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Program Manager

The Big Cat Sanctuary Alliance (BCSA) is a non-profit organization that works to end the private ownership and commercial exploitation of big cats and other wild cats, while providing expert resources to its sanctuary members aimed at improving the health and welfare of rescued captive wild cats.

January 5, 2022

Assembly Committee on State Affairs
Wisconsin State Capitol
2 East Main Street
Madison, Wisconsin 53702

Re: Oppose AB 341: Relating to captive wildlife in facilities holding a U.S. Department of Agriculture exhibitor license

Dear Chair Swearingen and Members of the Assembly Committee on State Affairs:

On behalf of the Big Cat Sanctuary Alliance (BCSA), whose membership is comprised of reputable sanctuary operators and highly regarded national and international partner organizations, we urge you to oppose AB 341: Relating to captive wildlife in facilities holding a U.S. Department of Agriculture exhibitor license.

The proposal for this permit raises serious public safety and animal welfare concerns, including the following:

This proposed bill is a step backward for animal welfare.

This bill as proposed would remove the state licensing and thus the high standards set by the Wisconsin DNR for captive wildlife in facilities within the state. The reliance of the state on standards and inspection by the USDA alone is a troubling step backward for ensuring animal welfare standards are met. The USDA currently has just over 100 inspectors responsible for overseeing 10,000 plus licensed facilities in the United States.

In addition, the state pen requirements for cougar, bobcat, lynx, and many other species on exhibit would be removed. These requirements are vital to ensuring the health and welfare of these species, and the current WI DNR standards that would be removed greatly exceed those of the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) that the USDA upholds for many species.

Removing state licensing would increase public safety risks.

State standards for captive wildlife facilities also include enhanced pen requirements for public safety. The fencing heights and pen tops required for some species ensure that dangerous captive wildlife is properly contained. With the removal of the state level standards, the requirement for reporting concerns with containment to the DNR would also be discontinued. Any concerns would be reported to the USDA only and due to their limited number of inspectors, the response time would be greatly delayed. In addition, the DNR would no longer be able to confiscate captive wildlife from unsafe conditions nor assist in the recapture of escaped animals. The first responders and

animal shelters that these responsibilities would then fall upon are not properly trained or equipped to handle such dangerous situations.

This bill would move Wisconsin backwards at a time when many states are strengthening their captive wildlife laws and licensing.

The BCSA has seen an increase in recently proposed legislation across the country aimed at strengthening state laws and licensing of captive wildlife facilities. AB 341 would move Wisconsin in the opposite direction. Particularly with dangerous captive wildlife, such as tigers, lions, cougars, and other big cat species, the movement in legislation has been to strengthen requirements and penalties in an attempt to improve animal welfare and enhance public safety. However, the proposed bill would greatly reduce the requirements for facilities housing captive wildlife in Wisconsin, while simultaneously limiting the entities able to inspect and enforce the requirements. As an alliance of true sanctuaries housing captive wildlife, we welcome the strengthening of requirements for our facilities' animal welfare and safety measures. Facilities with animal welfare and public safety as priorities should welcome the strengthening of laws relating to requirements for private owners of captive animals, not the opposite.

Based on serious public safety and animal welfare concerns, we strongly urge you to oppose AB 341.

Sincerely,



Kathy Blachowski
Program Manager, Big Cat Sanctuary Alliance

BCSA Sanctuary Members

Big Cat Rescue
Black Pine Animal Sanctuary
Carolina Tiger Rescue
Cedarhill Animal Sanctuary
Cleveland Amory Black Beauty Ranch
Crown Ridge Tiger Sanctuary
Elmira's Wildlife Sanctuary
Forest Animal Rescue

Keepers of the Wild
Lions, Tigers and Bears
Performing Animal Welfare Society
PrideRock Wildlife Refuge
Safe Haven Wildlife Rescue
The Wildcat Sanctuary
Turpentine Creek Wildlife Refuge
Wildcat Ridge Sanctuary

BCSA Partner Members

AAP Primadomus
Animal Legal Defense Fund
Bears, Etc.
Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries
International Fund for Animal Welfare
The Humane Society of the United States
Tigers in America
World Animal Protection