

# Oswald's Bear Ranch

13814 County Rd. 407, Newberry, MI 49868

Oswald's Bear Ranch, owned by Dean and Jewel Oswald, 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 Oswald's for failing to provide animals with food of sufficient nutritive value to maintain good health; failing to handle bear cubs properly during photo ops with the public, including by allowing young children to hand-feed cubs and using physical abuse to handle a cub; failing to maintain sufficient distance and barriers between the public and the animals; and failing to maintain enclosures to contain animals properly, resulting in the escape of two juvenile bears in April 2019, one of whom was shot and killed. In 2021, Oswald's was assessed a penalty of \$2,400, in part because Dean Oswald had provided inspectors with false information regarding that death. Over a dozen other infant and juvenile cubs have died at the facility—some of whom were only months old. Records indicate that 65 bears have presumably died at Oswald's since 1997—and at least half died before they reached 15 years old, which is considered premature, as bears can live into their thirties. Several bears from Oswald's have been slaughtered. In 2017, a representative for the roadside zoo told a state inspector that “mean” bears should be “harvested, and made into jerky.” Contact PETA for documentation.

**April 18, 2022:** During a USDA inspection of Oswald's, an inspector noted that the

transportation enclosure used to transport live animals didn't contain ventilation on two opposite sides. The bear cubs had apparently been transported from New York in a plastic storage tote.

**December 6, 2021:** The USDA issued a decision and order requiring Oswald's to pay a \$2,400 civil penalty to settle a complaint that the agency had filed on October 7, 2021, against the facility.

**October 7, 2021:** The USDA filed a complaint against Oswald's for willfully violating the AWA, including by failing to provide animals with outdoor housing that adequately contained them—resulting in the escape of two bears in April 2019—and failing to provide food of sufficient nutritive value to maintain the animals in good health. The complaint described the escape, in which one of the bears went as far as half a mile to a mile from the facility onto a neighbor's property, ripped off window screens, and climbed on the neighbor's car before being shot and killed by a Luce County Sheriff's Department deputy. The complaint noted that Dean Oswald had provided conflicting statements related to his knowledge of the bears' escape to Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) officials and the Sheriff's Department and that his statements to APHIS officials contained false information as to when the bears had escaped the premises and how long they had been loose.

**September 1, 2021:** An investigation by the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) found that two 3-month-old female black bear cubs had died at Oswald's on April 27 and 28, 2021.

**June 23, 2021:** The USDA cited Oswald's for failing to feed bears a diet that was appropriate for their age and the time of the

year. They were being fed a diet that appeared to be very high in fat and caloric content for the time of year and that consisted of restaurant scraps and donated meat along with produce and dog food. The inspector noted that diets that are too high in fat and calories could lead to chronic health conditions such as arthritis and respiratory issues and that some of the bears appeared to be overconditioned for the time of year.

**June 11, 2019:** The USDA issued Oswald's a teachable moment for failing to provide bears with food that was "wholesome and palatable." The inspectors recommended that the facility make changes to the formula it was using to feed bear cubs.

**May 20, 2019:** The USDA cited Oswald's for failing to maintain enclosures to contain the bears properly and protect them from injury. In April 2019, two bears were able to climb out of and escape from their enclosure. One bear was tranquilized and returned to the enclosure, and the other was shot and killed by a local sheriff approximately half a mile from the facility.

**June 1, 2018:** According to a news article, an 18-year-old black bear named Charlie died at Oswald's.

**September 27, 2017:** The Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration issued Oswald's a Notice of Alleged Safety and Health Hazards stating that employees had been exposed to life-threatening hazards when working with black bears at the facility and hadn't been protected while engaging in bear habitat maintenance or during bear interactions. When asked about bears the facility had obtained from Ohio, a representative of the roadside zoo reportedly stated that a "mean" bear should be "harvested, and made into jerky."

**April 17, 2017:** According to an inventory report that APHIS officials reviewed during an inspection at Oswald's, a bear cub named Carla was listed as dead. At 8 weeks old, she had been transferred to the roadside zoo from a facility in Wisconsin around March 30, 2017, and therefore reportedly died within three weeks of arriving.

**June 2016:** According to a post on Oswald's Facebook page, a bear cub "runt" named Butch, who was partially blind, reportedly had a major seizure and was euthanized two months after arriving at the facility.

**June 1, 2016:** The USDA cited Oswald's for failing to have sufficient distance and/or barriers between the public and animals. On May 19, 2016, a bear cub injured a houseguest of the Oswalds. The cub was underdeveloped, had vision problems, and was being kept in the house. According to records from the MDARD, the cub bit the hand and scratched the leg of the guest, who later went to the hospital after an infection developed around the bite wound.

**May 2016:** According to an e-mail exchange between staff of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR), two newly acquired bear cubs at Oswald's died.

**May 14, 2015:** On a monthly inventory report filed with the Michigan DNR, Dean Oswald reported the death of two black bears: an 18-year-old who had reportedly died of natural causes and a 13-year-old who had died after his den had caved in.

