



What Congress Wants, Congress Gets: Seminole Sovereignty and Everglades at Risk

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Research Question

How can the Seminole Tribe of Florida use tribal primacy to restore the Everglades & Cultural Sovereignty?
Many researchers indicate that tribal governments exercising tribal primacy over natural resources have a higher chance of environmental control, tribal sovereignty, and policy decisions. The Seminoles and the State of Florida strive for the same result: restoration of the Everglades, but lack of cooperation and cultural acknowledgment creates hurdles for united efforts. Obtaining tribal primacy through the PWSS Act can assist in restoring the health of the Everglades and the sovereignty rights of the Seminoles. **TRIBAL PRIMACY: Power to implement law and enforce environmental regulations upon Tribal jurisdiction.**



Introduction

The Florida Everglades are home to several endangered species, including the Florida panther. The Seminole Tribe of Florida, like the Florida panther, is dependent on the health of the Everglades. Research seeks to determine if enforcement of environmental regulations under tribal primacy can regulate and restore:

- Tribal & Cultural Sovereignty
- Tribal-to-Government Agency Relationship
- Higher Water Quality Standards



Figure 1: Traditional Seminole home (Chickee).

Literature Review

Recognizing the positive impact of tribal primacy is critical. Tribes that enforce environmental regulations on tribal land can exercise sovereignty while also protecting tribal land and culture. Using tribal primacy to structure high environmental health and policy standards can benefit the tribe's political and ecological needs (Fausett 1989, p. 584). Furthermore, tribal primacy strengthens their legal position if the tribe determines that government practices violate tribal guidelines (Crotty 1987, p. 64). My research can assist tribal communities in safeguarding their lands and cultural traditions. The Seminole Tribe of Florida may secure these rights by obtaining tribal primacy under the Public Water System Supervision Act. United restoration efforts of the Everglades have been hindered by the South Florida Water Management District's refusal to recognize the Seminole's sovereignty and right to self-determination.

Methods

Secondary data was gathered through tribes that have acquired tribal primacy over natural resources within Tribal jurisdiction in my research. To assess the success of receiving Tribal environmental primacy, I will analyze various case studies of Tribal communities with Tribal primacy compared to tribes that do not have primacy. The successful scope of tribal environmental primacy includes preserving traditional practices, improved water quality, and efficient government-to-government relationships. Additionally, I gathered data of the 1995 Everglades' land cover change within the primary panther range. Due to infrastructure development, the panther encountered habitat loss and increased water pollution. The Florida panther populations are declining rapidly due to the hazardous impacts of infrastructure development in the Everglades. Restoring the health of the Everglades starts with including the endangered species, watersheds, wildlife, and plant life in the decision-making process. The Seminole traditional ecological knowledge systems defend non-humans. Achieving Tribal primacy through the Public Water System Supervision Act can aid in restoring the Everglades and the lives impacted.

