



THE WILDCAT SANCTUARY



Chair Torrey Westrom and Committee Members
Senate Agriculture and Rural Development Finance and Policy Committee
95 University Avenue W. Minnesota Senate Bldg., Room 3201
St. Paul, MN 55155

I'm worried Tiger King could be moving to Minnesota. **Please oppose SF 4280/HF 4166.**

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak up for our existing law. My goal is to keep the state as safe as it has been since 2005 when the Regulated Animal Law was put in place.

A ZAA exemption has much broader implications than simply one local zoo adding a few tigers to exhibit. A ZAA exemption means any existing or new private facility, local zoo, or private menagerie in the entire state could potentially acquire, house, breed and sell an unlimited number of dangerous big cats, bears, and primates.

After 20 years running an accredited sanctuary and being immersed in the rescue of displaced big cats, I have to ask myself why this was brought forward when our law already provides a path for local zoos to possess regulated animals?

Is changing a state law easier than AZA accreditation? I don't think so. But does it make our law weaker? In my opinion, absolutely.

- ZAA insists that their standards are the same as AZA. **Then why, when a zoo fails AZA accreditation, does ZAA accredit them?** The truth is because their standards are not the same.
- ZAA put out a short 8-page comparison of their standards vs. AZA's. But in fact, there are 118 pages of AZA standards, many that ZAA doesn't include.
- It wasn't even until the spring of 2020 (**right before *Tiger King* on Netflix aired and exposed the harsh realities of the big cat overbreeding for lucrative cub petting and public photo opportunities**) that ZAA ended cub petting by their members. One of the characters featured on Tiger King, Doc Antle owns Myrtle Beach Safari, has bred hundreds of big cats, uses the cubs for public handling, was ZAA-accredited until shortly before Tiger King aired, and has since been **indicted by the Attorney General of Virginia for wildlife trafficking and cruelty to animals**. US Fish & Wildlife Service denied application to export and re-import 18 tigers to and from Mexico citing, among other things, substandard conditions.
- Other states and townships have wrestled with this same exemption request and ultimately chose to deny a ZAA exemption for public safety reasons. For example, **California, Texas, Louisiana, Michigan, and Clark County, Nevada, rejected heavy lobbying efforts by ZAA**. In Michigan, Governor Rick Snyder rejected efforts to exempt ZAA from the law, stating that doing so "could lead to gaps in public health protection and animal welfare."
- The ZAA stated that they couldn't be included in 2005 since they were not yet an entity. The truth is that the ZAA was formed in 2005. And at that time, the ZAA and/or its previous



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incarnations, would not have been approved for exemption because they certified facilities that **bred, sold big cats, bears and primates to private menageries and individuals, and allowed public photo experiences with big cats, bears and primates.** All, of course, was in direct conflict with the 2005 bill.

- It's true that our law exempts other entities like traveling circuses and sanctuaries. As one of the people who worked on the bill in 2005, I can tell you that traveling exhibits were a concession that was made since the law was intended to **be focused on limiting possession of wild animals.** Sanctuaries do not buy, breed, trade or sell animals. Similar to a humane society for companion animals, we exist to pick up the pieces when breeders and exhibitors sell dangerous animals to the private sector or facilities that violate USDA licenses.
- There seems to be a misconception that AZA accreditation is only achievable by big, publicly funded zoos. That is not the case. In fact, **AZA accredits smalls private zoos** such as 5-acre Cosley Zoo in Illinois, 3-acre Happy Hollow Park and Zoo in California, privately-owned 4-acre Clyde Peeling's Reptiland in Pennsylvania, just to name a few. They also offer a mentor program to help zoos achieve accreditation.

I understand why local zoos want to be able to offer their guests a chance to see an exotic animal. It's very exciting. But it's our responsibility to make sure that it's always safe and not contributing to the bigger trade in wild animals.

Allowing the ZAA exemption would put us where we were before the 2005 law, where local authorities were strapped with removing big cats, bears and primates after public safety threats occurred in so many facilities.

Thank you for your consideration,

Tammy Thies
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