

The Pelican

Sierra Club

Florida

INSIDE:
LEGISLATIVE
REVIEW

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF SIERRA CLUB



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Circle B Bar Reserve, Polk County, FL

Photos / Marcia Biggs

SIERRA'S 30X30 PLAN FINDS MOMENTUM

One year ago, we announced in the Pelican the kick-off of a national Sierra Club campaign called **30x30: Protecting Lands to Fight Climate Crisis**. Scientists tell us that to halt mass extinction and solve the climate crisis we need to not only preserve existing wild spaces, but increase the conservation of lands across the country — from large wild areas to neighborhood parks and local rivers and streams. The goal of this campaign: In the United States, we must protect about 30 percent of lands and waters by 2030. So far, 50 countries and 70 US mayors have committed to Sierra Club's 30x30



goal.

So we were encouraged that on May 6, President Biden released a 24-page report, wherein a quartet of federal agencies devised a broad outline to achieve Biden's vision of protecting 30 percent of US lands and waters by 2030.

With the announcement, the White House and the federal agencies tasked with overseeing the 30x30 initiative — now called the “America the Beautiful” campaign — are on their way to ensuring an environmental legacy that most conservation groups hope will last for generations.

(Continued on page 3)



Staff News

We wish a fond farewell to two longtime Florida Sierra Club staffers who recently departed the organization. **Phil Compton** devoted 21 years as powerhouse organizer, with the last 5 years committed to Sierra's Ready for 100% Clean Energy campaign. He traveled across the state, working hard with volunteers, allies and lobbying city and county government officials to support clean, green energy.

Phil worked tirelessly promoting electric vehicles, particularly the transition of cities and counties to electric buses. A well-known Tampa Bay Buccaneers fan, Phil is legendary for dressing as a pirate at each game and spearheading a volunteer stadium recycling team for Tampa Bay Sierra Club. He was presented with a Bucs Super Bowl t-shirt as a parting gift. Thank you, Phil, for your dedication and service!!

Longtime office manager and administrative assistant in our Chapter office in St. Petersburg, **Linda Demler**, was our "Angel of Mercy" for nearly two decades, never wavering in her strong support of staff, groups, and



Phil Compton has volunteered nearly 30 years to Sierra Club's recycling campaign at Tampa Bay Bucs games.

volunteers, fielding questions and calls in her calm, professional demeanor. Linda did yeoman's work, from handling paperwork and invoices to dealing with innumerable requests for database lists and much more. Thank you, Linda!

Announcements

A new Chapter Political Director has been announced by Acting Chapter Director Deb Foote. Welcome to **Luigi**

Guadarrama, a veteran of multiple successful campaigns, including Mayor Hancock's campaign in Denver, Mayor Mendenhall's campaign in Salt Lake City, and President Biden's campaign in Wayne County, Michigan.

Luigi will bring both an organizing and strategic lens to our political work. Everyone across the nation is well aware of the political climate we have here in Florida, and Luigi will be working with our volunteers and communities to build a powerful grassroots movement to elect pro-environment candidates up and down the ballot. Additionally, as a fluent Spanish speaker, Luigi will be working to elevate our political efforts with Spanish-speaking voters. Luigi will be living and working out of Orlando. You can reach him at luigi.guadarrama@sierraclub.org.

Gonzalo Valdes has been promoted to Beyond Coal Organizing Manager for the Florida Chapter. **Walter Smith** will be working with him as Beyond Coal Organizing Representative. Both are based in Tampa.

Deb Foote is Acting Chapter Director while a search for a new Chapter Director is underway.

COVID-19 UPDATE

Sierra Club remains committed to the safety of our members, volunteers, staff and the public. While some meetings and events will continue to be held virtually, groups will slowly roll-out in-person programs and outings this summer.

Many of our groups are using social media such as Facebook and Meetup with great success, and sending news via e-mail. We highly encourage members to find their groups on social media to remain engaged and updated on current events. Make sure we have your e-mail on file, too.

Our state offices remain closed for now, with staff working from home under mandate from National Sierra Club which is constantly evaluating the safety of opening offices and events. **Certain administrative functions can be taken care of through our national Member Care team** by calling (415) 977-5653 or logging onto our new Member Center platform, My Account, at myaccount.sierraclub.org Once you've successfully signed in, you will be able to change your address, update your e-mail and phone, sign petitions, and find contact information.

