

Animal Welfare Coalition Applauds Reintroduction of “Big Cat Public Safety Act” to Prohibit Private Ownership of Dangerous Big Cats



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Washington D.C.

Big Cat Rescue, Born Free USA, the International Fund for Animal Welfare, The Humane Society of the United States and the Humane Society Legislative Fund applaud U.S. Representatives Jeff Denham (R-CA), Walter Jones (R-NC), and Niki Tsongas (D-MA) for introducing the Big Cat Public Safety Act. The bill would advance animal welfare and protect

public safety by prohibiting possession and breeding of tigers, lions, leopards and other big cat species by private individuals and unqualified exhibitors.

This bill would strengthen the Captive Wildlife Safety Act, the existing federal law passed unanimously in 2003, by closing the loopholes that allow private possession of big cats by unqualified individuals. Existing owners that do not qualify for an exemption may keep the big cats they currently possess so long as they notify the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The bill provides for reasonable exemptions for wildlife sanctuaries and exhibitors licensed by the United States Department of Agriculture that meet basic standards intended to protect the public and the animals.

According to Kate Dylewsky, program associate at Born Free USA, “This common sense and narrowly-crafted bill is an urgently-needed solution to the problem of big cats kept in unsafe and abusive situations around the country. Thousands of big cats are currently owned as pets or maintained in ill-equipped roadside zoos. These poorly regulated facilities — with animals kept in basements, cement pits, or in backyards — pose a severe risk to the safety of people in surrounding communities, as well as the welfare of the cats themselves.”

Nicole Paquette, vice president of wildlife for The Humane Society of the United States, said, “Tigers, lions, and other big cats should not be kept in peoples’ homes or backyards. In order to protect the public, there needs to be strong oversight of these private owners who, in most cases, do not have the expertise needed to properly care for these animals in captivity. Some states have little to no laws regarding the keeping of big cats and it’s time for a uniform federal law that ends this dangerous industry once and for all.”

Carson Barylak, campaigns officer at the International Fund for Animal Welfare, noted that “there are now more tigers in private hands in the U.S. than remain in the wild, and nearly all of them are denied proper veterinary care, nutrition and enrichment.”

Moreover, “law enforcement officers and other first responders — including those who have encountered these deadly animals in the course of their work — have joined animal rescue and conservation advocates in supporting the Big Cat Public Safety Act. Emergency officials and the communities that they protect, much like the big cats themselves, should not be placed in harm’s way by a private owner’s irresponsible decision to keep big cats.”

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Relying on accredited sanctuaries to take in unwanted and usually neglected big cats is not a viable solution," said Carole Baskin, founder and CEO of Big Cat Rescue. "When individuals foolishly acquire big cats as pets or exploit them in entertainment businesses, the cats often suffer in deplorable conditions with inadequate nutrition and veterinary care for many years. Then when owners realize they are not equipped to take care of a big cat or no longer want them, the burden to house and care for these big cats falls upon sanctuaries. This is not the solution; it does not address the inhumane treatment of the cats nor the public safety issues."

Facts:

- There have been more than 700 dangerous incidents in the U.S. involving tigers, lions, and cougars, including hundreds of human injuries, maulings and deaths. In many cases, the animals were shot and killed, often by first responders who are not trained to deal with these situations. The most dramatic example was an October 2011 incident in Zanesville, Ohio, in which a private exotic animal owner released 38 big cats near a populated area, requiring law enforcement to kill the cats — and risk their own lives — for the sake of public safety.
- Big cats are wild animals and suffer when kept as pets. They are often purchased as babies, and private owners typically are not able to manage them once they're fully grown. Consequently, the animals are frequently left to languish in grossly substandard conditions and often deprived of sufficient space, adequate veterinary care, a nutritious diet and enrichment.
- It is standard procedure for some roadside zoos to separate babies from their mothers so they can charge the public to pet and play with the cubs. This is an inhumane and unhealthy practice that can cause lifelong physical and psychological problems — or even death — for the cubs. Young cats, who very quickly outgrow their usefulness in the cub handling industry, end up warehoused at substandard "zoos," sold into the exotic pet trade or possibly even killed and sold for parts — all while a vicious cycle of constant breeding churns out more babies to be exploited.

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Big Cat Rescue is one of the largest accredited sanctuaries in the world devoted to rescuing and providing a permanent home for abused and abandoned exotic cats. Located in Tampa, Fla., Big Cat Rescue is home to approximately 80 exotic cats, most of whom were abandoned by owners who mistakenly thought they made good pets, abused, seized by authorities, orphaned or retired from performing acts. The sanctuary's dual mission is to provide the best possible home for the cats in our care and to educate the public about the plight of big cats in captivity and in the wild.

www.BigCatRescue.org

Born Free USA is a global leader in animal welfare and wildlife conservation. Through litigation, legislation, and public education, Born Free USA leads vital campaigns against animals in entertainment, exotic "pets," trapping and fur, and the destructive international wildlife trade. Born Free USA brings to America the message of "compassionate conservation": the vision of the U.K.-based Born Free Foundation, established in 1984 by Bill Travers and Virginia McKenna, stars of the iconic film *Born Free*, along with their son, Will Travers. Born Free's mission is to end suffering of wild animals in captivity, conserve threatened and endangered species, and encourage compassionate conservation globally. More at www.bornfreeusa.org, www.twitter.com/bornfreeusa, and www.facebook.com/bornfreeusa.

The Humane Society Legislative Fund is a social welfare organization incorporated under section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code and formed in 2004 as a separate lobbying affiliate of The Humane Society of the United States. The HSLF works to pass animal protection laws at the state and federal level, to educate the public about animal protection issues, and to support humane candidates for office. On the web at hslf.org.

The Humane Society of the United States is the nation's largest animal protection organization, rated *most effective* by our peers. For 60 years, we have celebrated the protection of all animals and confronted all forms of cruelty. We are the nation's largest provider of *hands-on services* for animals, caring for more than 100,000 animals each year, and we prevent cruelty to millions more through our *advocacy campaigns*. Read more about our 60 years of *transformational change* for animals and people.

HumaneSociety.org

IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare): Founded in 1969, IFAW rescues and protects animals around the world. With projects in more than 40 countries, IFAW rescues individual animals, works to prevent cruelty to animals, and advocates for the protection of wildlife and habitats. For more information, visit www.ifaw.org. Follow us on social @action4ifaw and Facebook/IFAW.

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