

## **Florida Wildlife Corridor Expedition**

With the American Space program grounded, the next best scientific expedition to watch and follow will be the Florida Wildlife Corridor Expedition launching on January 17, 2012.

The expedition will cover 1,000 miles in 100 days, from the Everglades to the Okefenokee Swamp. The journey aims to inspire, excite, and enlighten scientists, artists, reporters, citizens, and national and international tourists about the relationship between landscapes, watersheds, and inhabitants.

### **The Florida Wildlife Corridor**

It used to be that people thought protecting the environment meant purchasing land and building a fence to keep it safe. But many key species, such as panthers and bears and even certain plant migrations, need extensive ranges well beyond the acreage of even our largest public lands. As metropolitan areas infringe upon these “islands of green,” not only are the impacts on air, water, and noise pollution impossible to fence out, but the increased number of roads create unexpected boundaries for these species. Wild lands depend on other wild and undeveloped lands to sustain their collective and broad-reaching functions, and this is where the concept of corridors comes to play.

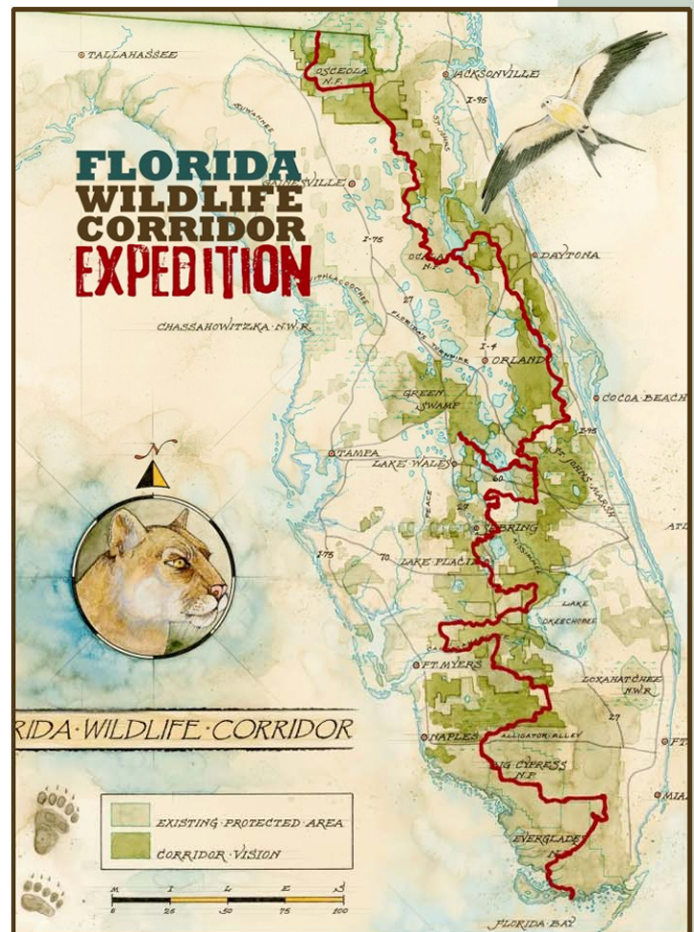
Florida began protecting sectional wildlife corridors in recent decades, but most of these were within a county’s boundaries and occasionally across county boundaries. The Florida Wildlife Corridor is the only north-south cross-state corridor planned, and its goal is to connect natural lands and waters from the Everglades to Georgia. This Corridor aims to ensure enough un- and under-developed land for species such as panthers and bears to safely find food and mates. It can do this while protecting the vastness of prairies, floodplains, wetlands, and the free-flowing rivers and lakes that are vital to keep downstream waters healthy and viable, while still maintaining the historic landscapes of native cultures and sustaining the ranchlands, farms, and groves that nourish our urban centers.

### **The Expedition**

**The Expedition is the centerpiece of the strategy to raise awareness for The Florida Wildlife Corridor.**

The Florida Wildlife Corridor Expedition will be about travelling first-hand through the vision of a sustainable corridor of wild lands and cultural traditions along an interior of Florida that most people never see. It will provide an opportunity to distinguish and celebrate the resources and people that constitute Florida’s spine—its interior watersheds, Native Americans, rivers, cowboys, lakes, farmers, springs, foresters, bird watchers and hunters; in short, everything and everyone connected by the same need for natural and open spaces.

For 100 days, the Expedition Team will be communicating with the outside world using media which earlier explorers never imagined. The team will employ the full arsenal of current social media, including blogs, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. Vivid daily reports from the field will use words, photographs, art, and video in real time, to provide public awareness, with potential feedback to the team. As filmmaker Elam Stoltzfus explains, “The ability of the social media component to provide two-way communication in and of itself is one of the most compelling elements of the Expedition. What will the Expedition hear back



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from the outside world—other scientists, archeologists, artists, and curious laymen? Will it influence the journey?...The Expedition Team is counting on it!”

The journey will start in the Big Cypress Swamp in the western Everglades and travel north to the Everglades Agricultural Area; back to the Okaloacoochee Slough in southern Hendry County; across the Caloosahatchee River to Babcock Ranch in Charlotte County; and then east along Fisheating Creek toward Lake Okeechobee. From Lake Okeechobee, the heart of the Everglades system, the expedition will travel up the Kissimmee River, with excursions toward the Lake Wales Ridge; up the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes; east around Orlando; and into Ocala National Forest in central Florida. From there the participants will travel north to the Osceola National Forest in north Florida, west of Jacksonville, in what is known as the Ocala to Osceola Corridor. The trip will continue north to Georgia and into the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge.

*The Expedition will connect people in real time to the places Floridians need to protect, and as bear scientist Joe Guthrie explains, “Our scientific discoveries and field notes will have the added benefit of being interpreted and communicated with art. That will be a first for me, and I am really interested in having interaction with the social media followers and how that will impact what we learn along the way.”*

The expedition team will include conservationist Mallory Lykes Dimmitt, photojournalist Carlton Ward Jr., bear biologist Joseph Guthrie, and filmmaker Elam Stoltzfus. Dimmitt and Ward are board members of LINC. Guthrie completed his Master’s research at the University of Florida on a special population of black bears that live almost entirely on private lands in central Florida. Because bears require vast natural landscapes to survive, they are one of the most obvious justifications for open space connectivity.

In addition to the daily live exchange of experiences, LINC will be producing, as part of its partnership with the Expedition and with Live Oak Production Group, a two-hour documentary detailing the Expedition for public broadcasting stations. The scientific interviews, art, photography, and trip souvenirs created and gathered on the journey have equal roles in the documentary. LINC Executive Director Peg McPherson explains, “The pioneering format of this documentary will include what the Expedition Team learned about the Corridor’s natural and cultural heritage, and then also, what the Expedition Team learned from the social media followers, artists, elected officials, scientists and fans who were along for the ride.”



LINC and the [Florida Wildlife Corridor](#) Partners expect the Expedition and the documentary film to influence future governmental policy decisions by educating and inspiring the public.

*In the process, it also will provide professional and artistic communication tools to scientific, educational and cultural agencies and organizations addressing the issues explored throughout the Expedition.*

