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COMMUNITY VIEWPOINT: Animal rights groups need to mind their own business

By **Zuzana Kukol**
Community Viewpoints

Like many freedom loving "Pahrumpians," I found it offensive that outsiders, special interest groups, Vegas animal rights activists, and hypocritical greedy exotic animal sanctuaries, want to tell us how to live our rural lifestyle.

The tigers' CUP (Conditional Use Permit) zoning appeal regarding the Mitchells and Ray Mielzynski , aka Flagman, was brought about by the Animal Legal Defense Fund; People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA); Lions, Tigers & Bears Sanctuary; Keepers of the Wild Sanctuary and Big Cat Rescue Sanctuary. These outsiders need to realize that this is a land zoning, NOT an animal welfare issue. If the conditions of this CUP are violated, the CUP will be repealed. Nye County commissioners don't need to be spoon fed organic carrots to make a decision on their own, they are elected to serve and listen to the local voters and taxpayers who put them in office.

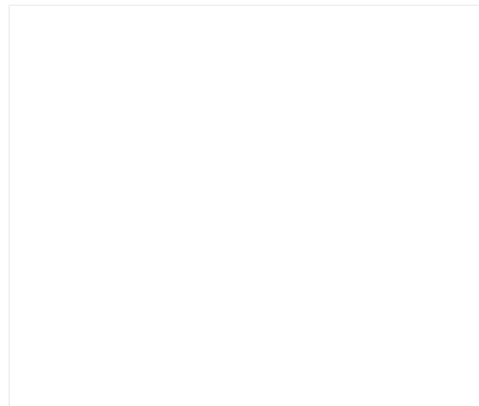
I am getting very irritated by these animal rights groups and greedy sanctuaries traveling around the USA at donors' expense, pushing and lobbying for exotic animal bans on others, most recently in Clark County, Nevada, while exempting their own facilities through their own club memberships, misleadingly called sanctuary "accreditation," while collecting millions of dollars in donations from unsuspecting donors.

The audacity and hypocrisy of these outsider groups is astonishing, claiming:

"They stand ready to help rehome the ten tigers and recently-born cub to reputable, true sanctuaries where they will have vast, naturalistic habitats and won't be used as props for public handling and other public exhibitions." From the animals' point of view, it is all the same being in a zoo, sanctuary or casino exhibit: animals are locked in cages for exhibition, and paying humans are looking at them. Many sanctuaries only have few larger play areas, where the animals are rotated after few days or weeks of being in smaller cages.

Lions, Tigers & Bears (LTB), in California, has wedding and event packages on site, also Feed a 'Wild One' Experience (\$130) or Exclusive 'Behind the Scenes' Experience (\$500) and Keeper for a Day Experience (\$1000). How is this not using animals for public exhibitions in exchange for money???? The founder of LTB was testifying for an Ohio exotic animal ban a few years ago, and just got a quarter of a million (\$250,000) taxpayers' money contract with Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA to transport away the very animals they helped to make illegal by supporting the Ohio exotic animal ban. Isn't there little bit of a conflict of interest going on here?

Big Cat Rescue, (BCR) formerly called Wildlife on Easy Street (WOES), in Florida, is another huge hypocritical supporter of bans on others that exempt their facility. On Sept. 10, 1998,-the U.S. Department of Agriculture, USDA- APHIS, charged "licensed animal dealers J. Don and



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Carole Lewis, doing business as Wild Life on Easy Street, Inc. in Tampa, Fla., with violations of the Animal Welfare Act."

"The animal care program is designed to enforce minimum animal care standards under the law," said W. Ron DeHaven, acting deputy administrator for animal care with the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, a part of USDA's Marketing and Regulatory Programs Mission Area. "We are charging that the Lewises did not even meet those minimum standards."

In March 2010 the now remarried Carole Lewis Baskin facility was written up by USDA again for issues with their perimeter fence. To this day, (now presumed dead) husband millionaire Don Lewis is still missing and according to various news reports, cops and family members are wondering if he was killed and fed to big cats, or did he fake his own death? According to People magazine's Dec. 7, 1998 issue, "Police did learn that two months before he vanished, Don Lewis had filed court documents seeking a domestic violence injunction against Carole, accusing her of threatening to shoot him."