Thank you for your continued patience.

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Marcia Biggs, Editor

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IRL Manatee Deaths Drastically Rise Due to Seagrass Loss

By Sandi Schwartz
Loxahatchee Group Conservation Chair

Four years ago, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that manatees, which had been on the endangered list for many years, were doing much better. In fact, in 2017 the manatee was down-listed from an endangered species to a threatened species.

But now, manatees swimming in Florida's waterways are dying at an alarming rate. Nearly 700 manatees have perished throughout the state in the last few months. That is almost three times the five-year average of 146 deaths in the period between January 1 through March 5, according to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Why is this happening?

Although boat strikes continue to threaten manatees, experts believe that the main reason so many manatees are dying this year is mainly due to starvation because of a lack of seagrass. Manatees rely on seagrass as their main food source; an adult manatee typically eats over 100 pounds of seagrass each day. Without their primary food source, manatees are literally starving to death.

Seagrass depends on sunlight to flourish. When there are massive and long-standing algal blooms, the sunlight cannot penetrate to the bottom to support the seagrass. Sewage and fertilizers filled with harmful chemicals like nitrogen and glyphosate are ending up in the local waterways and causing algal blooms, destroying the seagrass. The nutrients originate from people's lawns, while the sewage comes from spills and leaking septic tanks.



Photo/Marcia Biggs

Unfortunately, this is an issue happening around the state. At last count, there have been 32 manatee deaths in Palm Beach County, 51 in Broward County, and 15 in Miami-Dade County.

The largest number of manatee deaths have occurred just north of my region in Brevard County in the Indian River Lagoon. Much of the seagrass has been destroyed in that area. The Florida Oceanographic Society has been working to grow more seagrass, but the process has not been fast enough to save the manatees this season.

What can you do? Avoid using fertilizers. Rain events cause them to run off into water bodies, adding dangerous amounts of harmful nitrogen and causing algal blooms.

30x30 Plan

(Continued from page 1)

The report offers a measure of clarity — If not a complete road map — for how to reach the 30x30 goal. To get there, stakeholders from all aspects of land use are asked to pitch in. No longer is conservation the exclusive realm of federally protected lands.

Instead, the very definition of conserved land is being adjusted to incorporate farms, working landscapes, city parks, and practically any natural environment that stores carbon, provides wildlife habitat, or serves as green space for communities lacking access to nature.

The administration's plans are grounded in community-led conservation. A set of guiding principles serve as the

backbone of the report, and most of them lean on public participation to steer the way. Additionally, the report highlights the need to honor the sovereignty of Native American nations, create conservation jobs, and respect private property.

The Center for American Progress estimates that protected areas account for 12 percent of US lands and 26 percent of US territorial waters, and most of that is public lands. Expanding or creating new national wildlife refuges, national parks, and wilderness areas won't be possible without congressional action.

Conserving 30 percent of US lands and waters by 2030 will require creative advocacy strategies and an energized grassroots movement. But the policies that need to be implemented are neither complicated nor entirely new. Federal,

state, and local governments have an extraordinary range of conservation powers — from the executive reach of the president to the zoning authorities of city councils — and we'll need to utilize the whole range of protections available to meet our goals.

How can you lend support? Work with your Sierra Club group and local and state government officials to take action for 30x30 including:

- Implementing state-funded open space programs.
- Managing state lands to offset climate pollution.
- Designation of wildlife corridors that safeguard lands within them.
- Creation and expansion of state and local parks.

Environment, Democracy Snubbed

The 2021 State Legislative Session Should Cause Concern for Florida's Future

By JESSICA LEWIS

Editor's Note: Sierra Club Florida was one of very few environmental organizations with a daily presence in the State Capitol during session this year due to pandemic restrictions. Jessica Lewis joined Acting Chapter Director Deb Foote and lobbyist Dave Cullen to represent Sierra Club interests and filed this report.

Another Florida legislative session has come and gone, and the next one begins in just a few short months.

It was an especially arduous session for environmentalists and progressives alike. While there are bright spots worth recognizing, it should be noted that these victories do not outweigh the environmental and democratic losses that Florida suffered this session. Not even close. Here's a look at what went down and what to expect in the future.

