



## THE WILDCAT SANCTUARY



Could Tiger King be moving to Minnesota? **Please oppose Senate File 4019 A-1 DE Amendment, exempting ZAA facilities is in Article 3, Section 15.**

I am the founder of The Wildcat Sanctuary in Sandstone, MN. We are accredited by the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries and licensed by the United States Department of Agriculture. We do not buy, breed, trade or sell animals and are a no-contact facility. The sanctuary was founded in 1999 and currently home to over 120 wild cat residents, most that have been former “pets” or seized by local and federal authorities from closed or substandard facilities.

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.

Exempting facilities accredited by the Zoological Association of America 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.**

Just as I feared, a 2nd local zoo is already seeking ZAA status in anticipation of this exemption becoming law which would allow them to have an unlimited numbers of big cats, bears and primates.

**Minnesota already has a proven path for zoos to house regulated animals through AZA accreditation which has the highest of standards.** A proposed ZAA exemption like this is often used as a veil to hide the intent, buy, breed, and sell dangerous animals behind the scenes, which ultimately contributes to the surplus of wild animals who often find their way into the pet trade or substandard facilities, posing a public safety risk.

In fact, we at The Wildcat Sanctuary have surplus tigers that a ZAA facility sent ~~through~~ to a Colorado facility that had years of USDA critical safety and animal welfare violations. Luckily, the facility was closed, and 70 big cats and bears were sent to reputable sanctuaries.

The facts speak for themselves.

- ZAA insists that their standards are the same as AZA. **But often facilities that lose or fail to meet AZA critical standards promptly apply for and receive ZAA accreditation.**
- ZAA’s standards are 33 pages long. AZA’s 2022 standards are 118 pages long. **AZA standards are more thorough, exacting, and demanding than the ZAA standards.** This is demonstrated in the standards themselves and in the different memberships of the two organizations.
- It wasn’t until right before the Netflix series Tiger King aired featuring Doc Antle, a ZAA accredited exhibitor who excessively breeds big cats and allows cub petting, that the ZAA revised its policy to prohibit cub petting. Doc Antle, who has won awards from ZAA, has since



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been **indicted by the Attorney General of Virginia for wildlife trafficking and cruelty to animals**. ZAA still opposes a federal bill that would ban cub petting and since they are constantly reactively changing their standards, we are unsure whether they intend to maintain this policy long term.

- It isn't about a small vs. big, rural vs. urban. It's about high-quality standards. Enforcing high standards for apex predators through a proven track record of AZA policies vs. new promises from the ZAA.
  - Rural areas do not have the resources to respond to emergencies such as an escaped tiger and therefore high standards outlined by the AZA are extremely important.
  - AZA is affordable. Annual membership is \$8,000. A purchased tiger cub begins at \$6,000 and up. Does that mean they can afford to buy a big cat, but not follow guidelines to ensure proper care and safety?
  - AZA is achievable by small zoos. The cost is NOT prohibitive. Facilities housing dangerous animals should only do so if they have appropriate funding for housing, safety equipment, emergency response plans, safe evacuation, vet care, liability insurance, more.
  - AZA accreditation opens up new revenue streams through funders and grantors and helps ensure financial stability to grow their business.
- **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.
- Other states and townships chose to deny a ZAA exemption for animal welfare and public safety reasons. For example, **Texas, Louisiana, Michigan, California 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."
- Minnesota law does exempts other entities like traveling circuses and sanctuaries since the law was intended to **be focused on limiting possession of wild animals**. Sanctuaries do not buy, breed, trade or sell animals. The goal and the positive outcome of the 2005 law was to decrease the breeding, selling and possession of big cats, bears in primates in MN since this surplus feeds private possession and substandard facilities.

Allowing the ZAA exemption would put us where we were before the 2005 law. Local authorities will be responsible for intervening with big cats, bears and primates as the opportunity for public safety threats presents itself once again under the looser restrictions of the ZAA.

Thank you for your consideration,



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