

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 23, 2003

CONTACT: Kim Haddad, DVM
(650) 595-4692
www.cwapc.org

HOMELESS TIGERS FACE POSSIBLE DEATH
-- RESCUE FUND ESTABLISHED --

(SAN CARLOS, Calif.) –JULY 23, 2003-- Authorities in California and Texas have asked the Captive Wild Animal Protection Coalition (CWAPC) and other animal protection groups to help find proper placement for 90 big cats recently rescued from horrendous conditions.

The 90 big cats were seized at two different facilities in the past month by the California Department of Fish & Game and the Texas district attorney's office in connection with illegal wildlife possession and breeding charges, child endangerment, animal cruelty, fraud and/or misuse of funds.

The CWAPC -- which represents 20 leading animal protection organizations, zoos, and more than 10 million supporters -- believes that the immediate, humane euthanasia is preferable to the continued suffering of these animals in inadequate facilities or an uncertain future in the breeding, entertainment, or private "pet" industries.

"Obviously, we prefer that these animals get placed in reputable, accredited sanctuaries or zoos," said Kim Haddad, DVM and manager of CWAPC. "However, death is a more humane answer than allowing these beautiful animals to continue to live in the horrendous conditions we have witnessed in California and Texas."

According to CWAPC, it is critical to differentiate reputable, accredited sanctuaries and zoos from just any USDA licensed animal exhibit or facility. The so called "tiger sanctuary" in Colton, California being shut down by the Department of Fish and Game, was a USDA licensed facility. Descriptions of the April 22, 2003 raid on the sanctuary operator's home describe a hideous scene. "The residence was filthy," Rick Fischer, a California Department of Fish and Game warden said. "Garbage was strewn about, animal feces was on the floor, and there was a strong odor of animal feces

throughout the home." The area outside his home was described by Riverside County's Animal Control Services as "...equally grim, with rotting animal carcasses and bones strewn about the property, tiger hides stored in a trailer and mounds of trash and animal waste everywhere." Weinhart, the sanctuary operator, kept his collection of more than 70 exotic big cats at Tiger Rescue in Colton, CA, a USDA licensed facility. According to State officials, Weinhart kept his cats in cramped, filthy cages without adequate food, water or shelter and bred them without a proper permit.

"USDA licensing alone is no guarantee that animals will receive responsible lifelong care in appropriate environments," Haddad added.

Captive Wild Animal Rescue Fund Established

To help improve the quality of care for captive wild animals and to assist the sanctuary community receive and care for more captive wild animals, the CWAPC has established the **CAPTIVE WILD ANIMAL RESCUE FUND**. Donations should be sent to:

Captive Wild Animal Rescue Fund
Captive Wild Animal Protection Coalition
P.O. Box 6944
San Carlos, CA 94070
To donate: <http://www.cwapc.org/fund/index.html>

The cost of caring for these wild animals in captivity is substantial and growing. CWAPC conservatively estimates that a quality diet, proper veterinary care and professionally trained staff for these 90 cats, who in captivity can live 15-20 years, is approximately \$500,000 per year, or more than \$8 million over the course of their lives. Most sanctuaries are at capacity and would need to build new enclosures; new habitats for these 90 big cats alone would cost more than \$2 million.

A Growing Problem

CWAPC estimates that in the United States today private citizens own more than 10,000 large cats -- lions, tigers, cougars, leopards and jaguars, many of whom endure --

significant deprivation and suffering. CWAPC is deeply concerned about the welfare of these animals, which are likely to be confiscated or abandoned in increasing numbers.

CWAPC believes the practice of keeping wild animals as “pets” is reaching crisis levels for both people and animals. Wild animals kept as “pets” or in private menageries have been known to injure or kill children and adults and too often are confined in appalling conditions by unqualified owners; they also can transmit potentially deadly diseases to humans and other animals.

“We know if we’re lucky enough to help place these 90 cats from California and Texas, we’ll be in the same situation again soon, and we are at a loss of where to put all of these animals,” said Haddad. “Ultimately thousands of animals may be euthanized.”

Historically, nonprofit organizations, sanctuaries and American Zoo and Aquarium Association facilities have accepted the awesome and expensive responsibility of providing a permanent home for animals lucky enough to be confiscated. Yet legitimate sanctuaries and accredited zoos will never be able to absorb all of the tens of thousands of captive wild animals languishing in poor conditions in the United States.

For more information on the CWAPC, please contact Kim Haddad, DVM, at (650) 595-4692.

###