



## THE WILDCAT SANCTUARY



January 8, 2016

To: Kansas House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

Re: Opposition to the passage of SB 97

It's disturbing to see a bill before Kansas legislators that would overturn the positive steps made when Haley Hilderbrand tragically lost her life to a tiger there in 2005. Few will forget the heart wrenching testimony of her family as they urged Kansas to pass tougher regulations – and state legislators did. Kansas took the responsible step of safeguarding the public and tightening regulations about public interaction with wild cats and set an example many states have followed.

New York recently joined Kansas, Mississippi, and Arizona in passing a law banning direct physical interaction between people and big cats. Federal legislation is being considered, with many co-sponsors of a bill before Congress to ban public contact with big cats. The USDA is proactively looking at the issue as this has become a nationwide problem. The bill Kansas is currently considering would take a huge step in the opposite direction in terms of conservation, education, and public safety.



This proposed bill will encourage rampant overbreeding of big cats who will, ultimately, have no place to go. The zoos allowed to host public interaction with big cats have a finite amount of exhibit space. With a short shelf life for using cats for interaction sessions (between 10 – 40 pounds), zoos will breed over and over again to supply these opportunities. Where will all these big cats end up? That is the bigger question - and who will be left to deal with supporting these cats for the 20+ years they will live?

There is no evidence that these petting sessions save endangered species. Quite the opposite. It teaches the general public that wildlife is to be exploited, bred and disposed of. The Wildcat Sanctuary's Facebook page has over 2.2 million fans and every single commenter that shares their experience of petting a wild cat cub regrets it.

The general public is becoming more astute, realizing petting a cub means sentencing that cat to life in a cage. For that one selfish “memorable” moment, the cats pay with their lives. Animal welfare is becoming more important in our society, as we've seen this week when Ringling announced they will no longer transport elephants around the country, merely for entertainment. When celebrities like Beyonce recently posted a photo petting a tiger cub, there was a worldwide social media backlash against her. There are countless petitions and even Facebook pages devoted to “Exposing



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Cub Petting.” Kansas cannot ignore the public relations nightmare this bill will create.



Another element of this bill, removing clouded leopards from the list of dangerous animals, is incredibly dangerous and irresponsible. Clouded leopards, though small in stature, have the longest canine teeth for their skull size of any modern carnivore. They can inflict massive damage and even death in a split second.

Tiger cubs used for “Pay-to-Pet” operations and other tourist opportunities are taken from their mothers at eight weeks and hand raised to allow the cub to bond with human trainers and begin generating profits. They live under unnatural conditions that can never meet their needs. And, again, where will they all go once they’re over the legal limit for these petting sessions?

Zoos are not going to be able to keep all these cubs that are bred for petting. The exotic animal trade is growing as is the number of cubs that end up at canned hunting ranches all over our country. Bred to pet really means bred to die. If the general public knew the truth behind where these cubs might end up when they’re sold off to dealers and at auction, there would be outraged.

There is also the risk of zoonotic disease transmission when the general public is allowed contact with big cats, no matter their size. According to the CDC’s report on disease associated with animals in public settings, “human health problems are associated with these settings, including infectious diseases, exposure to rabies, and injuries. Infectious disease outbreak have been caused by Escherichia Coli O157:H7, Salmonella species, Cryptosporidium species, Coxiella burnetti, Mycobacterium tuberculosis, ringworm, and other pathogens. Such outbreaks have substantial medical, public health, legal, and economic effects.”

Kansas did the right thing in 2005. Kansas legislators must think of the true global implications of this important issue before them. We hope you will once again put public safety and animal welfare at the forefront and do not encourage more cubs to be bred for life in a cage – or for no life at all.

Sincerely,

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