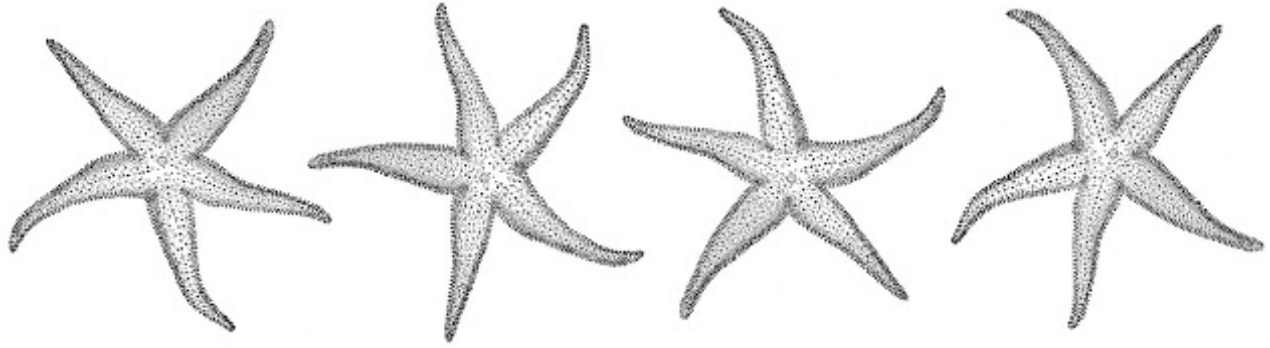


# Florida SEE Star News



## Greetings!

With over 1800 nature-based tour operators in Florida, it's clear that tourists in the sunshine state have created a demand for ecological, educational tours that highlight the diversity of natural and cultural heritage of our beautiful state. Florida SEE's message to these operators is "how can we help?" We are in the unique position of galvanizing the industry and raising the bar for standards and practices through our certification and education programs.



***Florida SEE's all-volunteer board at the December retreat at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.***

*(from left - Pete Corradino, JoNell Modys, Felipe Correa, Charles Wright, Rebecca Beck, Joy Hazell, John Kiseda, Nancy MacPhee.)*

The enthusiasm for SEE's mission continues to grow across the state with new members coming on board and current members renewing their support. We have just certified our newest ecotour provider - Congratulations Everglades Area Tours!

We have four more tour providers undergoing certification. As we receive more applications and train more assessors around the state we will continue on a path of steadily growing the number of

certified ecotour providers. To learn more about our Certification Program and Everglades Area Tours - read on.

Click [here](#) for more information on certification.

Click or scroll down for articles on:

Everglades Area Tours - SEE Certified!

Did You Know...Bananas arrived in Florida in XXXX

Did You Know...Florida became a U.S. Territory in XXXX

Florida Panther Wildlife Refuge

Calendar of Events

Certified Tour Operators

Pete Corradino - Vice-chair of Florida SEE - [petecorradino@floridasee.org](mailto:petecorradino@floridasee.org)



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## Why become SEE Certified?

- **Validation** - Any nature-based tour can call themselves an "ecotour". Florida SEE offers an objective third party perspective that reviews a tour operators business practices against a strict ecotourism industry standard. Certification validates responsible ecotours.
- **Promotion** - SEE Certified tour operators are promoted by SEE through social media, press releases and quarterly newsletters. SEE also distributes promotional information to Visit Florida, Visitor and Convention Bureaus, local chambers and other appropriate tourism destination management organizations.
- **Spotlight** - When tourists visit Florida and are making responsible choices, SEE Certified tour operators have a competitive marketing advantage and are spotlighted as the best that Florida has to offer.
- **Website** - SEE Certified tour operators receive their own business listing landing page on the [www.FloridaSee.org](http://www.FloridaSee.org) website including contact info, tour descriptions and link to their site.

