

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR****Fish and Wildlife Service**

[FWS-R4-ES-2008-N0131; 41545-1261-0000-D2]

**Interagency Florida Panther Response Plan****AGENCY:** Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.**ACTION:** Notice of availability: environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact for the Interagency Florida Panther Response Plan.**SUMMARY:** We, the Fish and Wildlife Service, announce our decision and the availability of the Final Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for our Interagency Florida Panther Response Plan. Our EA considers alternatives for managing conflicts between humans and the endangered Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*), in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended.**ADDRESSES:** A copy of the EA and FONSI may be obtained by writing to: Layne Hamilton, Refuge Manager, Florida Panther and Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuges, 3860 Tollgate Boulevard, Suite 300, Naples, FL 34114, or Elizabeth Souheaver, Area II Supervisor, Southeast Regional Office, Fish and Wildlife Service, 1875 Century Boulevard, Suite 420, Atlanta, GA 30345. The EA and/or FONSI may also be accessed and downloaded from the Service's Internet Web site: <http://www.fws.gov/verobeach/>.**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Ms. Layne Hamilton, at address in**ADDRESSES**, or at 239-353-8442, extension 227 (telephone), or Ms. Elizabeth Souheaver, Area II Supervisor, at address in **ADDRESSES**, or at 404-679-7163 (telephone).**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** With this notice, we announce our decision and availability of the final EA and FONSI for the Interagency Florida Panther Response Plan in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act's (NEPA's) implementing regulations at 40 CFR 1506.6 (b). We released a draft of the plan to the public as a Draft EA for "Guidelines for Living with Florida Panther and the Interagency Florida Panther Response Plan," and requested comments in a notice in the **Federal Register** on May 25, 2006 (71 FR 30156). To improve the quality and credibility of the scientific information, we also conducted a formal peer review process for the draft plan. Responses to public,tribal, and peer review comments were included in the Revised EA appendices. On November 2, 2007, we released the Revised EA and the Interagency Florida Panther Response Plan to the public, requesting comments via a **Federal Register** notice (72 FR 62256). We have included responses to specific comments in the Final EA appendices. We have coordinated this proposal with the National Park Service, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and local Indian tribes.The Draft, Revised, and Final EAs identified and evaluated three alternatives for managing the conflicts between humans and the endangered Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*). Alternative A (Preferred Action) manages human-panther interactions with an interagency response team and an established plan that prioritizes public safety and evaluates each situation by analyzing panther behavior and human activity. Alternative B (No Action) does not utilize an interagency team or a response plan, but responds to human-panther interactions on a case-by-case basis without established protocols or guidelines. Alternative C includes a response team and a plan that differs from Alternative A by providing rigid protocols based on frequency of panther sightings and proximity to human-occupied structures, without considering panther behavior or influences of human activity on panther behavior. The EA consists of a thorough analysis of the environmental, social, economic, and cultural resource considerations for each alternative.

The FONSI documents the selection of Alternative A. This alternative was selected over the other alternatives because it utilizes the best available science in a consistent manner to manage human-panther interactions. Under this alternative, the Response Team's responsibility is to review information related to human-panther interactions, classify these situations based on the documented behavior of the panther, provide an action plan to the responsible agencies, and take approved and appropriate actions. The plan provides the responding officials with the flexibility to address emergency situations swiftly. Also, public outreach and education are an important element of this proposal, recognizing the importance of teaching people how to safely live and recreate in panther habitat. There are no conflicts with local, State, regional, or Federal plans or policies.

**Authority:** We provide this notice under NEPA regulations at 40 CFR 1506.6.

Dated: October 6, 2008.

**Cynthia K. Dohner,**

Deputy Regional Director, Southeast Region.

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**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR****Fish and Wildlife Service**

[FWS-R9-FHC-2008-N0219;13410-1124-0000 L5]

**Marine Mammal Protection Act; Stock Assessment Report****AGENCY:** Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.**ACTION:** Notice of availability of final revised marine mammal stock assessment report for the northern sea otter stock in Washington State; response to comments.**SUMMARY:** In accordance with the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has incorporated public comments into a revision of the marine mammal stock assessment report for the northern sea otter (*Enhydra lutris kenyoni*) stock in Washington State. The 2008 final stock assessment report is now complete and available to the public.**ADDRESSES:** Send requests for printed copies of the final stock assessment report to: Manager, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Western Washington Fish and Wildlife Office, 510 Desmond Drive SE, Suite 102, Lacey, WA 98503; (360) 753-9440. Copies of the final revised stock assessment report are also available on the Internet in Adobe Acrobat format at <http://www.fws.gov/westwafwo>.**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** One of the goals of the MMPA (16 U.S.C. 1361-1407) is to ensure that stocks of marine mammals occurring in waters under the jurisdiction of the United States do not experience a level of human-caused mortality and serious injury that is likely to cause the stock to be reduced below its optimum sustainable population level (OSP). OSP is defined as "the number of animals which will result in the maximum productivity of the population or the species, keeping in mind the carrying capacity of the habitat and the health of the ecosystem of which they form a constituent element."

To help accomplish the goal of maintaining marine mammal stocks at their OSPs, section 117 of the MMPA requires the Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to