

NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Collier County residents join together to protect people, pets, livestock
and panthers**

Naples - Local 4-H families and volunteers from Collier County will construct three small predator-proof livestock enclosures this weekend to demonstrate how local residents can help reduce the risk of conflicts with endangered Florida panthers. These pens have been proven to nearly eliminate the threat of encounters between panthers and enclosed domestic animals like pets and livestock, which will ultimately reduce pressures on the panther itself.

The pens have been designed by the Mountain Lion Foundation based on research and experience gathered in the organization's efforts to protect mountain lions in the American west. The Mountain Lion Foundation is hopeful that their expertise will aid the recovery of the Florida panther while educating communities that live with the large cats.

"This project is a win-win for Florida communities, especially here in Collier County. We designed these pens to show communities that reducing conflicts is crucial to carnivore conservation," said Lynn Sadler, President of the Mountain Lion Foundation, a US-based non-profit dedicated to saving America's lion. "With these new pens the community feels safer and significant pressure is taken off of the panther."

The Florida project, organized by Defenders of Wildlife, is bringing together a large partnership between federal, state, local government agencies, non-profits and homeowners in southwest Florida that are working to reduce potential conflicts with panthers.

"This project demonstrates how we can all work together to take individual responsibility for protecting panthers and all of Florida's wildlife and habitat," said Laurie Macdonald, Florida director of Defenders of Wildlife. "We are finding solutions to ensure the safety of both wild and domestic animals that are so very important to the quality of our lives."

Robert Halman, director of the Collier County Extension Service, has asked to have an enclosure built at their center to serve as a model for all homeowners.

"4-H teaches responsible animal husbandry," said Halman, "and this enclosure is an important addition to the tools we need to raise healthy livestock in a healthy ecosystem."

The groups express that the do-it-yourself enclosures are relatively inexpensive, easy to build and effectively protect livestock from panthers and, more importantly, frequent encounters with coyotes, bobcats and unrestrained pet dogs.

Local 4-H members here will be encouraged to share their experience with chapters in the west, thereby adding to the body of knowledge about reducing conflicts between people, pets, livestock and predators.

Detailed plans for building predator proof enclosures are available free of charge at www.MountainLion.org in the publications section. To initiate a project in Florida panther territory, homeowners are encouraged to contact Elizabeth Fleming at 727/823-3888.

This weekend's project has been organized by Defenders of Wildlife, Mountain Lion Foundation, and Collier County Extension Service in partnership with 4-H, US Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission and Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge.

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Collier County Extension Service is an off-campus branch of the University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences and a department of Public Services Division of Collier County Government. We help people find practical solutions to problems that are specific to living in Florida. The fact that we are the largest education and youth development organization in the world is the reason people find us so valuable.

Defenders of Wildlife is recognized as one of the nation's most progressive advocates for wildlife and its habitat. With more than 500,000 members and supporters, Defenders of Wildlife is an effective leader on endangered species issues.

The Mountain Lion Foundation is a national non-profit conservation organization founded in 1986 and dedicated to Saving America's Lion. The Foundation is the nation's leading advocate for Puma concolor (mountain lion, cougar) and its habitat.