

## *Wings of Hope*

**Ms. Ricky Pires, College of Arts & Sciences**

2003-2011

The *Wings of Hope* program is an integral part of the Environmental Humanities curriculum and service learning at FGCU. University students are introduced to native southwest Florida wild-life species, their habitats, water conservation and green ways a person can help our earth. Then, as part of their service learning, they bring this knowledge to students in first through fifth grades with science-based environmental education.

Programs are presented to public and private schools in Collier and Lee Counties. The *Wings of Hope* program focuses on bringing back a sense of place within our family, community, and the environment.



Photo courtesy of FFWCC

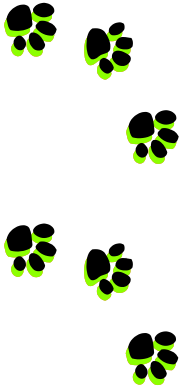
The picture at left shows the deep blue eyes and spotted coat of panther kittens, which fade as they reach six months of age. At two months, they follow their mother on hunting trips. By 12 months they can catch prey on their own. By two years, the mother leaves them at a kill site while feeding and does not return. The kittens need to find a territory and begin their own family.

Florida was one of the first states to build wildlife crossing under roads. Since 1986, 42 crossings have been built on I-75 and State Route 29. High chain link fences and native vegetation shield wildlife from highways, directing them to underpasses. Since their construction, no panthers have been killed where underpasses and fencing have been installed.



Ms. Ricky Pires, left, Director of the *Wings of Hope* program at FGCU, helps a Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission biologist to examine a sedated Florida Panther. Rice-sized transponder chips are inserted under a kitten's skin, helping to identify the kittens later and aiding in recovery and survival.

What happens when 300 university students each semester work together to teach elementary school students about the Florida Panther, its habitat, water conservation and green ways to be kind to the earth?



Doing the "Pink Panther Dance"

Watch out, guys! The cougar, below, looks so lifelike you have to feel it to know it's not. In the background, Ms. Ricky teaches FGCU students about panther habitat.

Right: Students are making tracks at the new Panther Posse classroom in Reed Hall on the FGCU campus.