First and foremost: Thank you! Volunteers across the state made calls, sent emails, signed petitions, wrote letters to the editor, attended meetings with state representatives, and shared information on social media. You are what makes our organization great!

Victories

There was important movement on the dangerous toll road project known as M-CORES. The legislation that passed eliminates the M-CORES program, but not all the roads included in the program. This is not a repeal of all three Roads to Ruin, but it is meaningful progress, especially given it originally passed with nearly unanimous support. The fight for sustainable transportation alternatives continues.

Initiatives including electric vehicle infrastructure, solar energy for schools, and limitations on cigarette smoking on beaches and in parks moved forward but didn't make it across the finish line. These will hopefully return in the coming 2022 session and become law.

LEGISLATOR SCORECARDS

How did your local legislators vote?

Sierra Club tracked important bills on issues of conservation, environment, clean energy, growth and development, and home rule and how each legislator voted. This "scorecard" will be available in mid-June so you can find out who got thumbs up and thumbs down by going to our web site at www.sierraclub.org/florida/legislative-lobbying

There were several small wins for the environment this year, from bicycle/pedestrian safety and urban agriculture, to recognition for the Florida Wildlife Corridor and increased funding for land conservation and state parks (thanks in part to federal boosts in funding).

Greenwashing

"Greenwashing" is deceptive marketing used to persuade the public into thinking something is environmentally friendly when it is not. Gov. DeSantis has long touted his supposed environmental leanings, all while doing very little to actually protect, preserve, and expand Florida's natural resources. The conservative-led legislature worked hard to help him further greenwash his image. This is a trend that will likely continue in Florida, where elected officials recognize that voters truly care about the environment.

We now have state-recognized Springs Protection Awareness Month and Oceans Day, yet the legislature failed to pass even one recommendation from Gov. DeSantis's own Blue Green Algae Task Force, the entity created to work on the perpetual problem of harmful algal blooms.

Last year for the first time we saw express acknowledgement of sea level rise in Florida legislation. This year House Speaker Chris Sprowls made it a top pri-

ority to pass a trio of bills aimed at funding some aspects of sea level rise adaptation. This is movement in the right direction, but these bills fail to address the causes of sea level rise (climate change via greenhouse gas emissions) or protect those most vulnerable to its impacts.

The programs funded in these bills are essentially grant programs for communities and homeowners. These are not so much pro-environment bills as pro-property bills. One bill permanently removes funding from the Sadowski Trust Fund which was created for the express purpose of increasing affordable housing. Forcing sea level rise adaptation to compete with affordable housing is a false choice; we can and must do both.

There aren't enough taxpayer dollars to hurricane-proof Florida. We cannot "adapt" our way out of climate change. We must mitigate the causes by reducing emissions of greenhouse gasses.

Anti-Clean Energy Preemptions

There are multiple pieces of anti-clean energy legislation being passed around in conservative playbooks across the country, and some of them are unfortunately poised to become law in Florida.

One bill will prohibit mandatory beneficial electrification requirements, hamstringing local governments' ability to implement and achieve clean energy transition targets, such as the popular Ready for 100 commitments made by 11 cities in Florida. Another bill prohibits gas station bans, making the transition to electric vehicles more difficult. Yet another bill rebrands biogas as a "renewable energy" so that corporate utilities can build out natural gas infrastructure while making even more money from ratepayers through cost recovery. That "renewable natural gas bill" includes preemption over industrial solar power plant siting that removes local control over placement of these potentially massive power plants. (Read more on this in the Transparency

section below.)

It would be one thing if our state's leadership were putting these energy preemptions in place while enacting strong, greenhouse gas reduction strategies statewide. But they're not. Florida's leaders are working hard to prevent local communities from tackling climate change, while refusing to do it themselves.

These attacks on local solutions to climate change show how seriously the oil and gas industry views local action as a threat to their bottom lines. It's simultaneously a point of pride for clean energy activists across our state and another hurdle that we must overcome.

Transparency and Democracy

Participating in the legislative process has never been easy or accessible for most Floridians, but Gov. DeSantis, President Simpson, and Speaker Sprowls put even larger barriers in place this year, all under the guise of pandemic protocols.

