

Feline Conservation Federation in Uproar over Big Cat Breeding Ban

Big cats are charismatic mega species, key to the success of any zoo or wildlife exhibit. HB 4122 will eliminate most of these majestic felines from the public's consciousness.

Washington, D.C. ([PRWEB](#)) March 13, 2012 -- The Feline Conservation Federation ([FCF](#)) warns that House Bill 4122, which makes it illegal to own, possess, or breed lion, tiger, leopard, jaguar, cheetah, puma or snow leopard, will cause great harm to captive conservation, and leave little opportunity for Americans to view and learn about great cats. Representative McKeon introduced HB 4122, which exempts only members of the American Zoo Association (AZA) from the ban on breeding big cats.

According to FCF analysis, if HB 4122 becomes law, in the very near future, circus and stage acts, and movies and television will not show these cats, and many zoos will not be allowed to exhibit these endangered felines to visitors. "HB 4122 means no future stars like Gunther Gebel Williams amazing us at the circus, or future Siegfried's and Roy's making magic on stage, or Steve Erwin's educating us on television. And what is a zoo without the great cats?" asks Culver. "Big cats are charismatic species, key to the success of any zoo or wildlife exhibit. HB 4122 will eliminate most of these majestic felines from the public's consciousness."

Culver believes HB 4122, named the Big Cat and Public Safety Protection Act, is unnecessary. "Great cats are already well protected by federal laws", says Culver, citing the Animal Welfare Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Lacey Act, the Captive Wildlife Safety Act, and the Rhino and Tiger Product Labeling Act, which criminalizes commerce in body parts for food or medicinal purposes. As for the risk to public safety, Culver says, "You face far more danger driving to the zoo." Culver says it is ironic that the only public attack by an escaped tiger occurred at a facility that will be exempt from the prohibitions in HB 4122. The isolated case occurred Christmas Day 2007 when a tiger at the AZA accredited San Francisco Zoo mauled several visitors, killing one man. Federal investigation of the incident cited the zoo's tiger enclosure as inadequate, which has since been renovated.

FCF member zoos and educators that breed or exhibit African and Asian leopards will be stopped by HB 4122, ending captive conservation programs for black panthers and African and Asian spotted leopards. AZA does not preserve these kinds of leopards, because it only has enough cage space for Amur leopards. Culver says, "It is unconscionable for misinformed legislators to give a breeding monopoly to one trade association that has neither the capacity, nor the intent, to conserve all these species long term. It is also probably a violation of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, and therefore, a legal quagmire."

Culver believes HB 4122 will be detrimental to the survival of tigers because AZA zoos only hold about 300 tigers, and manage these as three separate subspecies. "According to their own computer models, this is not enough animals to satisfy long-term survival plans", says Culver. The AZA is phasing out Bengal tigers and generic tigers. According to Culver, "Other zoos and exhibitors are conserving these endangered felines, including the white Bengal tiger, a public favorite." Generic tigers are a mixture of tigers imported by zoos, circuses, and brokers during the past century. Because these tigers hold greater genetic diversity, some experts believe the generic tiger could be the best choice for long-term sustainability.

FCF members are feline trainers, educators, and zoo owners that serve their communities by providing valuable wildlife viewing opportunities and vital conservation education. The FCF is a non-profit association that works to conserve wild felines, and improve captive feline welfare and public safety. FCF provides readily available



husbandry information, mentoring services, facility accreditation, and continuing education courses throughout the country. The next Wildlife Conservation [Educators Course](#) and Wild Feline [Husbandry Course](#) are scheduled for Wednesday, June 6, at the Radisson Cincinnati Hotel.

Culver says, “Congress should not support HB 4122, legislation that will destroy irreplaceable genetic diversity. After the damage is done we cannot just go out and replace this gene pool with new animals. Nature is disappearing. We need more people involved in captive conservation and wildlife education, not less.”



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