

*Marjory Stoneman Douglas talks about Florida Panthers in Big Cypress and failed tracking methods*

*Marjory Stoneman Douglas: (21:50)* Also, the hunters were in there, have complicated enormously and now, of course, our, my own great concern, my own great concern, in the panther in the big cypress, which is the most, the largest habitat of the existing panther that we have. Our state animal of which is official count is only about 20 and which have been, whose habitat is being overrun, not only by the oil people but by the people who go in there for the deer hunting. We had to allow an eleven-mile road called the Southern Road to the Airfield, but they have been able to keep the hunting people from using it. But they haven't, the Everglades park that controls the Big Cypress have had to allow four crossing points for hunters who come in on forty-one, and there are four places where they are allowed to cross the road, although they are not allowed on the road. I'm very anxious to see hunting, to see deer hunting, better controlled in the Big Cypress. I would be glad to see no hunting there at all, because we'll never preserve the panther as we should until we get rid of so many hunters, whether they shoot the panther or not. It's very illegal. They're an endangered species, protected; they're supposed to be protected, by the federal government. And I am not aware that the panther are being shot particularly because there is a very heavy fine, jail terms and all that, and I don't know what anybody shoots a panther for, I don't know what they'd do with the dead body that wouldn't get them arrested. So, that may be under better control, but I don't like what they're doing about the panther habitat. I think it should be left for the panther. I think there should be any oil drilling there or any hunting there, I think it should be left for the panther. The, I don't like... either the state of Florida has had a program of which Colonel Brantley of the fish and game commission have gotten money to study the panther, and the way they study it, I think, is nuts! They chase the panther with dogs, chase him up a tree; they shoot him with a hypodermic that anesthetizes him. He drops off the tree supposedly into a net. Sometimes the net isn't there and he falls off and breaks bones. They put a collar on him that has batteries and a beeper and then they let the panther go, so then... I don't know how much that part of it costs, but I know it's a lot. Then they have a helicopter for a week in each month that flies over the Big Cypress, and they get the beeps from the panther's collars and know where the panther are. Well, all that costs an awful lot of money, and I don't believe they get any more information about the panther than about that. I've been trying to get a report from Colonel Brantley as to what they've learned about the panther, and I'm trying to get

it. I hope I can. But I don't believe they've learned very much. There are people who are raising the Western panther, which is very near to our kind of panther. There are people who are raising panthers in the area that know more about panthers, I'm perfectly certain, than the men who put the collars on them. In putting the collar on them, they have to acknowledge that they've killed one panther, and I think they've killed another panther and that a third has either disappeared with the collar on it or was drown with the collar on it. To my mind there is another death that Colonel Brantley denies but I can't help it; I believe it. I believe there has been three: one killed that they'll acknowledge, one killed that they won't acknowledge and one that has either disappeared or drown with the collar on it. I think that that is a very stupid program. Of course, I've already expressed myself to poor Colonel Brantley on the subject. But the program is discontinued since the beginning of May; I figured it will be resumed again in January. Well we now, thanks to Senator Neil of Bradenton, we now have a bill passed through the Florida senate and the House of Representatives with an appropriation for a committee to study the Florida panther, also. And I hope that committee will be effective in proving that the collaring program is a bad one. Which I believe it is, I think that anybody who knows about panthers, knows that a panther with a collar on it is not the same thing as a panther without a collar on it. It's a wild animal, and it's a cat and a sensitive cat, and we believe that the collar is bad for it, and I don't see why it isn't. I think they are going to have a hard time proving that it's not bad for it. Anybody who knows anything about the big cats knows that they are, their breeding habits, their habitats and all they, they're very sensitive to all kinds of conditions. So anyway, that's the situation as it is now. And you see how complicated it all is.