



May 12, 2022

The Honorable Raul Grijalva, Chairman
House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bruce Westerman, Ranking Member
House Natural Resources Committee
1329 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Grijalva and Ranking Member Westerman:

We write in support of the Big Cat Public Safety Act, H.R. 263, and submit these comments to supplement the record you'll create for your May 12th hearing. The bipartisan measure now has 257 House cosponsors, including more than 50 Republicans – double the number of Republicans it had in the previous Congress. It is supported by the National Sheriff's Association, Fraternal Order of Police, Association of Zoos and Aquariums, and every major animal protection group in America, while no reputable or major organizations oppose it to our knowledge.

As you know, the measure passed the House on suspension in December 2020, but with little time left in the Congress, the Senate failed to act. Today, this legislation has more cosponsors from both sides of the aisle than any other animal protection measure introduced in the House in the 117th Congress.

The bill corrects a technical problem with the Captive Wildlife Safety Act that passed both the House and Senate two decades ago and was signed into law by President George W. Bush. The legislation goes further by banning possession of big cats for the pet trade and ending the practice of "cub petting." It is crafted to stem the tide of breeding of big cats that put the animals and people at risk for no compelling reason and for no major business or revenue-generation enterprise. Nobody who acquires a big cat as a pet keeps them for their natural lifetime; they are too big and powerful, too difficult to handle, and expensive to keep. Inevitably, they pass on the problem to the larger community.

Commercial cub petting is a business with a wide range of collateral effects. Cats typically can be used for this purpose for only a couple of months before growing too large to handle. Just weeks after their first use, the cubs are no longer valuable and a business liability; they are

typically sold or discarded, often placing an unfunded mandate on dozens of big-cat sanctuaries who take in the cats and then are saddled with the idea of raising up to \$1 million per cat to care for the animal over his or her life. Meanwhile, operators of cub-petting attractions continue to breed more cats, perpetuating the cycle.

There's also great danger in the potential intentional or inadvertent release or escape of big cats. Such a release occurred in 2011 in Zanesville, Ohio, case where a mentally troubled owner released 50 exotic animals, mostly big cats, into the community. County Sheriff Matt Lutz and his deputies were forced to make the horrific choice: to hunt down the animals or to risk a chance encounter with a child or adult and a large, powerful, frightened carnivore. His accounts of what transpired are wrenching, and these problems preventable with sound national policies to keep these animals in the wild or at an accredited or licensed zoo or rescue operation. By failing to act on this measure, the Congress puts our brave law enforcement agents and first responders in harm's way; none of them are trained or equipped to confront a big cat guarding a drug den, responding to a fire, and racing toward a school when there is a report of a lion or tiger on the loose. In the past year, three tigers have escaped in Texas alone, forcing law enforcement to address a crisis of our own making.

Not only do the trade and exploitation of big cats create unfunded mandates for rescues and potential hazards for humans, these innocent creatures live miserable lives. The cubs are taken from their mothers at birth, deprived of the proper nutrition found only in mothers' milk, denied sleep while being handled for hours on end, and physically punished for exhibiting their natural behaviors.

Some forms of animal exploitation have lasted for centuries. But in the 21st, we can close out this practice of exploiting animals for commercial cub-petting, impulse acquisition, and ego gratification. We ask that you report the measure out of Committee and press the House Leadership for a swift vote on the House floor. The chamber closest to the American people should take action on such this broadly supported measure.

All the best,



Wayne Pacelle
President
Center for a Humane Economy



Marty Irby
Executive Director
Animal Wellness Action



Annie Harvilicz, D.V.M
President
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