[back to the top](#)

## Everglades Area Tours

### Certification:

2 (out of 4) SEE Stars

### About Everglades Area Tour:

Everglades Area Tours has provided educational, nature-based tours throughout the Everglades region since 1997. They provide educational tours via hiking, paddling and power boating on tours that run from half-day tours to 7-day excursions. Everglades Area Tours president Captain Charles Wright has seen the evolution of his company grow from fishing charters to nature-based eco-tours over the years. He sought SEE certification as a way to validate the ethical business practices that Everglades Area Tour employs and to help raise the standard by being a positive example for other tours in the region.

### Everglades Area Tours SEE Certification:

Everglades Area Tours was the second Ecotour Operator to be certified through the Florida SEE certification program and received 2 out of 4 possible SEE Stars.

One star is an incredible achievement. Two stars is an astounding accomplishment. Three stars is stellar and four stars is nearly off the charts! Congratulations Everglades Area Tours.

### Highlights of Everglades Area Tours Certification:

by John Kiseda

It was truly my pleasure to participate as an Assessor on two kayak tours provided by Everglades Area Tours. Both of these tours were conducted with small groups (3 - 5 total).

The "Boat Assisted Kayak Tour" was an ideal way to combine the best of a boat tour, kayak experience and a walking tour. Suited for the experienced and beginner ecotraveler, this tour took us with ease by pontoon boat through the back bay area of the 10,000 Islands to a remote destination where we launched our kayaks for a leisurely paddle to a pristine barrier island beach. Boating and paddling past sea turtles, dolphins, wading birds and mangrove covered islands, we had the opportunity to explore on foot a beach that is seldom visited by tourists. Our guide was very professional and personable as he shared with us safety tips and factual information about the flora and fauna that we were experiencing. Caution and care was taken along the way to lessen our impacts as travelers through this remarkable natural area.

The "Mangrove Tunnel Kayak Eco Tour" provided a totally different experience along the fresh water of the Turner River and into brackish "lakes" as it flows to the gulf coast. This mix of fresh and salt waters, provided the varied habitats to see native wildlife going about their daily chores of eating, mating and resting. Paddling past roosting and breeding birds, we stopped many times to allow alligators to cross the waterway and watched as turtles dropped into the water to scout out their next meal. As we paddled further down the river, we experienced the solitude and magic of

arching mangroves dotted with thousands of bromeliads and the occasional orchid clinging to their prop roots. Once again our guide took as much time as needed to prepare us for a comfortable and safe trip since the participants had various kayaking abilities. All felt welcome and not rushed as our guide provided fact based personal stories of the natural and cultural history of the river way. A very rewarding and pleasurable trip for families and experienced kayakers alike.

**Contact Everglades Area Tours:**

239-695-3633

Chokoloskee Island, FL 34138

[Info@EvergladesAreaTours.com](mailto:Info@EvergladesAreaTours.com)

[www.evergladesareatours.com](http://www.evergladesareatours.com)

**Certified by:**

Joy Hazell and John Kiseda

**Certification Completion Date:**

February 15th, 2012

[back to the top](#)

## **Did You Know...**

### **Florida became a U.S. Territory in 1819**

Negotiations over Florida began in earnest with the mission of Don Luis de Onís to Washington in 1815 to meet Secretary of State James Monroe. The issue was not resolved until Monroe was President and John Quincy Adams his Secretary of State. Although U.S.-Spanish relations were strained over suspicions of American support for the independence struggles of Spanish-American colonies, the situation became critical when ([read more here](#))

*excerpt from the US Department of State's Office of the Historian*

[back to the top](#)

## **Florida Panther NWR Provides a Glimpse Into the Mysterious World of the State's Endangered Cat**

by JoNell Modys

Southwest Florida, and to a large extent, Collier County, is the primary habitat of the endangered Florida panther (*felis concolor coryi*), Florida's official state land animal. Since one of the major threats to Florida panthers is shrinking habitat, this places great importance on the natural open spaces that still remain in the region.

At one time, the panther ranged throughout Florida as well as throughout much of the southeastern United States from Louisiana north and east to Tennessee and the Atlantic. Today only 100 to 160 adult panthers exist on protected state and federal lands and the remaining private lands in southwest Florida, making them among the most endangered animals in the world. Young, dispersing males have been documented in other parts of the state but the breeding population remains restricted to south Florida.

