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**Twilight of the panther: biology, bureaucracy and failure in an endangered species program.**—Ken Alvarez. 1993. Myakka River Publishing, Sarasota, Florida. 501 pages, 3 figures, and 1 appendix.—Florida panther recovery has taken many twists and turns since a conference was convened on the subject in 1976 (Proc. Fla. Panther Conf., P.C.H. Pritchard, ed. Fla. Audubon Soc. and Fla. Game and Fresh Water Fish Comm. Orlando, March 17-18). Recovery efforts have grown to include a myriad of agencies, conservation groups, corporations, and individuals interested in this enigmatic animal. Ken Alvarez, in this retrospective view, takes a facet of human nature and boils it down to an excruciating 500-page lashing of nearly everyone associated with Florida panther recovery. There is little doubt that in any assemblage of groups, the diversity and abundance of people, organizations, and agendas complicate the process. *Twilight of the panther* asserts that nothing but bungling and incompetence are to blame for a perceived lack of progress in panther recovery, and that drastic changes are necessary.

The principal characters are the Florida Department of Natural Resources, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, National Park Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. However, others include the Sierra Club, Florida Audubon Society, National Parks and Conservation Association, National Audubon Society, Environmental Defense Fund, Defenders of Wildlife, and The Nature Conservancy. Government agencies receive low marks by promoting “departmental dogma,” employing researchers with “protective instincts,” “bureaucratic dysfunction,” “institutional malaise,” and “unprofessionalism.” There is much truth in these observations.

Many of the attacks on agency intransigence are based on the author’s premise that the panther is a senile, disease-ridden shell of a predator, and that reflex actions are the only solutions to the problems of a predator that is poorly understood by many of those trying to save it. Alvarez observed that in 1984 the image of the panther was “of a small, sparse, aging population with few young entering the ranks.” I assumed that the book would document the mounting data that have changed management direction and created a very different image of the panther (good reproduction, low turnover, normal demographics). Despite the recent publication date of *Twilight of the panther*, it does not reflect biological fact based on the last 8 years of research.

Alvarez was correct in observing that the nature of agencies involved in panther management has resulted in a cumbersome coalition of unlikely cooperators, and that progress has been slowed because of it. He is also correct in observing that a common vision of success among all participants in panther management is needed if bureaucratic hurdles are to be overcome and success eventually achieved. Alvarez repeatedly reminds us that agencies involved in panther recovery must put behind the rhetoric of departmental philosophies and let biology and forthrightness drive interagency progress. Panther recovery is more than just creating the illusion of cooperation and success.

Clearly, this book was intended to be a wake-up call for the four agencies most closely involved in panther recovery. Although the message is there, its strength is severely weakened by wordiness and technical errors. Significant streamlining, accurate documentation, and elimination of biological errors could have made the book a more useful contribution to the subspecies’ recovery. *Twilight of the panther* only partly fulfills the promise its title makes. The reader will certainly come away with a better appreciation for the complexities and politics of panther recovery, but the biology of this controversial endangered species must be obtained from other sources. Nonetheless, this book should be read by anyone interested in the future of Florida wildlife, and how not to recover endangered species.—**David S. Maehr**, 331 27th St. N.W., Naples, Florida 33964.