

Misty Upham

January 23, 2014

Dr. Chester Gipson
Deputy Administrator of Animal Care, USDA

Dear Dr. Kohn,

When my friends at PETA alerted me to the fact that many captive bears in the United States endure a miserable existence in squalid pits and tiny cages at federally licensed facilities, I was horrified. As a Native American, I was even more dismayed to learn that two such facilities are located on tribal land. While growing up in Montana and Washington, I had the opportunity to observe wild animals—including bears—in their natural habitats. Because my personal and cultural values include a deep concern for the welfare of all living beings, I have a profound respect and appreciation for bears and am writing to support the proposed regulatory changes that would better ensure the humane care and treatment of captive bears under the federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA).

Bears are complex individuals, and experts have compared them to primates in terms of the challenge that caretakers face while attempting to maintain their welfare in captivity. For these reasons—and in order for the U.S. Department of Agriculture to fulfill the AWA's intended purpose of ensuring the humane care and treatment of animals—it is critical that the specific and uniquely complex needs of bears be more carefully considered and that licensees who keep bears have more exacting standards for naturalistic habitats, wholesome nutrition, environmental enrichment, adequate space, and sufficient opportunities to engage in other species-specific behavior necessary for their physical and psychological well-being.

All bear exhibitors should be required to adhere to humane standards, the least of which necessitate a clear prohibition against the confinement of bears to barren concrete pits and other similarly cruel enclosures. The proposed regulations are reasonable and necessary in order to meet minimum standards of care that are universally recognized by bear husbandry experts and also reflect the respect for wildlife that is part of the core values of Native American culture.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Misty Upham', with a long, sweeping horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Misty Upham