



Briefing note: Ontario's roadside zoos

Background

With approximately 50 zoos, wildlife displays, and zoo-type exhibits housing wild animals, many of which can be classified as roadside zoos, **Ontario has the most captive wildlife operations in all of Canada.** This province is the only major jurisdiction that has not yet comprehensively addressed issues related to the keeping of wild animals in zoos, mobile zoos or when kept as pets. Instead, this responsibility has been downloaded to municipalities, which often lack the expertise and/or resources to deal with captive (and often dangerous) wild animals. Additionally, the current existing regulations that are supposed to safeguard the health and wellbeing of captive wildlife and the public are not working.¹ We would like to see the province take ownership and resolve this longstanding issue.

Provincial responsibilities

There are two Ontario ministries with authority to regulate the keeping of wild animals.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) issues licences for keeping certain native wildlife in captivity through regulations under the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act*. **Very few conditions are attached to these licences and there are no required minimum qualifications, such as professional training in the humane and safe caretaking of these animals.**

The Ministry of the Solicitor General (SOLGEN) is responsible for the welfare of all captive wildlife (native and exotic) through the *Standards of Care and Administrative Requirements* under the *Provincial Animal Welfare Services (PAWS) Act*. The Act does not license facilities and its **animal care provisions are vague and have shown to be unenforceable, and there are no prescribed minimum safety standards.**

To this day, the province has not regulated the keeping or the use of exotic wild animals for display purposes (i.e., zoos). Lions, tigers, monkeys, parrots, snakes, etc., can be kept and displayed in the province without restrictions, unless a municipality has a bylaw preventing this. **Ontario is the only major jurisdiction in Canada that hasn't regulated this issue at provincial level (see attached score card).**

¹ https://www.worldanimalprotection.ca/sites/default/files/media/WAP_Roadside_Zoo_Report_FINAL_092322_LR_1.pdf
(World Animal Protection, 2022)

Impact on Municipalities

- In Ontario, between 1,000 and 2,000 wild animals are currently kept at roadside zoos and tens of thousands more are being kept in private homes.² **In many cases, the exact location of these wild and potentially dangerous animals is unknown, presenting a safety concern for neighbours, firefighters, police, by-law enforcement officers, and other first responders.**
- In addition to public safety and animal welfare issues, poorly run facilities can be a community nuisance contributing to odour, noise and other problems, which can result in a decrease in property value of adjacent properties and ultimately impact the municipal tax base.
- Captive wildlife related issues can overburden already stretched municipal services – animal control staff may have to catch escaped animals, find homes for surplus or abandoned animals, and respond to noise and other complaints.
- Retroactively closing facilities or stopping exotic animal owners from bringing their animals into municipalities causes significant pressures on municipal legal staff and other departments, on financial resources, and can lead to significant unrest within communities.
- **Municipalities that have bylaws in place are increasingly facing challenges from unregulated zoo-type facilities, mobile zoos, and wild animal owners who have sought bylaw exemptions or have attempted to open zoo-type facilities and bring in prohibited wild animal species despite existing bylaws.**

Resolution

World Animal Protection and Zoocheck are asking municipalities to support and adopt the resolution to urge the Ontario government to stop downloading responsibilities to municipalities. Instead, the Ontario government should restrict the possession, breeding, and use of non-native (“exotic”) wild animals and license zoos to support municipalities and guarantee the fair and consistent application of policy for the safety of Ontario’s citizens and the captive wild animal population.

Our campaign is supported by major municipal associations such as AMO, AMCTO, and MLEOA, as well as by the Toronto Zoo.

<https://www.worldanimalprotection.ca/municipal-resolution>

² [Risky Business, the unregulated exotic pet trade in Canada](#) (World Animal Protection, 2019)





	ON	MB	NL	NB	NS	PEI	BC	SK	QC	AB
Provincial licence	○	○	●	○	●	○	●	●	●	●
Permit for non-native wildlife	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Permit for native wildlife	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Animal welfare standards	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	●
Public safety & security standards	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	●
Liability insurance	○	○	○	○	○	●	●	●	●	●

[name of municipality] RESOLUTION
Provincial regulations needed to restrict keeping of non-native (“exotic”) wild animals

WHEREAS Ontario has more private non-native (“exotic”) wild animal keepers, roadside zoos, mobile zoos, wildlife exhibits and other captive wildlife operations than any other province; and,

WHEREAS the Province of Ontario has of yet not developed regulations to prohibit or restrict animal possession, breeding, or use of non-native (“exotic”) wild animals in captivity; and,

