

# Big Cat Public Safety Act on Deck for Floor Vote in U.S. House This Week

*It is finally our legislative moment to put the "Tiger King" sideshow aside and do something lasting to prevent the ongoing exploitation of captive big cats.*

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EINPresswire.com/ -- The following was written by Wayne Pacelle, President of [Animal Wellness Action](#):



A big cat in captivity.

In a nation driven indoors last spring by COVID-19, "Tiger King" became a home-viewing rage. But now, six months after Netflix released the episodes for binge-watching – with the producers creating a bogus equivalency between the antagonists in the debate over animals kept in roadside zoos – there's much that's been clarified about the big-cat owners.

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*Wayne Pacelle*

The series ended with Joe Maldonado – aka “Joe Exotic” – staring out at us from federal prison after convicted in a murder-for-hire scheme and a tiger-killing spree. But what's new is that Joe's exotic-animal brethren, also featured in the series, may be close on his heels when it comes to trouble with the law. Indiana's Tim Stark and South Carolina's “Doc” Antle are now facing criminal charges for mistreatment of animals, while Joe's business partner, Jeff Lowe, faces civil charges from the U.S.

Department of Justice for his own alleged animal violations.

The courtroom proceedings in those cases are likely to give us a clear-eyed view of the misfortune, misery, and violence that befall animals thrust into the exotic-animal trade.

The U.S. House of Representatives should take note of those facts as it takes up the Big Cat Public Safety Act (BCPSA), H.R. 1380, later this week. That bill, backed by Reps. Mike Quigley, D-Ill., Brian Fitzpatrick, R-Pa., Mike Garcia, R-Calif., Raul Grijalva, D-Ariz., and 227 additional House cosponsors, seeks to stop the trade in big cats as pets, including breeding the animals for cub-

petting opportunities by paying customers.

Here's our legislative moment to put the "Tiger King" sideshow aside and do something lasting to prevent the ongoing exploitation of captive big cats.

### ZAA Withdrawal of Opposition Clears Path for Big Cats Bill

H.R. 1380 is positioned for action now that the single notable organization opposing the measure has in recent weeks withdrawn its opposition. That group is the Zoological Association of America (ZAA), a relatively new zoo and aquarium consortium of about 60 institutions. Before "Tiger King," a handful of Republican lawmakers worked to stall the bill by creating one more hyped-up blood feud — between ZAA and the much more established AZA. That latter group is the American Zoo and Aquarium Association, which has long supported H.R. 1380. "Congress shouldn't pick sides," went the argument from the bill's small coterie of critics.

Now that debate is moot, with ZAA having surveyed its 60 or so members and found that 59 of them do not favor public interactions with big cats and other dangerous carnivores. We applaud ZAA for revising its standards of accreditation to disallow public contact with powerful predators, even seemingly harmless juvenile animals.

Animal welfare groups and law enforcement agencies know all too well the fate of animals conscripted into this trade. Sheriffs and other first responders do not want to confront a 350-pound tiger when they rush in to stop a fire, attend to medical injuries or interrupt a domestic dispute.

Not only are these roadside zoos a threat to those who enter its confines, but they also endanger surrounding communities. The image I remember best from "Tiger King" was of a forbidding, endlessly tall and churning tornado approaching the Greater Wynnewood Exotic Animal Park, with its 100-plus captive tigers. Had the tornado swallowed up the ramshackle park, it might have broken down barriers and allowed dozens of tigers to escape and gambol through the town.

A decade earlier, another emotionally troubled exotic animal owner in Zanesville, Ohio released 50 exotic animals, including grizzly bears, wolves, and big cats, into the community just before dusk. Sheriffs' deputies were ordered to shoot the animals for public safety purposes.

Pick your cause for a dangerous-animals-at-large scenario: Tornado, derecho, troubled owner, vandal, disgruntled employee cutting a hole in a fence. Any one of them might trigger a Zanesville-like incident to recur at any one of the facilities with a one or more captive carnivores and a deficit of proper protocols and sound housing.

And for what? So someone can pet a tiger cub for 10 minutes and the roadside zoo owner can pocket the fee for this form of exploitation?

## Each Discarded Big Cat May Cost A Million Dollars to a Sanctuary

Cub petting as a business strategy lasts just a few months for each animal. They are too big to handle after that, and that's why the operators must keep breeding tigers and lions to keep a fresh supply in the pipeline.

Then, an unethical owner may kill the tiger for the bone trade, perhaps as Joe Exotic did, or confine the animal in a shoddy, filthy enclosure as an addition to their collection. Or the big cat may be traded before he or she is discarded through some other channel. If the animal survives that process, the cat may then be turned over to an animal welfare group. That group then has an enormous liability on its hands, needing to build a shelter big enough and strong enough to contain one of the world's largest land carnivores, hire caretakers, enlist an exotic animal veterinarian, and fundraising to care for the cat for up to two decades.

Each tiger or lion thrust into that world costs an animal welfare group as much as a million dollars over the course of the animal's lifetime.

This is an unfunded mandate on a small, non-profit business (that's what rescue organizations are). So why not solve the problem on the front end and stop people from putting juvenile tigers and lions into this dangerous and cruel situation in the first place?

Opponents can no longer hide behind any legitimate organization. Only a shrinking band of roadside zoos object to the bill.

They cannot rely on conservation arguments, because no reputable advocate for the species believes that excessive breeding of animals of unknown genetic background helps restore tigers or lions in their habitats thousands of miles away.

Where in this whole cycle of abuse and unethical business practices is anyone who deserves the title of "responsible business owner?" These "business owners" are charlatans, their conservation arguments hocus pocus, their carnival barking just a distraction. Their legacy is one of cruelty, chaos, and cost-transference to the rest of society.

Let's remember what happens in their first few months of life for the animals: 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.

Kudos to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other House leaders for bringing the bill to the floor later this week. Time for advocates to give a lion's roar in favor of the bill.

Please [take action](#) by asking your legislators to help the big cats.

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