

A letter to be read into the October 24th, 2007 Nye County Board of County Commissioner's Meeting Concerning Bill Number 2007-13

My name is Tim Stoffel, and I am a resident of Washoe County, Nevada. I am requesting that this letter be read into the meeting, and incorporated into the testimony given at that meeting.

I am very concerned about this proposed bill 2007-13 and its implications for owners of exotic animals, not only in Nye County, but in other places in Nevada as well. Strange laws like this tend to spread. I am a keeper of big and small cats in a zoo setting, and am currently consulting on the design of a new big cat facility in another part of the country.

This bill seems to be based on misinformation, and ill-conceived ideas about the safety of exotic animals, especially small exotic animals. I am going to deal with exotic cats here, as this is my area of expertise, but I believe it applies to most other exotic animals as well.

There is some merit to regulating large exotic animals, but the approach given in this bill is inappropriate. The kind of zoning process required by this bill opens up the people who wish to have the large exotics to an unfair type of 'Kangaroo Court', in which every neighbor within a considerable radius may come forth and exhibit generally unfounded fear of having that particular animal nearby. Most of these people are not aware of the real issues involved in keeping animals such as lions and tigers. What they don't understand, they fear. If you examine the extant statistics for big cats, you will find that the safety threat to the public at large is for all intents and purposes nonexistent. (You can read an extensive study I did a couple years back on deaths and injuries caused by big cats in the United States at http://www.lionlamb.us/lion/CWSA_comments.pdf. This study basically concludes you are at far greater risk of serious injury or death by doing things like driving to this hearing than you will ever be from a big cat.) Therefore, I feel that Nye County should drop the requirement for a special use permit FOR LARGE EXOTICS if the property has at least two acres of land, and has a perimeter fence.

The problems of this bill for small exotics is even more serious. For animals like servals, caracals, ocelots, etc. there is no justification for the extreme requirements in this bill. These animals do not pose any kind of a public safety or health risk. They are too small. These animals are a bit harder to care for, but otherwise, they have much in common with domestic cats. I do not know of a single incident caused by an escaped small exotic cat. This problem is even more severe for people who have hybrid domestic/exotic cats. Some of these breeds are even recognized by major cat fancier's associations as legitimate breeds. There does not need to be any law whatsoever regulating these people.

Some people will say there are health risks from diseases that exotic animals carry. In reality, these risks are about the same as any animal we work with in our society, such as dogs, cats, cows, horses, etc. In many cases, these animals are even more disease free than our common animals, because their owners take extra good care of them. No special laws or requirements are needed to protect the public from any diseases carried by exotic animals.

Respectfully,
Tim Stoffel