



Animal and Plant
Health Inspection
Service

1400 Independence
Avenue SW
Washington,
DC 20250

Ms. Brittany Peet
Deputy General Counsel
Captive Animal Law Enforcement
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
1536 16th Street, NW.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Ms. Peet:

This letter is in response to your organization's petition dated April 29, 2020, entitled "Petition for Emergency Rulemaking and/or an Interpretive Rule."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) received your petition requesting emergency regulations directing that all physical contact between the public and big cat cubs be temporarily suspended in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Alternatively, you requested USDA issue an interpretive rule instructing exhibitors regulated under the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) that the agency will consider any direct public contact with big cat cubs during the COVID-19 pandemic as noncompliant with AWA regulations.

After evaluating your request, USDA is not making any regulatory changes or issuing an interpretive rule relating to public contact with big cat cubs and potential exposure to COVID-19 virus. The current regulations are sufficient as they require licensees to ensure the health and well-being of their large exotic cats during public exhibition. Under the AWA, licensees are to ensure that during public exhibition animals are handled so there is minimal risk of harm to the animal and to the public, with sufficient distance and/or barriers between the animal and the general viewing public. Licensees are also required to exhibit animals only for periods of time and under conditions consistent with their good health and wellbeing. This includes licenses that exhibit big cat cubs. USDA has also maintained contact with our licensees throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and we continue to help them address compliance and other issues.

USDA will issue an advisory note reminding exhibitors and dealers who offer public contact with big cat cubs of their regulatory responsibilities. The advisory note will request that the exhibitor or dealer:

- Consult the attending veterinarian in order to protect the health and welfare of susceptible felids.
- Don extra protective equipment and practice physical distancing when possible.

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- Encourage members of the public to maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from big cats and optimally be required to wear a mask when in the vicinity.

We will continue to monitor the health and welfare of the cubs used in such exhibition activities and take all actions dictated by the AWA to ensure their well-being.

Thank you for your petition. We appreciate your shared commitment to ensuring animal welfare.

Sincerely,

Kevin Shea

Kevin Shea
Administrator
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service