

Sunrise Side Nature Trail and Exotic Park

1220 N. Kobs Rd., Tawas City, MI 48763

Sunrise Side Nature Trail and Exotic Park is owned by James Svoboda, who 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 Svoboda repeatedly for failing to provide animals with veterinary care, failing to maintain enclosures in good repair, failing to provide shelter from inclement weather, failing to store food properly, and failing to clean enclosures properly. The USDA issued Svoboda a penalty of \$1,950 in 2015 for violations that allowed a lion to bite off a patron's finger. In 2021, the USDA confiscated Grizzly, an adult male brown bear who suffered from a worsening injury for nine months without seeing or being treated by a veterinarian. Following the removal of Grizzly, Sunrise Side entered into an agreement with PETA never to own or acquire exotic or wild animals again and to relocate its remaining bear and foxes to The Wild Animal Sanctuary in Colorado, which is accredited by the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries.

Contact PETA for documentation.

September 16, 2021: Sunrise Side agreed to relinquish three foxes and the remaining bear, Dolly, and never again to acquire or own exotic or wild animals. PETA arranged for the transfer of Dolly and the fox family to The Wild Animal Sanctuary, a reputable and spacious facility in Colorado.

July 23, 2021: The USDA issued a notice of intent to confiscate Grizzly the brown bear because of the veterinary care issues cited on July 21, 2021, and July 19, 2021. Later this day, the USDA returned to the premises and confiscated him.

July 21, 2021: The USDA issued a repeat direct citation to Svoboda for failing to provide adequate veterinary care:

- The wound above the brown bear's left eye had increased in size and depth and compromised the entire forehead area above that eye. The wound was ulcerated and hairless, with a necrotic center, and there was significant swelling around the wound.
- An adult bobcat was obese, had matted hair on the neck and back, and was noted at the time of inspection to walk very slowly, gently, and stiff-legged.
- Damba, a 9-year-old lion, was "very thin with prominent vertebral bodies." The licensee did not know when the last fecal exam had been done for Damba.

Another repeat direct violation was issued to Svoboda for failing to have an adequate veterinary care program that included daily observations and relaying information to an attending veterinarian in the cases of the bear, bobcat, and lion. A veterinarian had not been contacted to address any of these issues.

A repeat citation was issued for failing to clean the bobcat enclosure properly. There were excessive feces in the litterbox and around the center post of the enclosure as well as a strong odor around the enclosure.

July 19, 2021: The USDA issued a direct citation to James Svoboda for failing to provide adequate veterinary care:

- The brown bear had a 4- to 5-inch diameter ulcerated red wound above his left eye, and the area around the wound was very swollen. The wound had started the previous October as a very small lump and continued to grow. The inspector found that “[t]here has been no veterinarian at the facility to properly diagnose and recommend treatment for this bear.”
- The bobcat was obese, had matted hair on the neck and back, and was noted at the time of inspection to walk very slowly and gently.

Another direct violation was issued to Svoboda for failing to have an adequate veterinary care program that included daily observations and relaying information to an attending veterinarian in the cases of the bear and bobcat. A direct citation was also issued for failing to have a formal arrangement with an attending veterinarian and a current written program of veterinary care. The attending veterinarian for the facility had retired one and a half years previously.

Svoboda was cited for failing to keep the shelter for the brown bear and a black bear in good repair to prevent injury to the animals—the boards to the shelter had rotted away at the bottom, and one entire side had been torn down by the animals. He was cited for failing to provide the bears with appropriate shelter from the elements.

The USDA also cited Svoboda for failing to clean enclosures, which had a very strong smell, adequately:

- The sheltered part of the lion enclosure hadn’t been cleaned since the previous fall, according to the licensee. There were accumulations of feces, hair, and excess food with mold.

- The bobcat enclosure had excessive feces in the litterbox and around the center post of the enclosure.

July 23, 2019: The USDA cited Svoboda for failing to have an adult available to accompany officials for an inspection.

August 31, 2017: The USDA cited Svoboda for failing to store food in a manner that would reduce risk of contamination and retain its nutritive value. The commercial feed for the bears and the lion was kept in open bags on the floor of the garage.

September 26, 2016: The USDA issued Svoboda a repeat citation for failing to have a complete program of veterinary care. The program included only bears and domestic dogs—it did not include the fox, coyote, lion, and goat.

Svoboda was also cited for failing to assure the attending veterinarian appropriate authority to ensure the provision of veterinary care. The inspector discussed with the attending veterinarian requirements of the licensee to have a written program of veterinary care. The attending veterinarian stated that his veterinary recommendations had not been followed in the past.

April 14, 2016: The USDA cited Svoboda for failing to supply adequate veterinary care to a female fox who had a large area of hair loss on her flank. He had noticed the hair loss a week earlier but had not contacted a veterinarian to treat the animal. He was also cited for failing to have a complete program of veterinary care. The program included only bears and domestic dogs—it did not include the fox, coyote, lion, and goat.

December 1, 2015: The USDA issued Svoboda a \$1,950 penalty for the alleged AWA violations leading to an incident on July 26, 2014, that allowed a lion to bite a

patron. (See the July 31, 2014, and July 26, 2014, entries.)

April 14, 2015: The USDA cited Svoboda for failing to keep enclosures in good repair to contain the animals and/or prevent injuries to them:

- The primary enclosure fencing for the goats had patched areas with wires sticking out.
- An old shelter in the bear enclosure was in disrepair and had nails sticking out in many places.

July 31, 2014: The USDA cited Svoboda for allowing public access to the lion's primary enclosure on July 26, 2014, resulting in injury. (See the July 26, 2014, entry.) According to the report, a 15-year-old employee was giving a patron a guided tour and opened an unlocked gate, allowing the visitor access to the area between the public barrier and the lion's primary enclosure. The patron reached into the enclosure, and the lion bit off the tip of her middle finger.

Svoboda was also cited for leaving the perimeter/barrier fence gate unlocked and for failing to provide all employees with proper training in giving safe guided tours of the facility.

July 26, 2014: A lion bit the tip off of a visitor's finger at the Sunrise Side Nature Trail and Exotic Park. The patron had stuck her finger into the lion enclosure in an attempt to pet the animal.

April 22, 2014: The USDA cited Svoboda for failing to have an up-to-date program of veterinary care that included written instructions on the care of an African lion obtained the previous November.

March 31, 2014: The USDA issued a repeat citation to Svoboda for failing to have an

adult available to accompany officials for an inspection.

March 11, 2014: The USDA cited Svoboda for failing to have an adult available to accompany officials for an inspection.

February 2, 2012: The USDA cited Svoboda for failing to have an adult available to accompany officials for an inspection.