



# Stopping Private Ownership of Captive Big Cats

## The problem:

It was a day that residents of Zanesville, Ohio, are not likely to forget: The owner of a backyard menagerie released 49 wild animals – 38 of them big cats – into his community. Police had no choice but to shoot most of the animals before they could harm anyone, leaving the community shaken, the first responders traumatized, the police department over budget, and the animals dead.

No humans were injured that day, but chalk that up to a swift response from local law enforcement and sheer luck. Since 1990, there have been over 740 dangerous incidents involving big cats – tigers, lions, cougars, and other species. Five children and 16 adults have been killed and another 50 children and scores of adults have been mauled. Tigers are 360-720 times more likely to be involved in fatal attacks than dogs. Big cats pose a serious threat to public safety as well as to law enforcement officers and other first responders who must risk their lives when these animals escape or attack.

Some 10,000 to 20,000 big cats are kept captive by private owners in the U.S. The exact number is a mystery because there are insufficient record keeping requirements.

What we do know is that most of these animals are not in legitimate zoos. They're in backyards and basements, in family homes and at exploitative roadside displays. All too often, big cats are kept in cramped, makeshift enclosures, improperly fed, denied veterinary care, and subjected to painful removal of teeth and claws.

## How You Can Help:

**Get Involved** ▶ Call your U.S. Representative and tell them that you support the passage of the "Big Cat Public Safety Act." Visit our website to learn more.

**Donate** ▶ Your gift will help support initiatives that protect animals and people. To donate, go to [www.ifaw.org/donate](http://www.ifaw.org/donate) or call 1 (800) 932-4329.

## FAST FACTS

- ▶ An estimated 10,000 to 20,000 big cats are in private ownership in the U.S. The exact number is a mystery.
- ▶ Most of these big cats are in backyards, roadside attractions and cub handling businesses that are not capable of keeping them in humane and safe conditions.
- ▶ The existing patchwork of state and federal regulations governing private ownership of big cats is inadequate to protect the public and the animals.
- ▶ Big cats have mauled or killed more than 250 people in the U.S.
- ▶ Police officers and other first responders are not trained to handle big cat escapes.

Laws that govern the private ownership of big cats vary widely from one state to another. Accordingly, this is a problem that requires a federal solution. With some states banning private ownership of big cats, other states imposing partial to no restrictions whatsoever, and most states exempting USDA licensees (a major loophole), this regulatory patchwork fails to protect public safety and animal welfare. It also fails to address the cross-boundary nature of the trade in U.S. captive big cats.

## Our solution:

IFAW worked with Members of Congress and a coalition of groups concerned about animal welfare and conservation to craft a bill that would prohibit the private ownership of big cats.

Rep. Walter Jones (R-NC) and Rep. Loretta Sanchez (D-CA) introduced the bipartisan "Big Cat Public Safety Act" (H.R. 3546) in the U.S. House of Representatives. Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) has introduced a companion bill (S. 2541) in the Senate.

The Big Cat Public Safety Act would amend the Captive Wildlife Safety Act to prohibit private possession and breeding of lions, tigers and other big cats. It includes exemptions for zoos accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), qualified sanctuaries, state universities, and traveling circuses. Current owners are grandfathered in and simply required to register their animals with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This common sense bill is an urgently-needed solution to the problem of big cats kept in unsafe and abusive circumstances. Please join us in supporting the Big Cat Public Safety Act.



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