

May 6, 2021

Robert Gibbens, DVM  
 Director, Animal Welfare Operations  
 USDA/APHIS/Animal Care

Via e-mail: [REDACTED]; [animalcare@usda.gov](mailto:animalcare@usda.gov)

Re: Request for Investigation of Apparent Animal Welfare Act Violations by  
 Steve Martin's Working Wildlife (license no. 93-C-0051)

Dear Dr. Gibbens,

I am writing on behalf of PETA to request that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) investigate Steve Martin's Working Wildlife (license no. 93-C-0051) for allowing direct public contact with an unrestrained adult bear in apparent violation of the Animal Welfare Act (AWA).

On May 4, 2021, licensee Steve Martin and animal handler Keith Bauer allowed political candidate John Cox to directly feed and interact with a 9-year-old Kodiak brown bear named Tag at a press conference at Miller Regional Park in Sacramento, California. (See [Video 1](#) and Photos.) Mr. Cox, who is a member of the public, was documented inside the temporary exhibition area with Tag while he was unrestrained. Mr. Cox can be seen feeding Tag while standing right next to him. (See [Video 1](#) at 0:35.)

For the remainder of the press conference, Tag was separated from the crowd of reporters by only a double-stranded electric wire fence. [According to Darren Minier](#), Assistant Director of Animal Care at the Oakland Zoo, "a hot wire is not really going to stop" a bear, and "[i]f the hot wire is strong enough to actually stop the bear, it's a danger (for people) to be around." Additional news reports stated that the wire was not electrified. (See [Video 2](#) at 1:24.) If that is true, this adult male brown bear was separated from a large public crowd by nothing more than *string*. At no point in the footage is Tag restrained by either Martin or Bauer.

Allowing Mr. Cox to have contact with this unrestrained dangerous wild animal without any barrier is in apparent violation of 9 C.F.R. § 2.131(c)(1) and (d)(3), which require that, respectively, "[d]uring public exhibition, any animal must be 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 so as to assure the safety of animals and the public" and "dangerous animals such as... bears... must be under the direct control... of a knowledgeable and experienced animal handler."

Bears are wild animals, and no matter how docile they may appear, they are always capable of inflicting serious and lethal injuries and can react unpredictably with little or no warning.

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- PETA Foundation (U.K.)

Tag—who is described as weighing 1,000 pounds—has the size, strength, and speed to use his powerful shoulder muscles, 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. Kodiak brown bears are surprisingly swift and even a bear of Tag’s massive size can sprint to speeds of up to 20 miles per hour (i.e., close to 30 feet per second), which can leave anyone in close proximity no time to react or escape before being overpowered by a bear’s ferocity and getting mauled or killed.

Please ensure that the public and animals are safeguarded in accordance with the AWA, and hold Steve Martin, Keith Bauer, John Cox, and any other responsible parties fully accountable for any and all violations you discover during your investigation.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Please inform me of the complaint number that your agency assigns to this correspondence.

Very truly yours,



Debbie Metzler, M.S.  
Associate Director of Captive Animal Law Enforcement

