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Tiger attack prompts exotic animal review

By Tom Fletcher
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The B.C. government is looking for ways to improve regulation over exotic animals after a woman was killed by a caged tiger near 100 Mile House last week.

The three-year-old male Bengal tiger was put down by a veterinarian, and two other tigers remain on the property under the care of the B.C. SPCA, 100 Mile House RCMP said.

Tania Dumstrey-Soos, a 32-year-old woman living at the rural property near Bridge Lake, died May 10 after being clawed by the tiger reaching out of its cage. Known as Siberian Magic, the property is home to a collection of domestic and imported animals.

Agriculture Minister Pat Bell and Environment Minister Barry Penner have reviewed the existing provincial legislation, the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and the Wildlife Act. Bell said some municipalities have bylaws to bar the possession of certain exotic animals, but there appears to be no regulation covering the breeding of exotics within Canada.

"We're meeting with the SPCA ... along with the Vancouver Humane Society to look at all of the options," Bell said. "I think people know that the federal government has responsibility for importation. Regional districts and municipalities can regulate the licensing regime around exotics, but we're looking for some sort of a more uniform approach across the province."

Penner said the issue comes up as his ministry is in the midst of public consultation on changes to the Wildlife Act, which has some provisions related to zoos and wildlife rehabilitation operations.

"One of the specific options we've identified for potential modernization of the act is listing certain species that would require additional rules and regulations around the handling of those species," Penner said.

Bell and Penner agreed it's important to have a list, because exotic animals such as parrots or llamas are commonly kept as pets and most people support that if they are properly cared for.

The B.C. SPCA was concerned about danger to the public from the animals at Siberian Magic, which have been shown at schools and shopping malls, but it has no authority to seize animals unless they are neglected or abused.

Public comments on changes to the Wildlife Act are being accepted until the end of June. A discussion paper and a forum for public comments has been posted at the

Ministry of Environment website, at www.env.gov.bc.ca/fw/wildlifeactreview/.

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