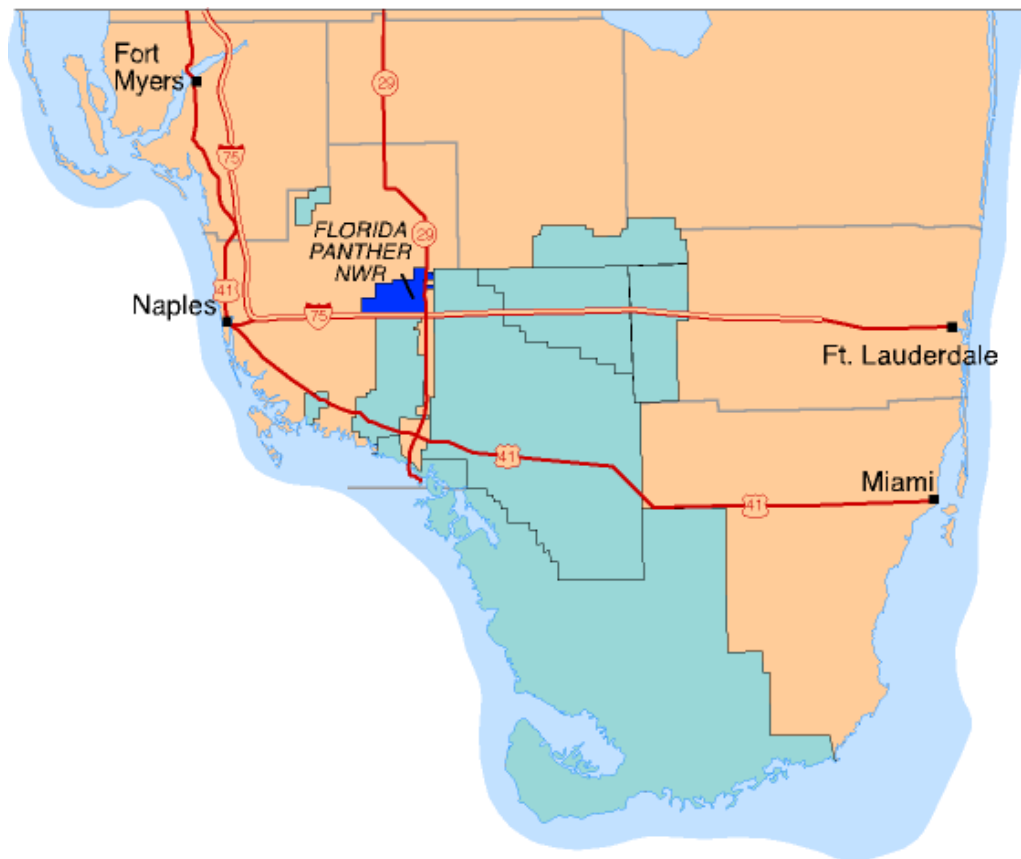
The Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge was established in June 1989 under the authority of the Endangered Species Act to protect the Florida panther and its habitat. The refuge consists of 26,400 acres in the northern portion of the Fakahatchee Strand of the Big Cypress Swamp. The refuge is adjacent to the 729,000-acre Big Cypress National Preserve and several other park and conservation land units, providing a wildlife corridor for the territorial cats to roam.



Photo © Glen Stacell

Each month, between five and eleven Florida panthers den, hunt and roam within the refuge. As it turns out, what is good for panthers is also good for many other native Florida animal species, which is why the panther is classified as an umbrella species. The panther refuge is also home to black bear, bobcat, white-tailed deer, Big Cypress fox squirrels and wood stork. Large concentrations of wading and water birds feed, nest, and roost there as well. Not to be left out are some very rare species of orchid. When the conditions are right for the Florida panther, all these other species benefit.

For many years the panther refuge was designated strictly as habitat preservation land with no public access. Several years ago two, free public hiking trails were opened, providing visitors with a peek into the panther's world. Access for the trails is a quarter mile north of the intersection of State Road 29 and I-75 during daylight hours.



