

Yellowstone Bear World

6010 S. 4300 W., Rexburg, ID 83440

Yellowstone Bear World, which was founded by Michael Ferguson in 1998 and is currently operated by his son, Courtney Ferguson, has failed to meet minimum standards for the care of animals used in exhibition as established in the federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA). The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has cited Yellowstone Bear World for—among other things—failing to provide animals with adequate shelter and space, failing to maintain enclosures in good repair, failing to create compatible animal groupings and separations that remove the risk of injury or death among animals, failing to provide animals with adequate veterinary care, failing to provide animals with potable water, failing to maintain adequate perimeter fencing to protect animals, failing to maintain an adequate program of veterinary care, and failing to maintain complete records. Documentation is available upon request.

September 15, 2022: The USDA cited Yellowstone Bear World for failing to provide a goat with adequate veterinary care. During the inspection, a female goat had overgrown rear hooves and the inspector noted, “Overgrown hooves can cause pain and discomfort and lead to abnormal gait and conformation issues.”

December 19, 2016: The USDA cited Yellowstone Bear World for failing to maintain a primary enclosure in good repair to protect and contain a wolf named Lightning. On December 9, 2016, Lightning

dug under the primary enclosure fencing where some erosion had occurred, allowing him to enter a pen housing other animals, where he ended up between the primary enclosure and the perimeter fence. The USDA also issued Yellowstone Bear World a critical citation for failing to maintain a perimeter fence adequate to function as a secondary containment method for Lightning. On December 10, 2016, staff discovered that Lightning had escaped from the facility after digging under and pulling a flap on a perimeter fence gate. Yellowstone Bear World ultimately euthanized Lightning after finding him approximately 2 miles away from the facility and “assessing the situation.”

June 14, 2016: The USDA cited Yellowstone Bear World for failing to have a responsible adult available to accompany USDA officials during an inspection.

March 18, 2005: Following an inspection during a traveling exhibit in Sandy, Utah, the USDA cited Yellowstone Bear World for failing to provide the inspector with a written program of veterinary care, which prevented the inspector from evaluating whether three brown bear cubs and six black bear cubs were receiving adequate veterinary care. The USDA also cited Yellowstone Bear World for failing to provide acquisition records for the nine bear cubs.

October 30, 2001: The USDA cited Yellowstone Bear World for failing to feed eight adult wolves at least once a day. The facility fed the wolves every other day as a method of weight control, but an inspector noted that this schedule would typically leave the animals hungry “more than necessary” and that weight control could be “accomplished in a more humane manner,” by decreasing the daily ration for each animal.

The USDA also issued Yellowstone Bear World repeat citations for failing to provide

adequate veterinary care and failing to maintain adequate records. The inspector observed that a juvenile antelope was experiencing “scours,” or diarrhea, “a common problem in juvenile animals which can sometimes lead to death.” Despite evidence that the animal had been suffering from the condition “for several hours or longer,” staff had failed to document the condition on the animal’s health record or report it to the attending veterinarian. The investigator observed dark, dried material adhered to the hair in patches running down the inside of the antelope’s back legs. An employee reported that they did not see the material during the daily observation, but the inspector noted that, based on the dryness of the material, it had been present for several hours or longer.

The inspector further observed that Yellowstone Bear World was failing to follow the written program of veterinary care that the attending veterinarian had designed. Two wolf pups born in May 2001 had only received one vaccination each, although the program called for repeat vaccines to be given at 12 and 16 weeks of age. The inspector noted that Yellowstone Bear World’s failure to administer boosters put the pups at risk of exposure to distemper, parvo, and other viruses that visitors might bring into the facility. Moreover, the inspector was unable to verify whether two buffaloes had received vaccines as required by the written program of veterinary care.