The case even made the People magazine 2005 crime stories special issue, where Don Lewis' kids from a previous marriage "were upset that the cops didn't test the DNA on the meat grinder" and "one of Lewis' daughters from his first marriage was suggesting, not subtly, that perhaps Carole very much knew what happened to her husband, and the cats did too".

Injuries at BCR/WOES happened more than once. Many 'sanctuaries' have an anti-whistleblower policy, but they can't keep everything a secret. WOES faced federal charges in 1998, when their pet black leopard Jumanji/Jamongee, born on the premises and hand-raised by Carole's daughter Jamie Veronica, attacked the volunteer, who required 451 stitches after the cat removed her skin from the elbow to wrist. Just like LTB, BCR has all kinds of wedding and other exhibiting packages available to paying customers.

Keepers of the Wild, in Arizona, is planning to open another facility, a drive-thru zoo near Hoover Dam, with more money charging venues in it: RV park, restaurant, wine bar, memorial garden, wedding chapel, museum, campground and housing for staff.

A USDA write-up from 2013 cites them for tiger fences without proper kick-ins or electric wires attached. In October 2003 a worker was severely bit there by a tiger, and the owner, a failed Las Vegas magician, Jonathan Kraft admitted to Las Vegas Sun: "In that time, Kraft said there have been four animal bite incidents at his facilities." The most serious of which was in October 1996, when Keepers trainer Charlie Stagnaro, 65, was feeding 8-year-old Bonnie, a Bengal tiger, when the tiger attacked him. Stagnaro needed surgery on his feet and legs as a result.

So how will Nye County taxpayers be served if, according to the outsiders' request, the commissioners are supposed to facilitate the transfer of Pahrump tigers to another exhibiting facility, with a public safety record worse than that of a current owner? Could the county face possible legal issues or ridicule if these tigers injured somebody in a new facility?

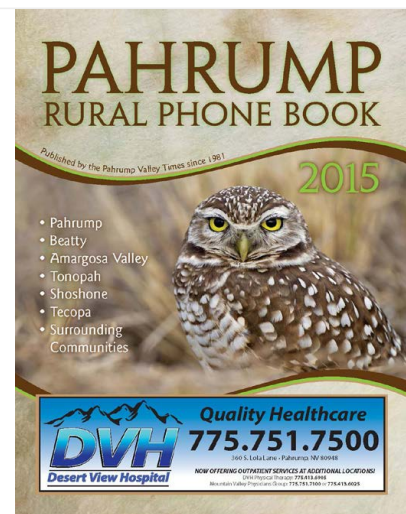
It looks like we might have a case of the pot calling the kettle black going on here in Pahrump. It might be a good idea to disregard the Vegas intrusions and let our rural, freedom loving, meat and potato community make our own decisions. And if the Mitchells ever need to rehome their animals, I am hoping they will find an ethical, honest, non-hypocritical place with good animal welfare and safety record, or they can simply move out of Pahrump

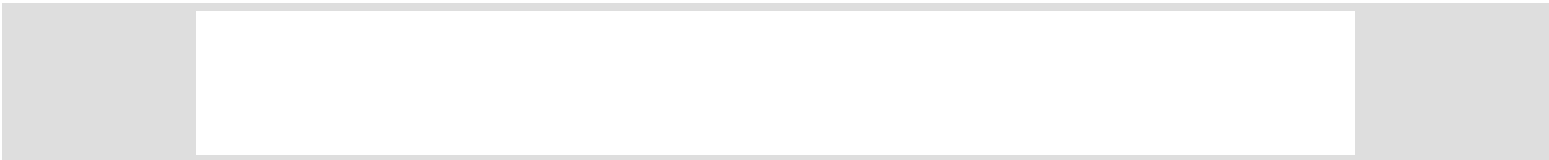
Regional Planning Commission boundaries where a conditional use permit is NOT needed, and live there with their tigers. Because like I wrote at the beginning, this is a land use/zoning issue, NOT animal ownership and not animal welfare issue.


Zuzana Kukol,

President, REXANO


Pahrump resident and taxpayer since 2000






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