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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.

December 22, 2021

Board of County Commissioners
Clark County
500 S. Grand Central Pkwy.
Las Vegas, Nevada 89155

Re: Oppose UC-21-0645-World Buddhism Association Headquarters' Permit

Dear Commissioners:

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 deny the proposed permit for a recreational facility that involves tigers at the World Buddhism Association Headquarters' property.

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

Proposed fencing specifications are unsafe.

Tigers are very powerful and agile animals capable of jumping heights well over 10 feet, making the proposed fence heights inadequate. In 2007, a tiger at the San Francisco Zoo escaped an enclosure with a 12.5-foot concrete wall, killing one person and injuring two others. Claw marks were found at the top of the wall. Best practices at the time suggested a minimum fence height of 16.4 feet – a full 6.4 feet higher than the proposed fence height in this permit application.

Aside from the tigers' cages (referred to as the "tiger sanctuary"), the highest fence is 10-foot tall, topped with another foot of barbed wire. Not only is it too low, but also a full-grown tiger could easily climb a fence made of wood. There is no guarantee that barbed wire would stop a tiger; it also could cause the animal grievous bodily harm.

Two other fences – one surrounding the proposed recreational facility and the other around the larger property – are even lower, at only six feet. An escaped tiger could easily scale these fences, allowing access to the surrounding community.

Transport plans to and from the performance tent lack detail.

The risk of escape is elevated during transport of the tigers from their enclosures to the performance tent and back. The BCSA agrees with the assessment by Clark County Animal Control that the applicant would need a detailed transport plan and structures in place including transport doors, proper transport cages, and a double door safety system on the primary enclosures. If a tiger were to escape during transport, the proposed fencing surrounding the recreational area would not contain the cat.

Direct contact with a tiger is extremely hazardous.

There is no foolproof way to constrain a predator as large and powerful as a tiger. The cats may be captive born and hand raised but they are not domesticated animals. Big cats retain their wild instincts and can attack suddenly and without warning, as was seen when a 400-pound, 7-foot long white tiger attacked and critically injured illusionist Roy Horn in front of hundreds of people. Siegfried and Roy had performed thousands of shows before that incident. All BCSA members manage their tigers in “protected contact.” They do not share the same space with or come into direct contact with the animals. This protects caregivers and the cats.

The health and well-being of the tigers may be adversely affected at this location.

Tigers may be trained to perform, but they remain wild animals with distinctive needs. There is no evidence to suggest that those needs can be met in the proposed facility, which would lack space and complexity. Furthermore, transport and introduction to a new environment are known stressors for big cats, as are loud sounds and crowds. This puts the cats at risk of disease and/or abnormal behaviors. The latter may include repetitive pacing, which is widely recognized as a sign of poor welfare. Another very important concern is exposure to extreme temperatures during the region’s scorching hot summers. The proposed mitigations may not be effective in such extremes, putting the tigers’ lives at risk. Wild animals often do not show signs of illness until it is too late.

Applicant uses the word “sanctuary” to mislead the Commissioners and the public.

The BCSA takes issue with the fact that the applicant refers to the animals’ cages as a “tiger sanctuary.” A true sanctuary does not commercially exploit its animals, and direct contact with big cats of any age is not allowed. True sanctuaries provide lifelong care for their animal residents, who are not made to travel or perform. Calling the proposed tiger cages a “sanctuary” is false advertising, meant to deceive unsuspecting tourists who may have genuine concerns about tiger exploitation and welfare.

Using tigers as props serves no educational or conservation purpose.

Tiger acts simply send the wrong message about this highly endangered species. Published research suggests that seeing wild animals in an entertainment setting can actually impair conservation efforts. It may also increase the likelihood that someone will consider a wild animal to be appealing as a pet, even though these animals are extremely dangerous.

Based on serious public safety and animal welfare concerns, we strongly urge you to deny the proposed permit.

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