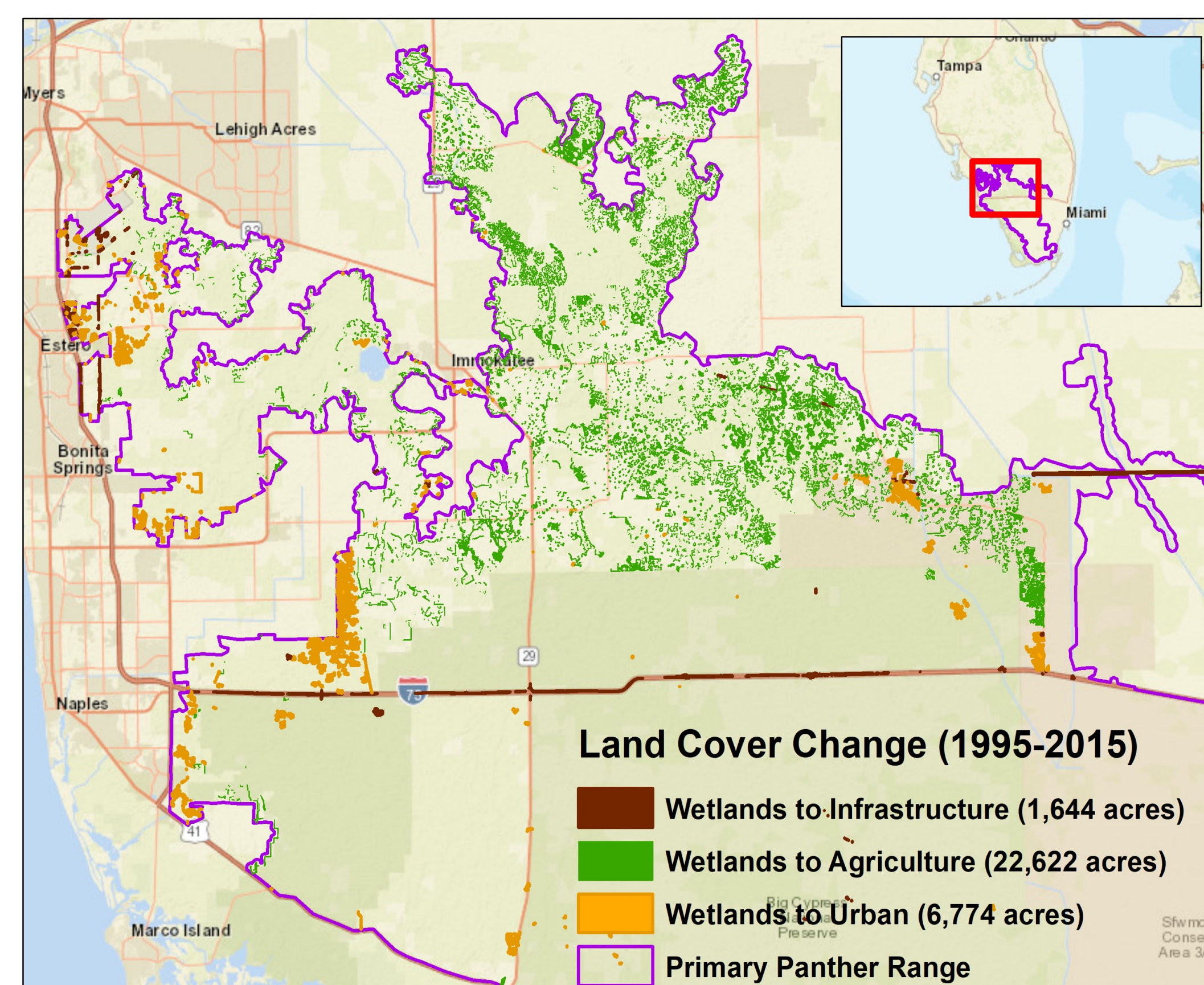
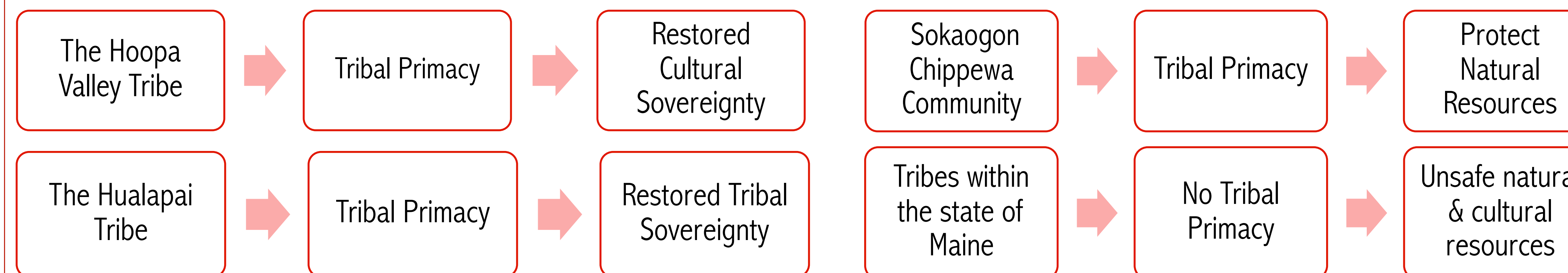


Figure 2: (1995-2015) Land cover change within the primary panther range. (Created by Josh Meisel)