They drastically reduced the number of people able to speak in public comment, forced average people to navigate a cumbersome speaker registration process, and refused entry to our state capitol to those without identification. Committee leadership such as Senate Rules Committee Chair Kathleen Passidomo and House Justice Committee Chair Daniel Perez followed suit by frequently limiting public comment to 1 minute, or even 30 seconds, per speaker.

While these restrictions were effectively boxing Floridians out from participating at the capitol, Gov. DeSantis continued to put workers and high risk Floridians at risk by opening the entire state. The Governor's mansion, however, stayed closed to the public. Then, the very week after the legislative session concluded, the entire capitol was opened up and all so-called pandemic restrictions were lifted.

Even without detailing the egregious attacks on voter participation and first amendment rights via the Florida Voter Suppression Bill and the anti-protest bill, one might justly see these barriers as an attempt to end public participation in our state's democracy entirely.

STAY INFORMED

For legislative updates and resources, go to www.sierraclub.org/florida/legislative-lobbying where you can sign up for action alerts and timely updates ("Subscribe to the Florida Report"), and become familiar with legislative priorities.

One reason the conservative leaders of the state may have wanted to reduce our ability to poke around could be the impressively undemocratic methods they used to ram bad bills through the process.

- The industrial solar power plant siting preemption mentioned above was amended onto an unrelated bill in it committee. That means this preemption should have died in the legislative process, but elected leaders worked together in back rooms to push this language through.
- A seaport preemption bill that overturns a wildly successful pro-environment ballot initiative out of Key West died in the process but was brought back to life, like a zombie bent on destroying smart environmental incentives, by being amended onto a general transportation bill.
- Representative Ingoglia filed an enormous amendment to the Voter Suppression Bill at 1:33 am to frustrate attempts at reducing the immensely harmful impact of the bill.

These are the actions of a state controlled by a single party. Let us not forget the actions from this session. Legislators are typically on better behavior when an election is approaching, hoping that Floridians will forget wrongdoings from the previous year. We can and must hold them accountable.

We continue to push forward with your help. Let's take these opportunities to embrace new ways of operating, fight the good fight, and explore, enjoy, and protect the Sunshine State as a united force for good.

What's Next ...

Bills that passed both chambers of the Florida legislature can be sent to Gov. DeSantis anytime over the next few months. He then has 3 options. He has 15 days to veto the bill, sign it into law, or allow it to become law without his signature. Bills are typically sent at opportune times during the summer to either highlight or obfuscate their impact. 248 bills of statewide impact and 24 local bills passed this year, and 33 have already become law as of this writing.

Gov. DeSantis has an opportunity to veto the remaining anti-environment and anti-democracy bills if he truly wants to claim the "Teddy Roosevelt conservative" moniker, though his rapid signing of the Right to Harm Act and the Voter Suppression bill do not bode well.

July is an ideal time to set up meetings with your state representatives. The 2022 legislative session begins with pre-session committee meetings this September then the 60-day session convenes on January 11 and runs through March 11.

Every legislative session brings lessons and opportunities and this year was no different. We will learn from this year's successes and failures, and adjust accordingly to become an even more effective advocacy organization for the sake of our air, land, water, health, and democracy.

We welcome your participation as we move forward. Contact Chapter Political Chair Dave Harbeitner at daveh@suncoastsierra.org to learn how you can become involved in your region.

Feeling is Mutual When Helping Those in Need

By SARAH YOUNGER

Sierra Florida EIJ Committee

Florida is no stranger to disaster and when it strikes, people will want to help. But when it comes to helping a community in crisis not every response is timely or even appropriate.

Well-intentioned efforts can often waste resources if the response to a disaster is not grounded in accountable relationships with those experiencing the crisis and, in some cases, they can even deepen the trauma experienced by survivors.

With climate change exacerbating storm conditions, it is no longer just inconvenience faced by the general populace, it is also an environmental justice issue with marginalized communities experiencing life-threatening conditions as evacuation is often not an option.

It is important to our mission at Sierra Club that our communities (especially those most at risk) can find the resources they need to survive and thrive this upcoming hurricane season.