**November 14, 2014:** On a monthly inventory report filed with the Michigan DNR, Dean Oswald reported the death of a 21-year-old male black bear.

**April 14, 2014:** On a monthly inventory report filed with the Michigan DNR, Dean

Oswald reported that two black bear yearlings had died after his grandson fed them grapes, causing kidney failure.

**December 12, 2013:** The USDA cited Oswald's for failing to have a responsible adult available to accompany APHIS officials during an inspection.

**June 18, 2013:** The USDA issued Oswald's a direct citation for failing to handle bear cubs properly during public exhibition to reduce the risk of harm to the animals and the public. During the inspection, the public was allowed to hand-feed bear cubs and the inspector observed young children hand-feeding cereal to a cub in order to keep the animal occupied while other people were touching the cub and taking photos. The inspector also observed that the cub was resting his or her paws on the arm of a child. The report noted that bear cubs are often unpredictable and temperamental with regard to their food, and because of the children's small hands and arms, the risk of injury was too great for the inspector to determine that the practice was safe for the public.

**June 15, 2013:** On a monthly inventory report filed with the Michigan DNR, Dean Oswald reported the death of three female bears, including two 2-year-olds who had died one week apart.

**May 14, 2013:** On a monthly inventory report filed with the Michigan DNR, Dean Oswald reported that six bears had died during hibernation. One was a 4-month-old cub who, according to state records, had been acquired two weeks earlier from a breeder in Arizona but whose death had apparently been reported along with those who had died in hibernation. The other five bears who had reportedly died during hibernation ranged in age from 4 to 9 years old.

**February 19, 2013:** A wildlife biologist with the Michigan DNR's Wildlife Division stated in an e-mail that since 2005, the agency had no longer been placing wild orphaned bear cubs at Oswald's.

**March 14, 2012:** On a monthly inventory report filed with the Michigan DNR, Dean Oswald reported that a "runt" female bear cub had died while at a veterinary clinic.

**April 27, 2011:** On a monthly inventory report filed with the Michigan DNR, Dean Oswald reported that two 11-year-old bears had died during hibernation.

**November 9, 2010:** The USDA cited Oswald's for using physical abuse to handle a bear cub. On August 10, 2010, during a photo op with the public, a handler admitted to striking a bear cub twice in order to maintain control and discipline the animal. The facility was also cited for failing to handle dangerous animals properly during public exhibitions. During bear cub photo ops with the public, it failed to have two people present at all times to maintain direct control of a bear.

**May 14, 2009:** On a monthly inventory report filed with the Michigan DNR, Dean Oswald reported the deaths of two bears: a female who had been euthanized and a male listed as a "winter fatality."

**April 23, 2008:** On a monthly inventory report filed with the Michigan DNR, Dean Oswald reported the deaths of a 3-year-old female black bear who likely had died from a drug overdose and a 17-year-old female black bear who had died when the "hole for [the bear's] den collapsed on her."

**August 28, 2007:** On a monthly inventory report filed with the Michigan DNR, Dean Oswald reported the death of a 4-year-old female black bear.

**May 2, 2007:** On a monthly inventory report filed with the Michigan DNR, Dean Oswald reported that an 11-year-old male black bear had died.

**November 2, 2006:** On a monthly inventory report filed with the Michigan DNR, Dean Oswald reported that a "mean" 8-year-old male black bear had been "harvested."

**June 14, 2006:** On a monthly inventory report filed with the Michigan DNR, Dean Oswald reported that three male bears (ages 4, 5, and 7 years) had been "harvested."

**May 28, 2004:** On a monthly inventory report filed with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Dean Oswald reported the death of a bear who had been "harvested."

**April 8, 2004:** On a monthly inventory report filed with the Michigan DNR, Dean Oswald stated that a 25-year-old male black bear had died in hibernation.

**March 31, 2003:** On a monthly inventory report filed with the Michigan DNR, Dean Oswald reported the death of a black bear and wrote in the description that the bear had been "harvested."

**July 18, 2002:** On a monthly inventory report filed with the Michigan DNR, Dean Oswald stated that a female yearling bear had died from pneumonia and that another female cub had died after falling inside her kennel and striking her head on the frame.

**April 25, 2002:** On a monthly inventory report filed with the Michigan DNR, Dean Oswald stated that a 2-year-old male black bear had been euthanized after sustaining injuries from falling out of a tree. A 3-year-old male black bear listed as being "mean" had also been euthanized.

**July 9, 2000:** On a monthly inventory report filed with the Michigan DNR, Dean Oswald stated that on June 26, 2000, a bear named Cody had attacked a bear named Tyson, resulting in Cody's death on June 27, 2000, from injuries sustained in the attack. Tyson died on July 2, 2000, after suffering a stroke.

**April 6, 2000:** On a monthly inventory report filed with the Michigan DNR, Dean Oswald reported that an 11-year-old female bear had died.

**May 17, 1999:** On a monthly inventory report filed with the Michigan DNR, Dean Oswald stated that a male bear cub "had an accident and died."