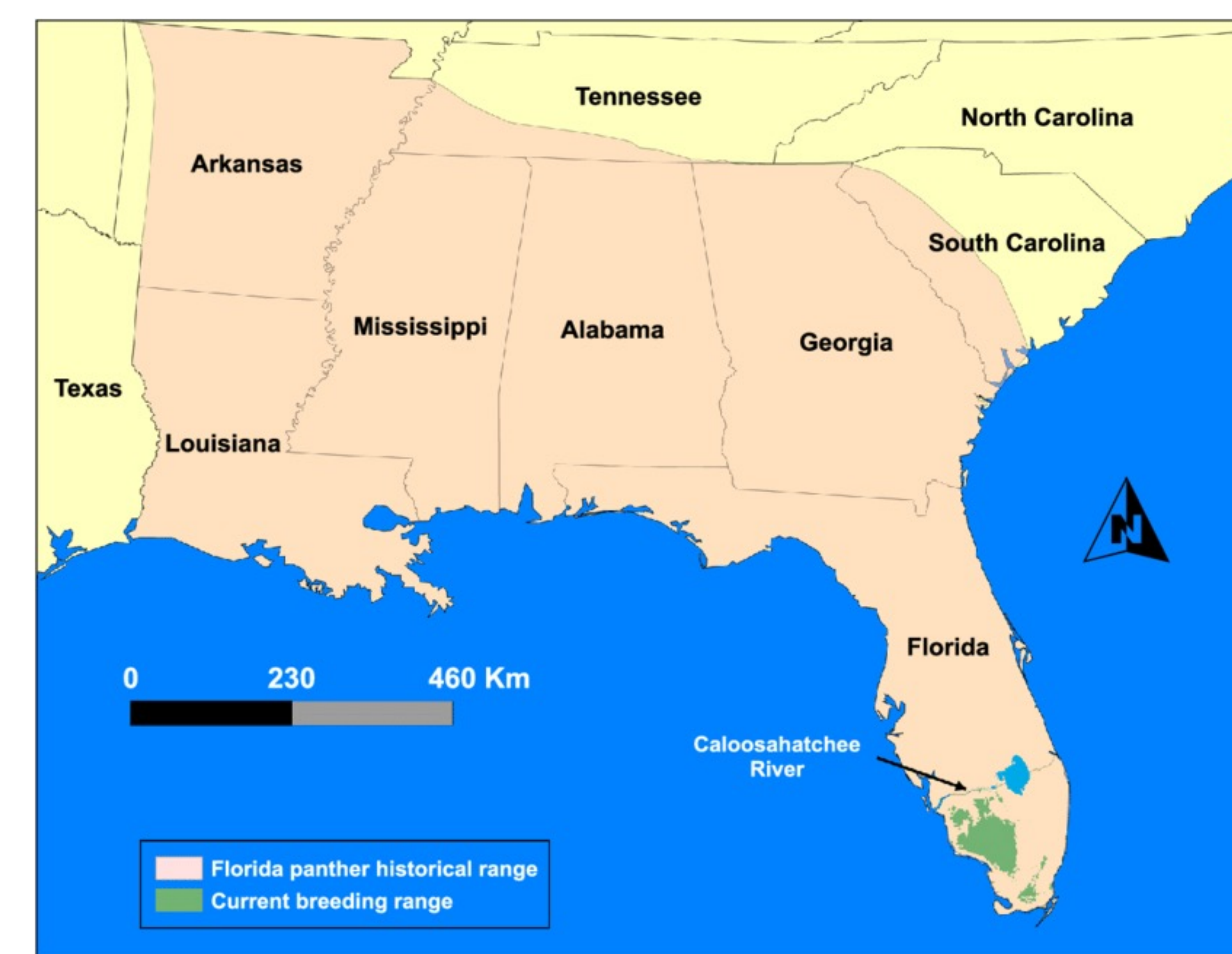


Figure 3: Historical panther range compared to current range

Cultural Significance: Florida Panther

The Seminole tribe and the creation story regard the Florida Panther as sacred. The Panther was one of the Creator's favorite animals; the Panther demonstrates patience and strength. In Creator's perception, the Panther was the perfect animal to be the first to walk on Earth. The Panther Clan is the largest clan system in the Seminole Tribe today. Unfortunately, the Panther's patience and strength are at risk due to ongoing climate crises and habitat loss.

"Your Clan [Panther] will have the knowledge for making laws and for making the medicine which heals," Creator told Panther. "You, the Panther, will be in possession of all knowledge of different things. The Panther will have the power to heal different ailments and to enhance mental powers." (Seminole Tribe, "Legends")



Figure 4: Florida Panther (*Puma concolor coryi*)

Recommendations

Research shows the importance of primacy status as every agency, state, and tribal organization has different ideas of restoring and sustaining the environment. My research proposal seeks to recommend tribal primacy to protect and restore the non-human lives, Seminole community, and the people who depend on the health of the Everglades. Seminole values believe the restoration of the Everglades starts with including the non-humans in the decision-making process when it comes to policy and permit approval. Utilizing tribal primacy can protect natural & cultural resources, improve government-to-government relationships (Haider & Teodoro, 2020, p. 08).

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