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CLEAN WATER
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July 23, 2009
Secretary Ken Salazar
US Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC, 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

We are writing in support of the petition for critical habitat designation for the endangered Florida panther submitted by the Conservancy of Southwest Florida on January 21, 2009. The undersigned organizations support critical habitat designation as necessary for the recovery of the endangered Florida panther, as well as for the restoration and protection of the greater Everglades ecosystem. Therefore, we respectfully request your support for designating critical habitat for the critically endangered Florida panther according to the Endangered Species Act.

The Florida panther is one of the most endangered species in the world as only 80-100 individuals survive today. The two greatest threats to the Florida panther are the loss of habitat and automobile-related deaths. Because the Florida panther was listed as endangered prior to the 1983 amendment requiring the designation of critical habitat, it has never received such protection. As a result, the panther is protected but its habitat in effect is not. The US Fish and Wildlife Service has the discretion to designate critical habitat - but has not done so to date.

Now, with the Florida panther facing severe pressure from encroaching development and transportation infrastructure projects, we believe it is imperative that critical habitat be designated immediately based on the best available science. Because the panther is an umbrella species and in peril, we support the designation of critical habitat - not only because it would assist in the protection of habitat areas necessary for preventing the extinction of the Florida panther, but also because it would help to protect other valuable environmental resources, such as wetlands, aquifer-recharge areas, and the habitat of other endangered species in the Everglades.

Please help to ensure the continued existence of the Florida panther and the preservation of their habitat in the western Everglades by designating critical habitat. On behalf of our organizations, thank you for your time and consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Andrew McElwaine
President and CEO
Conservancy of Southwest Florida*

Jeff Ruch
Executive Director
Public Employees for Environmental
Responsibility (PEER)

Dr. Thomas Poulson
Senior Scientist
Arthur R. Marshall Jr. Foundation
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** Indicates member organization of the Everglades Coalition*

cc: Tom Strickland, Dept. of Interior
Will Shafroth, Dept. of Interior
David Hayes, Dept. of Interior
Sam Hamilton, USFWS
Paul Souza, USFWS