



Tips for Living in Wild Florida



As the population of Florida continues to grow, more and more people are moving into Florida's remaining wildlife habitat. Interactions are sure to increase between humans and wildlife – including bear, deer, raccoons, coyotes and Florida panthers. Here's what you need to know about living safely in "Wild Florida."

Wildlife-proof your home or office

- Don't hand-feed wildlife: By feeding deer or other wildlife in your yard, you may inadvertently attract predators such as Florida panthers, wild dogs and bears. Take in bird feeders at night.
- Deer- and rabbit-proof your landscape: Avoid using plants that deer prefer to eat. If landscaping attracts deer, Florida panthers and other predators may be close by.
- Landscape for safety: Remove dense and low-lying vegetation near homes that can provide good hiding places for Florida panthers, especially around children's play areas.
- Closely supervise children: Watch children playing outdoors near a wildlife habitat. Make sure children are inside before dusk and not outside before dawn. Talk with children about bears, Florida panther, coyotes, and other wildlife and teach them what to do if they encounter one.
- Install motion-sensitive outdoor lighting: Keep the house perimeter well lit at night – especially along walkways – to keep any approaching wildlife visible.
- Keep pets and livestock secure: Unprotected animals are easy prey for hungry Florida panthers and coyotes. Either bring pets inside or keep them in a kennel with a secure top. Don't feed pets outside. This can attract Florida panther prey. Secure livestock at night.

What to do if you encounter a Florida panther

- Keep children close to you.
- Do not approach a Florida panther: Most will try to avoid a confrontation. Give them a way to escape.
- Do not run from a Florida panther: Running may stimulate a panther's instinct to chase. Stand and face the animal. Make eye contact. Pick up any small children so they don't panic and run. Try to do this without bending over or turning away from the Florida panther.
- Do not crouch or bend over: A person squatting or bending over looks a lot like a four-legged prey animal.
- Appear larger: Raise your arms. Open your jacket, if you are wearing one. Throw stones, branches or whatever you can reach without crouching or turning your back. Wave your arms slowly and speak firmly in a loud voice. The idea is to convince the Florida panther that you are not prey and that you may be a danger to it.
- Fight back if attacked: While there has never been a reported panther attack in Florida, in western states many potential victims have fought back successfully with rocks, sticks, caps, jackets, garden tools and their bare hands. Since a Florida panther usually tries to bite the head or neck, try to remain standing and face the animal.