

Wilstem Wildlife Park

4229 U.S.-150 W., Paoli, IN 47454

Wilstem Wildlife Park, also known as Wilstem Ranch or Wilstem Inc., owned by entrepreneur Jerry Fuhs, has failed to meet minimum standards for the care of animals used in exhibition as established by the federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA). The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has cited Wilstem for, among other things, killing a sick llama by dropping them into a hole and crushing their head with an excavator bucket; attempting to shoot a panicked eland with a tranquilizer dart, causing her to run into a fence post and break her neck; failing to provide camels with shade over a period of three summer months; and allowing a kangaroo to jump a fence and remain loose for two days. The USDA issued Wilstem a citation and notification of penalty of \$8,000 in 2022 due to four alleged AWA violations. Wilstem uses elephants for public encounters who are provided by external exhibitors, including the Carden Circus and Myakka Elephant Ranch. It also uses bears exhibited by former film and TV trainer Jeff Watson. Contact PETA for documentation.

February 2, 2022: The USDA issued Wilstem a citation and notification of penalty of \$8,000 to settle multiple alleged AWA violations that occurred in 2020 (see the September 15, 2020, entry below):

- February 5 or 6, 2020: Failing to handle animals as expeditiously and carefully as possible in a manner that did not cause trauma, overheating, excessive cooling, behavioral stress, physical harm, or unnecessary discomfort. Wilstem “personnel euthanized a llama

by dropping the live animal in a hole intended for burial and crushing [their] skull with an excavator bucket.”

- May 13, 2020: Failing to use appropriate methods to prevent, control, diagnose, and treat diseases and injuries. When three eland escaped an enclosure and were loose on the grounds of the facility, personnel attempted to tranquilize the panicked animals with a dart, causing one animal to run into a fence and break her neck. The attending veterinarian had not approved the method of recapture, which resulted in “unnecessary pain, discomfort and death.”
- August 8, 2020: Failing to construct housing facilities of appropriate materials and strength to contain the animals. Perth, a kangaroo, jumped over a 5-foot fence used for his enclosure, escaped, and was only recaptured after two days.
- September 15, 2020: Failing to construct a perimeter fence of sufficient height to keep animals and unauthorized persons out. The perimeter fencing had four sections that were raised 5 to 8 inches from the ground.

June 9, 2021: The USDA issued Wilstem a Teachable Moment for not having sufficient “pest” control in the kangaroo barn area.

September 15, 2020: The USDA issued Wilstem eight citations, three of which were deemed “critical,” during an inspection. According to the report, Wilstem was issued a critical citation for failing to handle a llama as expeditiously and carefully as possible in a manner that did not cause trauma, physical harm, behavioral stress, or unnecessary discomfort to the animal. On February 5, 2020, a staff member was advised to euthanize the llama by gunshot due to illness. The employee transported the llama, still alive, to a burial site in an “unapproved and inappropriate manner” that caused “undue trauma, behavioral stress

and unnecessary discomfort to the llama before death.”

The USDA issued a second critical citation following the escape of three eland on May 13, 2020. An employee shot two eland with tranquilizer darts to recapture them. The third ran into a fenced pasture and was panicked, so the employee attempted to dart her but missed. The eland ran into a fence post and broke her neck. The employee told the inspector that the attending veterinarian was present during the escape and darting, but the veterinarian denied this and said he was not consulted about the incident and “would not have approved darting a panicked animal [who] was already contained in a fenced pasture.”

A third critical citation was issued for failing to have an adequate perimeter fence. A 30-foot section had four areas where the fence was only 5 to 8 feet high, and the bottom was loose enough to allow it to be pushed over in either direction. A coyote or other dog-sized animal would have been able to get under the fence. The inspector noted that the area contained multiple free-roaming species and that two blackbucks at Wilstem had died after being attacked by an unknown predator in 2020.

The USDA also cited Wilstem for failing to provide animals with adequate shade and shelter from direct sun. Three camels did not have any natural shade or artificial structures offering shade in the pasture in which they had been confined since June 2020. Eighteen goats and seven sheep were not provided with shelters large enough to allow “for all of the animals to get into for shade without being overcrowded, and preventing natural bodily movements in a way to prevent overheating or discomfort.”

Another citation was issued for failing to provide the camels with adequate shelter from inclement weather. The inspector noted that there were no trees, buildings, or

structures to protect the animals from inclement weather, and the doors of a barn next to the pasture had been sealed shut with wood, preventing the animals from entering.

The USDA also issued a citation for failing to maintain a kangaroo enclosure in good repair. The fence around the kangaroo area had broken wires protruding inside the enclosure, creating a potential source of injury. In addition, the kangaroo perimeter fence was only 5 feet high and very wobbly. The inspector noted that on August 8, 2020, Perth, a kangaroo, escaped from the facility by jumping over the fence during a public feeding encounter and was not found until two days later.

The USDA issued Wilstem a citation for failing to have attendants present during public interactions with camels. During inspection, a young child was seen climbing the fence of the camel enclosure, reaching over to pet the camel, and hanging onto the fence “in direct face-to-face contact” with the camel. There was no barrier, distance, or nearby attendant to protect the child and camel from injury.

Another citation was issued for failing to maintain an updated inventory of all animals at the facility. Facility representatives indicated that there were no records documenting the status of multiple animals who had been born, died, euthanized, or sold.

November 20, 2017: While exhibitors Jorge and Louann Barreda were transporting African elephants Lou, Makia, and Lovie from Wilstem to Florida for the winter, their tractor trailer caught fire on the interstate in Tennessee. The elephants were evacuated onto the side of the highway around 2 a.m. while firefighters put out the blaze.