WHEREAS non-native (“exotic”) wild animals can pose very serious human health and safety risks, and attacks causing human injury and death have occurred in the province; and,

WHEREAS the keeping of non-native (“exotic”) wild animals can cause poor animal welfare and suffering, and poses risks to local environments and wildlife; and,

WHEREAS owners of non-native (“exotic”) wild animals can move from one community to another even after their operations have been shut down due to animal welfare or public health and safety concerns; and,

WHEREAS municipalities have struggled, often for months or years, to deal with non-native (“exotic”) wild animal issues and have experienced substantive regulatory, administrative, enforcement and financial challenges; and,

AND WHEREAS the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO) and the Municipal Law Enforcement Officers' Association (MLEOA) have indicated their support for World Animal Protection’s campaign for provincial regulations of non-native (“exotic”) wild animals and roadside zoos in letters to the Ontario Solicitor General and Ontario Minister for Natural Resources and Forestry;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT [given the recent [enter incidents if any]], the [name municipality] hereby petitions the provincial government to implement provincial regulations to restrict the possession, breeding, and use of non-native (“exotic”) wild animals and license zoos in order to guarantee the fair and consistent application of policy throughout Ontario for the safety of Ontario’s citizens and the non-native (“exotic”) wild animal population;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this resolution will be forwarded to all municipalities in Ontario for support and that each endorsement be then forwarded to the Premier of Ontario (premier@ontario.ca), Ontario Solicitor General (michael.kerzner@ontario.ca), Ontario Minister for Natural Resources and Forestry (graydon.smith@ontario.ca) and MPP [name and email address provincial representative], AMO (amo@amo.on.ca), AMCTO (advocacy@amcto.com), and MLEAO (mleo@mleoa.ca).



Friday, September 27, 2024

Sent via email
premier@ontario.ca

Hon. Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Bldg, Rm 281
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Ford,

Re: Roadside Zoos Legislation

On Sunday, August 18, 2024 the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus passed the following motion:

Moved by B. Clarke, seconded by K. Marriott:

"THAT this report titled "Roadside Zoos" be received and filed; and

THAT the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus pass the following resolution and forward to all 117 municipalities in Western Ontario;

WHEREAS Ontario has more private non-native ("exotic") wild animal keepers, roadside zoos, mobile zoos, wildlife exhibits and other captive wildlife operations than any other province; and,

WHEREAS the Province of Ontario has of yet not developed regulations to prohibit or restrict animal possession, breeding, or use of non-native ("exotic") wild animals in captivity; and,

WHEREAS non-native ("exotic") wild animals can pose very serious human health and safety risks, and attacks causing human injury and death have occurred in the province; and,

WHEREAS the keeping of non-native ("exotic") wild animals can cause poor animal welfare and suffering, and poses risks to local environments and wildlife; and,

WHEREAS owners of non-native ("exotic") wild animals can move from one community to another even after their operations have been shut down due to animal welfare or public health and safety concerns; and,

WHEREAS municipalities have struggled, often for months or years, to deal with non-native ("exotic") wild animal issues and have experienced substantive regulatory, administrative, enforcement and financial challenges; and,

AND WHEREAS the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO) and the Municipal Law Enforcement Officers'

Association (MLEOA) have indicated their support for World Animal Protection's campaign for provincial regulations of non-native ("exotic") wild animals and roadside zoos in letters to the Ontario Solicitor General and Ontario Minister for Natural Resources and Forestry;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus hereby petitions the provincial government to implement provincial regulations to restrict the possession, breeding, and use of non-native ("exotic") wild animals and license zoos in order to guarantee the fair and consistent application of policy throughout Ontario for the safety of Ontario's citizens and the non-native ("exotic") wild animal population;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this resolution will be forwarded to all municipalities in Ontario for support and that each endorsement be then forwarded to the Premier of Ontario (premier@ontario.ca), Ontario Solicitor General (michael.kerzner@ontario.ca), Ontario Minister for Natural Resources and Forestry (graydon.smith@ontario.ca) and AMO (amo@amo.on.ca) , AMCTO (advocacy@amcto.com) , and MLEAO (mleo@mleoa.ca)." - **CARRIED**

Sincerely,



Glen McNeil,
Chair, Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus

cc:

Hon Michael Kerzner, Solicitor General
Hon. Graydon Smith, Minister for Natural Resources and Forestry
Association of Municipalities of Ontario
Association of Municipal Clerks and Treasurers
Municipal Law Enforcement Officers' Association
Western Ontario Municipalities