The Leslie M. Duncan Memorial Trail is a 1/3 mile, wheelchair-accessible loop trail that winds through a hardwood hammock with old growth oak trees and tropical vegetation. A small boardwalk and overlook allow visitors to view a small, recently restored, seasonal pond. The trail and boardwalk were funded by private donations from Marge Duncan, Safari Club International and the Friends of the Florida Panther Refuge.

The longer 1 1/3 mile loop trail is not improved and often floods during the summer, fall and early winter. Additionally, wet conditions prevent the refuge staff from mowing this trail from June through December. The trail is well marked, but during wet conditions, overgrown vegetation on the trail may challenge hikers. Regardless of the trail's condition, you'll enjoy a leisurely walk through hardwood hammocks, pineflatwoods, and wet prairies. Late spring is a good time to visit to see wildflowers in bloom.

The Florida panther is a large cat that is tawny and brown with cream or white colored undersides. Small amounts of black coloring can be found around the face, paws, legs, and tip of its long tail. If you see a spotted medium-sized cat, it's not a panther, but rather a bobcat. Panthers are shy and quite elusive so don't count on seeing one simply by hiking the refuge trails. You're more likely to spot panther signs, such as paw prints, scratch marks or scat.

There are several opportunities to learn more about the Florida panther. The entire panther refuge is opened up once a year for the **Panther Refuge Open House** with guided trail walks, buggy rides through the refuge, swamp walks to view orchids and more. This year's open house is on March 17. Call 239-353-8442 for free activity reservations. This fall, the second annual Florida Panther Festival takes place on November 10 at North Collier Regional Park, with guided trail walks, presentations, children's activities and more along with music, food and festival vendors.

[back to top](#)

## Calendar of Events

### **Red Stag Ranch Tour for Master Naturalists**

East Central Florida Regional Co-facilitators, Ken Gioeli and Wren Underwood, have organized a special tour of the Red Stag Ranch in Okeechobee County for Florida Master Naturalists. The tour will include visits to a hardwood hammock and working cattle ranch. Pre-registration required. Cost includes lunch (most likely BBQ w/sides).

Master Naturalist are welcome to register guests.

March 10th, 8 am

Red Stag Ranch, Eastern Okeechobee County

\$55/person

### **Old Florida Festival**

March 10th-11th

Collier County Museum, Naples

### **Florida Panther Refuge Week**

March 10th-17th

Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge and surrounding parks

### **Ladies, Let's Go Fishing Annual Gulf Coast Seminar with FWC**

March 16th-18th

Naples

### **Mangrove Gathering Eco Cafe**

Live music, coffee, tea and snack/dessert "potlatch" and all of the current information on Southwest Florida environmental happenings.

March 16th - Fort Myers (6490 South Pointe Blvd, Fort Myers)

April 20th - Cape Coral (5505 Rose Garden Road, Cape Coral)

May 18th - Fort Myers

June 15th - Fort Myers

July 20th - Cape Coral

September 21st - Fort Myers

October 19th - Cape Coral

December 21st - Fort Myers

### **EcoTraveler Series**

*"A Time Gone By" by Terry Cain & John Kiseda*

March 29th, 7-8 pm

Eco-Living Center at Ruttenberg Park

## **Are You Smarter Than A Stone Crab?**

Learn about Stone Crab biology and how the fishery is managed

Florida Sea Grant Extension

April 3rd, 2:30 pm-6:00 pm, \$15

Rookery Bay Reserve Environmental Learning Center

## **Florida SEE Annual Meeting**

June 1st-2nd

Watch for email with more details

[back to the top](#)

## **Did You Know...**

by Felipe Correa

Bananas were introduced by Christopher Columbus from the Azores and were rapidly and widely disseminated by Native Americans. The bananas we eat are a result of hybridization that yields sterile flowers and seedless fruits. Since edible bananas have no seeds they are propagated by removing the plantlets at the edge of the clump of the stems.



Photo © Felipe Correa

[back to the top](#)

## **Certified Tour Operators**



## Everglades Area Tours

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[back to the top](#)



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