The USDA additionally cited Yellowstone Bear World for failing to maintain an intact perimeter fence around bear enclosures and for failing to provide adequate shelter from inclement weather. The inspector noted that the facility supplied a single 20-foot-by-12-foot shelter for four elk (including two who were not compatible to be housed together), four buffaloes, and one fallow deer and that the animals’ enclosure had no trees or other natural shelter from the area’s strong, cold winds and snow. In addition,

Yellowstone Bear World supplied a single 5-foot-by-4-foot shelter for two black bears and three wolf pups, which was too small and too low to accommodate all the animals. Six dens, each approximately 5 feet by 5 feet by 4 feet, were supplied for nine wolves (a pup and eight adults). Three of the dens housed individual wolves, while the other three dens were shared among six wolves. An inspector believed the three dens were not adequate for the six wolves, particularly since compatibility issues had already arisen among them.

The USDA also issued Yellowstone Bear World a repeat direct citation for failing to ensure that animals housed together are compatible after a wolf named Dillon suffered a “very damaged” eye because of suspected aggression from another wolf after the two animals were moved from an enclosure consisting of many acres and placed together in “a small pen.” Dillon’s eye subsequently had to be removed.

Finally, the USDA issued Yellowstone Bear World a repeat direct citation for failing to maintain its facilities in good repair to protect animals from injury. On August 25, 2001, a fallow deer named Pete was found dead, evidently strangled by “an electrical cord wrapped around his neck.” The USDA had previously advised Yellowstone Bear World to take action to prevent animals “from chewing on [the cord] or getting tangled in it, either of which could lead to death.”

August 22, 2001: The USDA issued Yellowstone Bear World repeat citations for the following: failing to maintain daily health records on site; failing to have complete acquisition records for wolf pups acquired on July 12, 2001; failing to have disposition records for the death of a white-tailed deer fawn; and failing to maintain intact perimeter fencing around several animal enclosures. In particular, the perimeter fence at the customer exit did not meet the 6-foot height

requirement, another perimeter fence had gaps and was not constructed in a way to prevent outside animals from going through or under it and having contact with animals in the facility, and there was no perimeter fence around an enclosure containing two bison.

The USDA issued Yellowstone Bear World a direct citation for failing to maintain outdoor facilities in good repair. The inspector noted that the facility had not mended gaps in the primary fencing around a deer enclosure, "which could allow predator entrance." The USDA further cited the facility for failing to provide two bison with potable water. The inspector noted that the pond that served as the only water source for the two bison was green in color and had "a large amount of thick algae buildup." The USDA additionally cited Yellowstone Bear World for failing to allow inspection of records. The inspector was unable to verify whether the attending veterinarian was performing an on-site visit every six weeks and whether the animals had received vaccines as called for in the written program of veterinary care because the records had "been inadvertently transported to Montana."

July 31, 2001: The USDA issued Yellowstone Bear World repeat citations for failing to include all species in the written program of veterinary care, failing to maintain complete and accurate health records, failing to maintain complete acquisition records for multiple species, failing to have disposition records for a fallow deer who died, failing to provide all animals with adequate shelter from the sun, and failing to have adequate perimeter fencing. Fencing at the entry gate did not reach the 6-foot requirement, a pen housing two bison did not have a perimeter fence, and another perimeter fence did not meet the 8-foot requirement near the highway and had openings large enough for outside

animals to enter the facility near the maintenance road.

The USDA also issued Yellowstone Bear World direct citations for failing to handle animals as expeditiously and carefully as possible after an employee left a gate open while traveling between pens, allowing wolves to gain access to a pen and kill a fallow deer doe. The containment gate also was not maintained in a way to contain the wolves and protect the adjacent animals from injury. The USDA also issued Yellowstone Bear World a direct citation for failing to maintain facilities in good repair to protect animals from injury. The inspector observed gaps in several areas along fences and gates, which could allow predators easy access to enclosures. Additionally, the inspector noted that a fallow deer fawn had been killed by a predator on July 5, 2001, while an adult reindeer was killed by a predator in the fall of 2000.

The USDA also issued Yellowstone Bear World a direct citation for failing to separate incompatible animals, resulting in the deaths of a moose, who was killed following interspecies aggression, and two fallow deer, one of whom was seen being raked on the ground by a fallow deer buck and was killed by the buck days later. Another fallow deer was gored and killed by the same buck. The facility was also cited for lacking sanitary potable water. Specifically, the pond that served as the water source for two bison was green in color and had a large amount of thick algae buildup. In addition, the USDA cited Yellowstone Bear World for failing to properly store food for the animals in the petting zoo. The inspector noted that the food was left in open bags on the floor of a shed.

