

February 12, 2021

Major Grant Burton
 Section Leader, Captive Wildlife Investigations
 Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
 Division of Law Enforcement

Via e-mail: [REDACTED]

Dear Major Burton,

I am writing on behalf of PETA to request that the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) investigate Monica Welde's dangerous exhibition of an adult brown bear during the filming of a news story at Bearadise Ranch in Myakka City, Florida.

According to videos posted online, Welde allowed two WZVN-TV employees to engage in direct contact with an adult brown bear named Carroll at Bearadise Ranch on February 10, 2021. The videos, which promoted an upcoming Valentine's Day event at Bearadise Ranch, show a reporter and a cameraman for WZVN-TV feeding and petting an unrestrained adult brown bear named Carroll while inside the bear's enclosure. There were no barriers between the news crew and Carroll.

The FWC's rules classify bears as "Class I" captive wildlife, triggering additional safety mandates, including a requirement that a "structural safety barrier . . . be present to prevent physical contact with unconfined Class I . . . wildlife except in instances where public contact is allowed . . ." ¹ The FWC only permits "full contact"—where the handler maintains only proximate control and supervision of the animal—with bears *under* 40 pounds and "incidental contact"—where the handler also maintains possession of the animal—with bears over 40 pounds with prior written approval from the Commission. ² The required "[s]tructural barriers may be constructed from materials such as fencing, moats, landscaping, or close-mesh wire, provided that materials used are safe and effective in preventing public contact." ³

The two videos show that there was no barrier between Carroll and the news crew. The first video, which was [live streamed to social media](#) on February 10, shows Welde allowing Rachel Anderson and Cody Lee Dunn aka "Camera Man Cody" to enter Carroll's enclosure shortly after Dunn asked Welde, "Can we go in there?" As Welde lead them into the enclosure, Dunn said, "I don't think people understand. We're in here with a bear right now.

¹ Fla. Admin. Code Ann. r. 68A-6.002(1)(a); *Id.* r. 68A-6.016.

² *Id.* r. 68A-6.016(1)(b).

³ *Id.* r. 68A-6.009(2)(b).

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This is a European brown bear. We're in one of her habitats." Welde then gave Dunn and Anderson a bottle of honey and allowed them to feed Carroll, who was not restrained in any way. After Welde explained that Carroll weighs "around 300 [pounds]," Dunn asked, "Can I pet her?" Welde responded, "Yes, touch her fur right here," before allowing him to pet the adult bear.

The second video, which [aired on WZVN-TV aka ABC 7](#) on February 11, again shows Anderson inside a bear enclosure feeding honey to the same unrestrained adult bear, Carroll. According to the video, which appears to have been filmed earlier than the live stream based on the background light, there were no barriers in place between Anderson and the bear.

In addition to prohibiting full contact with Class I wildlife, the FWC rules provide that "[n]o person shall maintain captive wildlife in any unsafe or unsanitary condition, or in a manner which results in threats to the public safety, or the maltreatment or neglect of such wildlife."⁴ Bears are wild animals, and no matter how "tame" or "well-trained" they may appear, they are always capable of inflicting serious and lethal injuries and can react unpredictably with little or no warning. These animals' size, weight, strength, and speed mean that they can use their long claws, strong jaws, and large teeth to deliver serious and life-threatening injuries, including lacerations, blunt force trauma, puncture wounds, bone and skull fractures, crush injuries, evisceration, and scalping. This makes them particularly dangerous to handle without safety barriers in place. Bears are surprisingly swift and can run faster than most people realize, which can leave anyone in close proximity no time to react or escape before being overpowered and injured or killed.

Welde is aware that this type of contact between the public and bears is prohibited. On May 6, 2020, the FWC issued Welde a warning for dangerously handling the same bear during a wedding at Bearadise Ranch where she used Carroll as a ring bearer and led the adult bear around on a thin wire cable in close proximity to the event's attendees.⁵

Exhibiting adult bears without safety barriers in place is inherently dangerous, and is the exact reason why the FWC's rules prohibit such exhibitions. Failure to comply with the FWC's rules is grounds for revocation of a permit.⁶ Accordingly, PETA respectfully requests that the FWC investigate Welde and pursue any and all available penalties for these apparent violations of the FWC's rules, including revocation of Welde's captive wildlife permit.

Very truly yours,



Jonathan Morris
Counsel, Captive Animal Law Enforcement

⁴ *Id.* r. 68A-6.009.

⁵ Ex. 1, FWC Warning for Welde (May 4, 2020); Vincent M. Mallozzi, *Their Ring Bearer Was a Bear*, N.Y. Times, Apr. 17, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/17/style/coronavirus-a-Bear-for-a-ringbearer-Vows.html>

⁶ Fla. Admin. Code Ann. r. 68-1.010(2)(b), (d).