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## Congressman McKeon and Congresswoman Sanchez Introduce Bipartisan "Big Cats and Public Safety Protection" Act

Washington, D.C. - Today, Congressman Howard "Buck" McKeon (R-CA) and Rep. Loretta Sanchez (D-CA) introduced the "Big Cats and Public Safety Protection Act." An alarming number of wild cats have been bred and sold as domestic pets in the U.S. This trend threatens public safety and often results in the mistreatment of these animals. Just recently, the tragic events in Zanesville, Ohio, where 49 wild animals were killed after they were let loose on an unlicensed wild animal preserve, showcases the dangerous implications of this trend. Currently, only nine states have laws enforcing "no wild animals permitted," and the remaining states have weak or no laws in existence. This bipartisan bill will ensure that lions, tigers and other dangerous big cats, do not threaten public safety, diminish global big cat conservation efforts, or end up living in horrible conditions where they can be subject to mistreatment and cruelty.

The Big Cats and Public Safety Protection Act would prohibit private possession of big cats except at highly-qualified facilities, like accredited zoos, where they can be properly cared for and restrained. Also, since nobody, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), state agencies, or local first responders knows exactly how many dangerous big cats are being kept in private hands, under what conditions, and in what locations, the bill would require any persons who currently possess big cats to register those animals with USDA in order to keep the cats they currently own. The bill would also outlaw the breeding of any big cat except at accredited zoos and research and educational institutions. Violators of the law could have their animals confiscated along with any vehicles or equipment used to aid in their illegal activity, and could face stiff penalties including fines as much as \$20,000, and up to five years in jail.

"No matter how many times people try to do it, wildcats such as lions, tigers, panthers and cheetahs are impossible to domesticate for personal possession and require much higher living standards compared to a domestic house cat," said Congressman McKeon. "When accidents happen and these wild cats are released into our neighborhoods, it causes panic, puts a strain on our local public safety responders and is extremely dangerous. This bill is a step forward in protecting the public and ensuring that wildcats reside in proper living conditions."

"The events in Ohio last year showed the tragedy that can occur when exotic animals are privately owned by individuals, with little to no oversight," said Congresswoman Sanchez. "Wild animals are dangerous and we clearly need better laws limiting their ownership. Exotic species should be regulated to high quality facilities with the ability to properly care for them."

Senator John Kerry (D-MA) is working on introducing a companion bill in the Senate.

"It's a little hard to believe that there's a crazy patchwork of regulations governing people who try to keep wild cats as pets," said Senator Kerry. "I know it sounds like something you just read about when there's a tragic news story, but it's all too real for first responders who respond to a 911 call and are surprised to come face to face with a Bengal tiger. This bill will ensure that these endangered creatures are kept in secure, professional facilities like wildlife sanctuaries rather than in small cages in someone's backyard or apartment building."

This legislation is supported by the Roar Foundation, Shambala Preserve, International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), Born Free USA, Humane Society of United States, Big Cat Rescue, Animal Welfare Institute (AWI), World Wildlife Fund (WWF), and Ian Somerhalder Foundation.

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