio transmitters, so biologists can monitor their movement, behavior, habitat use and survival.

In 2004 and 2005, remotely operated digital infrared cameras, including equipment donated by the Homestead Chapter of the Turkey Federation, enabled scientists to survey the population status of turkeys. The results show the population is extremely low.

The wild turkey population in the park dropped after the 1950s due in part to illegal hunting and habitat loss. Officials attempted to reintroduce wild turkeys to the Long Pine Key area in 1971 and possibly in the early 1960s, as well. Those attempts failed.