

July 23, 2004

Eller Does Not Stand Alone

In regards to the recent move by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to fire whistleblower Andrew Eller who has spoken up about the USFWS Vero Beach office using bad science such as daytime data to plot habitat use of panthers, which are mostly active at night; incomplete data that suggests panthers only use forested habitat when in fact they use a wide variety of habitats; and underestimating kitten survival rates.

Andrew Eller is one of many who have spoken up about the bad science used to permit development in Panther habitat. In fact, biologists and conservationists have been pointing out these issues since 1999 at public meetings such as the now defunct Florida Panther Interagency Committee and the Florida Panther Technical Advisory Committee. Not to mention the numerous other people that have exposed the bad science, including:

- 1) An Independent Scientific Review Team's (SRT) Analysis of Scientific Literature Related to the Florida Panther (Beier et al. 2003):
<http://northflorida.fws.gov/Panther/panther-literature.htm>
- 2) Three peer-reviewed published papers:
 - a. Panthers & Forests in South Florida (Comiskey et al. June 2002, Conservation Ecology): www.consecol.org
 - b. Measurement Problems and Florida Panther Models (Shrader-Frechette 2004, Southeastern Naturalist 3:1)
 - c. Evaluating Impacts to Florida Panther Habitat (Comiskey et al. 2004, Southeastern Naturalist 3:1)
- 3) Two lawsuits filed in 2003 by the National Wildlife Federation (NWF), Florida Wildlife Federation (FWF), and The Florida Panther Society (FPS).
- 4) Two white paper reports:
 - a. Road to Ruin (NWF, FWF, CCA 2002): www.nwf.org/everglades
 - b. Discrediting a Decade of Panther Science: Implications of the Scientific Review Team Report (NWF, FPS, FWF 2004): www.nwf.org/news
- 5) Annual field reports by filed biologist and legendary panther tracker with the state capture team: Current Panther Distribution, Population Trends, and Habitat Use. (McBride 2000, 2001, 2002) www.panther.state.fl.us/news/reports.html

Senator Lieberman has even inquired about the bad science in two letters sent to the USFWS (http://govt-aff.senate.gov/_files/061704fwsletterpr.pdf). Unfortunately the USFWS reply to Sen. Lieberman's first letter was vague and unresponsive, just as it was to the PEER/Eller Data Quality Act Challenge (www.peer.org/press/482.html). The USFWS needs to answer all of Sen. Lieberman's questions directly. What is preventing them from doing this? The science is clear. The findings of the SRT report are clear on

what we do know about panthers and what science is wrong, and it even spells out recommendations for correcting the bad science.

It looks like the USFWS is the only one *NOT* trying to correct the bad science.

When Bert Byers, spokesperson of the USFWS Vero Beach office, is cited in the press as saying this: “Byers dismissed accusations that agency officials pressured biologists to issue favorable opinions on proposed developments. Had that been the case, he said, many other scientists would have filed protests,” it sounds as if the USFWS Vero office is saying that Eller is the only biologist who has spoken up.

In fact, all four of the panther biologists who have been with the panther recovery project since it's beginning in 1981 support the SRT report findings. Eller joined these biologists along with a former USFWS biologist, and a University of Tennessee researcher/member of the MERIT panther subteam in a joint letter to the USFWS and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission urging them to endorse the SRT report.

As a public service agency, the USFWS Vero Beach office must be held accountable and must correct the bad science, as is requested in the PEER/ Eller DQA challenge. Taxpayers, public land users, environmental educators, people who care about wildlife, and anyone who appreciates the integrity of natural systems must speak up now.

Eller's position on the science is clearly supported by the larger panther science community. Rather than being fired, Eller deserves commendation for his bold effort to move his agency, the USFWS, out from under the debris of bad science and into the light of the sunshine state.

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