

February 16, 2021

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

Via e-mail: [REDACTED] animalcare@usda.gov

Re: Request for Investigation of Apparent Animal Welfare Act Violations at Bearadise Ranch (license no. 58-C-0056)

Dear Dr. Gibbens:

I am writing on behalf of PETA to request that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) investigate Monica Welde, dba “Bearadise Ranch” (license no. 58-C-0056) for allowing direct public contact with an unrestrained adult bear in apparent violation of the Animal Welfare Act (AWA).

On February 10, 2021, Welde allowed a reporter and a cameraman for WZVN-TV to engage in direct physical contact with an adult brown bear named Carroll at Bearadise Ranch. The individuals—who are members of the public—were documented inside the bear enclosure feeding and petting Carroll while she was unrestrained. In addition, when Welde left the news crew unsupervised at Carroll’s enclosure, the reporter put her arm through the enclosure fence.

The first video, which was [streamed live on Facebook](#) on February 10, shows reporter Rachel Anderson and cameraman Cody Lee Dunn approaching an enclosure confining Carroll, a 25-year-old brown bear. At 2:20, Dunn asks Welde, “Can we go in there?” and Anderson states that “Monica’s gonna go get some honey and we’re gonna watch Carroll” followed shortly by, “look at her [Carroll] watch mom [Welde] go.” The commentary indicates that Welde left the news crew unattended at the bear’s enclosure without any public barrier, in apparent violation of 9 C.F.R. § 2.131(c)(1), which requires that “[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.” Anderson put her hand into the enclosure as Carroll approached at 2:52, and then retracted when Dunn expressed apprehension and Anderson said, “Yeah maybe I won’t put my hands in there” and then, “She’s making noises and that kinda freaks me out.” Welde can be seen returning to the proximity at 3:39.

As Welde led the visitors into the enclosure at 3:59, Dunn said, “I don’t think people understand. We’re in here with a bear right now. This is a European brown bear. We’re in one of her habitats.” Welde then gave Dunn and Anderson a bottle of honey and allowed them to feed Carroll, who was not restrained in any way. After Welde explained that Carroll weighs “around 300 [pounds],” Dunn asked, “Can I pet her?” at 5:46. Welde responded, “Yes, touch her fur right here,” before allowing him to pet the adult bear.

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The second video, which [aired the next day on WZVN-TV aka ABC 7](#), shows Anderson inside a bear enclosure feeding honey to the same unrestrained adult brown bear, Carroll. At 2:06, Anderson suggests going on a “walk out of here” and Welde stated that, “We gotta get a leash.” After putting a wire cable around Carroll’s neck, Welde allows Anderson to take the lead on her own. Apparently at no point was Carroll under the direct control of Welde, in violation of 9 C.F.R. § 2.131(d)(3), which requires that “[d]uring public exhibition, dangerous animals such as... bears... must be under the direct control and supervision of a knowledgeable and experienced animal handler.”

Bears are wild animals, and no matter how “tame” or “well-trained” they may appear, they are always capable of inflicting serious and lethal injuries and can react unpredictably with little or no warning. These animals’ size, weight, strength, and speed mean that they can use their 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. This makes them particularly dangerous to handle without safety barriers or restraints in place. Bears are surprisingly swift and can run faster than most people realize, which can leave anyone in close proximity no time to react or escape before being overpowered and injured or killed.

Please ensure that the public and animals are safeguarded in accordance with the AWA, and hold Monica Welde 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