

By Senator Brodeur

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Senate Resolution

A resolution recognizing April 11, 2023, as "Path of the Panther Day" in Florida to highlight the recovery of the Florida panther and celebrate the Florida Wildlife Corridor.

WHEREAS, the Florida panther, the official state animal of this state, is an endangered species protected under the Endangered Species Act, with its survival and ultimate recovery dependent upon protection of the Florida Wildlife Corridor, and

WHEREAS, the Legislature recognizes that Florida's population is growing rapidly and that the lands and waters that provide Florida's natural infrastructure and vital habitat for wide-ranging wildlife, such as the Florida panther, need to be preserved and protected, and

WHEREAS, the Legislature has prioritized investments in environmental restoration and clean water resources with record funding for water storage, water quality, and the restoration of the Everglades, as well as the preservation and expansion of the iconic Florida Wildlife Corridor, and

WHEREAS, the award-winning film "Path of the Panther" and the book of the same name, which both feature photography by Carlton Ward, Jr., highlight these efforts and the urgency to protect all 18 million acres of the Florida Wildlife Corridor, 10 million acres of which are currently under some form of protection, with another 8 million acres remaining as opportunity areas, and

WHEREAS, the remarkable photographs by conservation photographer and National Geographic Explorer Carlton Ward, Jr.,

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30 which are featured in both the film and book, are prominently  
31 displayed in the office of Senate President Kathleen Passidomo  
32 and featured during the month of April 2023 on the 22nd floor  
33 observatory and gallery of the Capitol in Tallahassee, and

34 WHEREAS, the opportunity areas highlighted in the film and  
35 book and the related photography exhibits represent the land  
36 required to create a continuous swath of land and water for  
37 wide-ranging wildlife, such as the Florida panther, to access  
38 the habitats they need to survive, and

39 WHEREAS, with the passage of the Florida Wildlife Corridor  
40 Act, hundreds of thousands of additional acres will be preserved  
41 through Florida Forever programs, including land acquisition  
42 under the Department of Environmental Protection and the Rural  
43 and Family Lands Protection program under the Department of  
44 Agriculture and Consumer Services, as well as other state  
45 programs and efforts to acquire lands for conservation and  
46 preservation, and

47 WHEREAS, the protected lands of the Florida Wildlife  
48 Corridor include both public conservation lands and private  
49 agricultural lands acquired by the state's purchase of  
50 development rights of farmers and ranchers who will be able to  
51 continue their operations in perpetuity while ensuring that  
52 these lands will never be developed, and

53 WHEREAS, on March 8, 2023, the Senate unanimously passed  
54 legislation that will expand access to the Florida Wildlife  
55 Corridor by connecting it to Florida's Greenways and Trails  
56 System and the SUN Trail Network, as well as to recreational  
57 pathways of heritage small towns across this state, and

58 WHEREAS, Florida is one of the fastest-growing states in

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59 the nation, and time is of the essence to save and preserve  
60 ranches, groves, farms, and forestry areas that are compatible  
61 with the Florida Wildlife Corridor, and

62 WHEREAS, the Florida Senate is joined in its efforts to  
63 conserve, preserve, and expand the iconic Florida Wildlife  
64 Corridor by myriad advocacy groups and supporters from across  
65 this state and around the globe, NOW, THEREFORE,

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67 Be It Resolved by the Senate of the State of Florida:

68

69 That April 11, 2023, is recognized as "Path of the Panther  
70 Day" in Florida to highlight the recovery of the Florida panther  
71 and celebrate the Florida Wildlife Corridor.