With COVID-19 we discovered that our health is also dependent on other people's health, and we can literally save each other's lives. Mutual aid is a practice that emphasizes solidarity rather than charity. Mutual aid allows us to respond where we can make the most impact — locally.

Mutual aid efforts are founded on the understanding that it is the system, not the people suffering under it, that creates poverty, crisis, and vulnerability. Therefore, mutual aid projects also include



political participation and changing political conditions. The website bigdoorbrigade.com/_shares information on mutual aid that goes beyond disaster response to assisting in social justice, immigration, and support for incarcerated people and their families.

As we prepare for this hurricane season, the Sierra Florida Chapter's Equity, Justice, and Inclusion (EIJ) Committee is encouraging local groups and members of Sierra Club throughout Florida to assist their communities by locating, supporting, and promoting mutual aid projects. Find local efforts that need help at www.mutualaidhub.org/ Consider starting a project in your neighborhood to address food insecurity or disaster recovery

and add it to this network.

Principles for an Equitable and Effective Crisis Response - Appropedia: The Sustainability Wiki developed by many experienced in disaster response to promote successful outcomes.

Principles of mutual aid include:

Ask and Listen

We support those who most directly experience the impacts of crisis, and we act in response to their expressed needs.

Distribute Power

We promote strategies that effectively distribute information, resources, and decision-making ability, so that people can most effectively adapt to their local circumstances.

Collaborate Strategically

We work with institutions, to the extent that such work is in service of our goals of equity and justice.

Seek Appropriate Solutions

We understand that problem solving is an ongoing process requiring varied skills — and while we identify common patterns, every situation is unique.

Use Appropriate Technology

We prefer tools that are simple, accessible, freely usable, and well-documented.

The Sierra Florida Chapter EIJ Committee is a volunteer-led group working on issues of environmental and social justice. We welcome your participation and your comments and ideas pertaining to issues in your community. Contact us at justice@florida.sierraclub.org

NEWS BRIEFS

On May 20, Beyond Coal Organizing Manager Gonzalo Valdes led a team from Tampa Bay in their virtual participation in the annual shareholders meeting held by Emera, to demand that its subsidiaries, Tampa Electric Company (TECO) and Nova Scotia Power, abandon their plans to continue burning coal at its power plants. As shareholders (customers of the

electric utilities), our team, supported by Sierra Club Atlantic Canada Chapter in Nova Scotia, was not allowed access to the meeting.

On May 21, Sierra Everglades Organizing Representative Diana Umpierre participated in a congressional briefing entitled "The Endangered Species Act: Its Successes and Role in Stopping Extinc-

tions." She spoke on Climate Change, Key Deer & Resilience. Sierra Club is one of numerous environmental and wildlife organizations supporting the call for a National Biodiversity Strategy that would include strengthening the Endangered Species Act to help prevent the extinction of species like the Florida Key Deer that are vulnerable to the impacts of human-induced climate changes, such as rising seas, storms and temperatures.

Big Sugar Gets What Big Sugar Wants, Again

By **PATRICK FERGUSON**

Stop Sugar Field Burning Campaign

Since launching the *Stop Pre-Harvest Sugar Field Burning Campaign* in 2015, the Sierra Club has worked with local activists in and around the Everglades Agricultural Area to promote the end of the outdated, toxic practice and to challenge the status quo narrative provided by the sugar industry.

The “Right to Farm (Harm) Act” was signed into law by Gov. DeSantis on April 29. Florida Sierra Club’s Stop The Burn-Go Green Harvest Campaign leadership team responded as follows:

“Gov. DeSantis showed his true colors today when he sided with Big Sugar and signed SB 88 into law. But we fight on. The Stop the Burn-Go Green Harvest movement has only grown stronger as the insidiousness of Big Sugar’s lies and propaganda have been laid bare in the past few months. Community leaders in the Glades will continue to promote green harvesting of sugar cane – the only solution that is a win for the Glades people, the environment, and the sugar industry in the long term.”

Despite the ultimate outcome, the fight against the bill provided new opportunities for us. Glades community Stop The Burn Go Green Campaign leaders Sister Laura Cavanaugh and former Mayor of Pahokee Colin Walkes traveled to Tallahassee to speak truth to power. Thanks to Representatives Anna Eskamani and Omari Hardy who emerged as true champions of environmental justice by lifting up local activist voices and running circles around those



Photo/Patrick Ferguson

who parroted Big Sugar misinformation.

