NAME: _____ DATE: _____

MEET THE SURVIVORS

Humans and wildlife sometimes interact in ways that result in negative outcomes for either or both of them. For example, wolves preying on livestock can lead to loss of property for the rancher; a vehicle collision can result in loss of life for a deer and vehicle damage for the human; or elephants trampling freshly sowed crops can be a devastating loss for a subsistence farmer. There are strategies that humans can employ to reduce these problematic outcomes. Dogs such as the Great Pyrenees excel at protecting herds from wolves; wildlife bridges and fences can keep animals off of highways; and bees have been used to deter elephants from crop fields.

Incidents of human-wildlife conflict increase as humans continue to move into and develop wild areas. The Florida panther is no exception. As their habitat decreases due to human activity, panthers are forced to come into closer proximity to humans, leading to vehicle collisions, predation of domestic animals, increased exposure to disease, and increased risk of being removed from the wild as a nuisance or safety risk to humans.

Read about each of these seven panthers. As you read, think about how each panther ended up in a zoo in Florida.
Can you identify any patterns across the different stories?

WALTER / *ZOOTAMPA*

Walter was found in the Northern Everglades west of Lake Okeechobee in 2017, with his left front foot caught in a snare trap presumably put out by a landowner trying to control predators like coyotes. After multiple surgeries at ZooTampa, it was determined that Walter's foot could not be repaired, and he could not be returned to the wild. He was given a new permanent home at the zoo and named for a donor who helped fund his care. His keepers say that Walter enjoys the sunshine and taking naps on the top of his platform in his habitat, which he shares with fellow panthers Lucy and Micanopy.

ATHENA / *NAPLES ZOO*

Athena was born into a litter of four kittens in 2017 being observed by National Park Service biologists in Big Cypress National Preserve. Biologists later noticed that the mother had moved three of the kittens but had left Athena at the original den site when she was just a few weeks old. Attempts to reunite Athena with her family were unsuccessful, leading to the decision to remove her from the wild. Research suggests that a kitten needs to live at least six months with its mother to be a candidate for successful reintroduction into the wild. Athena was rehabilitated behind the scenes before being given a permanent home at Naples Zoo.

CYPRESS / *WHITE OAK CONSERVATION, NEAR JACKSONVILLE*

Cypress and his brother, Pepper, were born in 2019 near Immokalee to FP256, who was wearing a tracking collar. The state panther team observed that FP256 was so severely affected by the neurological disorder feline leukomyelopathy (FLM) that she would likely not survive, and certainly not successfully raise kittens. The two kittens were initially hand-raised at ZooTampa and monitored for signs of FLM before being provided a long-term home at White Oak Conservation near Jacksonville. Researchers are still investigating the source of the disease that ultimately claimed their mother.

SAKATA / *HOMOSASSA SPRINGS WILDLIFE STATE PARK*

As a two-month-old kitten in 2016, Sakata was discovered abandoned and sleeping in a field at the Sakata Research Station near Fort Myers. Biologists tried to locate his mother and concluded that the kitten had likely become lost in a rare circumstance when two mothers with kittens crossed paths and Sakata attempted to follow the wrong mother. Sakata's mother was never found, and the lost kitten was taken to Naples Zoo for medical care before finding a permanent home at Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park, joining Yuma, another male panther who was rescued as an orphan.

MAHALA / *ZOO MIAMI*

In 2014, Mahala was found hiding in a bougainvillea bush beside a tennis court in Naples. Her mother had been hit by a car nearby, sustaining only minor injuries, and was seen walking away from the area with her other kittens. After multiple attempts to reunite the lone kitten with her family, biologists rescued her, as she was too young to survive in the wild on her own. In 2015, she was given a home at Zoo Miami, where she lives today. Soon after, her mother was hit by another car and died. It is not known whether Mahala's siblings survived.

MICANOPY / *ZOOTAMPA*

Micanopy was removed from the wild in 2016 because he was preying on pets in a rural neighborhood of Immokalee. He was kept for a one-month quarantine to ensure he hadn't contracted feline leukemia from eating domestic cats, which could endanger the wild panther population. He was returned to the wild as far from people as possible but came back to residential areas. The Interagency Florida Panther Response Team decided his behavior was a public safety concern and permanently removed him from the wild. He was a young cat who possibly lost his mother early and learned to hunt domestic animals for easy food. ZooTampa saved Micanopy from euthanasia by welcoming him back a second time.

SASSY / *PALM BEACH ZOO*

When her mother was killed by a car on the Tamiami Trail near Naples in 2015, Sassy was too young to survive on her own. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissions biologists successfully trapped her near where her mom was struck and took her to Naples Zoo for medical care. They were not able to catch her two siblings. They found one dead from starvation, and the other likely suffered the same fate. After Sassy was nursed back to health, she was provided a permanent home in a new panther habitat at Palm Beach Zoo, where she has actively climbed a catwalk from one part of her exhibit to another.

1. **Identify at least two patterns evident in these panther stories.**

2. **Suggest how providing these panthers sanctuary at zoos might benefit the entire Florida panther population.**

3. **Identify two strategies that could help protect the endangered Florida panther, while still permitting humans to meet their needs. Include the potential costs and benefits of your strategies.**