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Judge rejects additional protection for Florida panther

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The swamps, fields and forests that constitute the last stronghold of the Florida panther will not gain additional legal protection, under a ruling by a federal judge in Fort Myers.

Environmental groups had sought to designate 1.3 million acres of South Florida, including the western fringes of Broward and Palm Beach counties, as critical habitat for the panther, making it harder to develop, mine or alter the land in any way. Although about two thirds already has protection as state or federal conservation land, the rest is in private hands.

“Florida panthers have been endangered now for four decades, and scientists have done a lot of research and mapped out the areas that are essential for the Florida panther to survive,” said Michael Robinson, conservation advocate with the Center for Biological Diversity, one of the groups that filed suit. “Those areas are being buried in concrete, and panthers are



dying underneath the wheels and on the front fenders of vehicles that are driving in habitat that used to be pristine.”

But U.S. District Judge John E. Steele ruled that the law allowed but did not compel the federal government to designate critical habitat for the panther. Robinson said they plan to appeal.

The land runs from the outskirts of Naples and Fort Myers through parts of Broward and Palm Beach counties, where levees serve as dispersal routes for young male

panthers seeking their own territories