July 17, 2000: The USDA cited Yellowstone Bear World for failing to follow the written emergency and evacuation program by not conducting periodic emergency and

evacuation drills or having the necessary emergency equipment available as well as failing to keep an emergency kit appropriately stocked with medications. Specifically, an injectable medication bottle in the emergency kit was empty and there were no other medications for emergency capture, tranquilization, or anesthesia in the kit. The facility was also cited for failing to have a complete perimeter fence at a drive-through gate, through which escaped animals could “easily” exit the facility and “people and other unwanted animals could easily gain entry.” The USDA further cited Yellowstone Bear World for failing to provide animals in the petting zoo with a clean, sanitary water receptacle. The animals had a plastic-lined artificial creek that had feces, a buildup of organic debris, and algae in it.

October 6, 1999: The USDA issued Yellowstone Bear World a repeat citation for failing to have responsible and knowledgeable attendants present during periods of public contact at the petting zoo, where guests were interacting with two sheep and three goats, and at the black bear cub enclosure, where there was a low fence that could lead to potential contact between cubs and guests. The USDA additionally cited Yellowstone Bear World for failing to provide a salt block free from contamination. The investigator observed feces on top of the salt block and touching the block where it sat in the receptacle. Yellowstone Bear World was also cited for improper sanitation in the petting zoo, which was “diffusely sprinkled with feces.” It was reported to the inspector that the shavings on the ground had not been changed in a month and that raking the pen was “not entirely effective” at removing the feces because of the small size of the fecal balls.

July 22, 1999: The USDA cited Yellowstone Bear World for the improper feeding and handling of animals. The inspector observed a salt block lying “directly on the ground

which consisted of shavings contaminated with feces.” The inspector also observed that no responsible and knowledgeable employee was present while nine visitors interacted with sheep and goats in the petting zoo.

June 16, 1999: The USDA cited Yellowstone Bear World for the following: failing to keep a current written program of veterinary care by updating it to show the veterinary care program for eight wolves and two buffaloes acquired since the prior year, failing to have an adequate quarantine area for sick animals, failing to maintain complete acquisition records for all animals, and failing to provide animals with adequate shelter from the sun. The inspector noted that three sheep and three goats shared a “metal culvert,” which could “not accommodate all 6 animals at one time” and was “not an appropriate material to provide protection from the sun.”

The USDA also cited Yellowstone Bear World for failing to properly handle a sheep who had been “left on exhibit” while suffering from a fever of 104.5 degrees. The investigator observed that it was “not appropriate to continue to stress a sick animal by keeping it on exhibition in a situation like this where there is feeding from the public and increased stress from interaction with the public.”

The USDA additionally cited Yellowstone Bear World for failing to provide adequate veterinary care. At least three fallow deer were “thin to the point that ribs were visible” and their coats were “dry and somewhat rough.” They were not as bright and alert as the other fallow deer. The investigator observed that there was no evidence that a fecal examination had been performed and that the facility had been unable “to physically manage close containment of the animals to treat them.”

The USDA further cited Yellowstone Bear World for failing to have an adequate quarantine area for sick animals. The investigator noted that the sick sheep had been left on exhibit with two other sheep and three goats in the petting zoo, while the three fallow deer who were sick had remained in an enclosure with five other fallow deer, nine elk, four reindeer, and two buffaloes.

Finally, the USDA cited Yellowstone Bear World for failing to construct a cargo area appropriately to protect animals during transportation. The cargo area for the primary conveyance used to transport wolves to the facility had not been designed and constructed to protect the animals' health, safety, and comfort. Specifically, the divider panels did not go all the way to the ground, which allowed one wolf to access another wolf's foot and cause damage to the extent that the foot had to be amputated.

In addition to these citations, the USDA inspector noted various concerns, including the need for a knowledgeable attending veterinarian or nutritionist to review the nutrition program for each species, the potential inadequacy of the facility's fencing and housing conditions to protect the animals during winter, and the potential lack of sufficient "animal handlers who are appropriately trained in handling dangerous animals."