A groundswell of calls and emails, excellent investigative reporting, and the bold advocacy by campaign leaders and allied lawmakers made clear a very inconvenient truth: This bill was never about protecting small farmers, but rather was always about increasing legal protections for the toxic, outdated, unnecessary, and racist practice of pre-harvest sugar field burning. Pre-harvest sugar field burning would have continued even if the bill had failed to pass.

As such, our campaign directed towards changing the existing discriminatory burn rules overseen by Agricultural Commissioner Nikki Fried is paramount. We have been demanding she institute a protective 27-30 mile burn free-buffer zone since she took office.

If she had heeded our campaign calls, improvements to public health in the Glades, environmental health (water and air), the very soils of the EAA, and

economic opportunity, would be highlights of her tenure and this recent fight against SB 88 would not have been necessary. Instead of fighting against the denial of rights to use the courts to seek justice for their families, residents in the Glades could have been enjoying the job creation provided by the use of the trash collected (instead of burned) via green harvesting such as mulch, electricity, biofuels, biochar, tree-free paper products, cattle feed, and disintegrant for medicine. And yet, Commissioner Fried continues to allow Big Sugar’s harvest of shame in the Glades.

Now we build upon the increased public awareness and momentum our campaign garnered through the legislative session to get to the point at which Commissioner Fried, and the sugar industry, will no longer be able to continue with the status quo.

Stay tuned for future updates and calls to action!

New Preserve is Coming

The Suncoast Group claimed a major victory after a 9-month effort by a coalition of groups, local activists, city and county commissions, to save a 44-acre green space in the heart of congested Pinellas County from development.

A fundraising campaign to save the Douglas Hackworth Property succeeded

in raising \$10 million to purchase the estate. The new Gladys Douglas Preserve was officially purchased by the City of Dunedin on May 10. City officials are working to secure management rights to the adjacent 55-acre lake, owned by the Southwest Florida Water Management District, to create a nearly 100-acre park.

Pinellas County Commissioner Karen Seel called the finalization of the \$10

million purchase the most miraculous synergy between public officials and community activism she had seen in her 25 years in elected office. Suncoast Sierra Excom member Nichole Mattheus was a tour de force during the campaign, rallying supporters, working with fundraising and public officials, and speaking to media.

Congratulations, Suncoast Group!

Moving?

Email new address to
address.changes@sierraclub.org
and include your membership ID
number located on the mailing label.

Development, Hunting Threaten Panther Habitat

The Collier County Board of Commissioners is considering approval of two new developments of approximately 1,000 acres each in the heart of the primary zone of the Florida panther. The areas are nearly adjacent to the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge.

Not only does the refuge contain the highest density of panthers in the state, but it is surrounded by other public lands established to provide interconnected habitat and travel corridors for panthers and other species which share its range.

The village of Longwater will contain up to 2,600 new residences while Bellmar will contain up to 2,750. In addition, commercial, government, and civic buildings, and increased vehicle traffic will become a part of this new suburban landscape.

And once the two new villages are approved, Collier Enterprises intends to add even more development and link them up with a third project, Rivergrass



Photo/FWS

Village (already approved), to create the Town of Big Cypress — a new downtown center for Eastern Collier County in the heart of the remaining habitat for the panther.

This same commission has recently approved a slew of new developments for Eastern Collier County - including 2,500 acres just across from the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and the purchase of 1,000 acres just north of the Panther Refuge for a horticultural waste site, county fair, and off-road vehicle park.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed opening the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge to wild turkey hunting. The panther refuge is the only land truly dedicated to keeping the Florida panther from extinction. The US Department of the Interior announced that this plan is a part of its promotion of public access to public lands. Three hunt weekends are being proposed with a limit that would amount to 70 turkeys.

The vast majority of the refuge's 26,609 acres would be open for turkey hunting during permitted hunts. Rhonda Roff, Sierra Club Calusa Group Executive Committee member, said: "If the Service has enough money to squander on giving hunters access to kill 70 turkeys, then let them do it elsewhere. The panther does not need another threat to its existence, especially not in its own refuge."