Young cubs: So cute, but you no longer can hold them

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The federal government is cracking down on roadside zoos for letting people play with exotic cats. Roadside zoos are small collections of animals in cages alongside roads. They often include exotic cats, large wild cats such as tigers and lions. These zoos have made large amounts of money allowing people to feed and play with exotic cats.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has responded to pressure from animal welfare groups. These groups have asked the USDA to halt the use of cubs as entertainment. Zoos have allowed visitors to have pictures taken with tigers, lions, leopards and cheetahs. People have often paid large sums of money for the pictures of them holding, playing with or feeding the animals.

Now, cubs younger than 4 weeks old cannot be removed from their mothers and handled by the public. The USDA has decided that this violates the Animal Welfare Act, a law that protects animals. Zoos must make sure cubs are kept with their mothers and sheltered properly. In addition, the cubs may be handled with care by zoo workers only.
Many Roadside Zoos At Fault

Animal welfare groups say the practices of roadside zoos are widespread and harmful. Seventy-five roadside zoos have removed hundreds of cubs from their mothers to allow visitors to handle them. This interrupts the feeding cubs receive from their mothers and alters their behavior.

The Humane Society found two zoos where cubs were regularly abused. This occurred at Natural Bridge Zoo in Virginia and Tiger Safari in Oklahoma. The cubs were punched and smacked to prevent them from playfully scratching or biting people.

One cub was used for 30 photo sessions and five 30-minute play sessions in one day. The Humane Society said visitors paid $50 for a photo session and $300 for a play session. At that rate, one cub could earn the zoo $65,000 over the course of a single summer.

Cubs Prevented From Bonding

Anna Frostic, a lawyer at the Humane Society, said zoos mass-breed tigers for this purpose. Frostic said zoos break the bond between the mother and cub right away. This makes it easier to get the cub to submit to human contact. Separated from their mothers, cubs are robbed of nutrition and regular feeding.

Frostic said taking a young cub away from its mother was an inhumane practice. "It's not possible to convince a mother tiger that you will take her babies for a day and then give them back," she said.

Zoos that allow people to interact with big cats are covered by the Animal Welfare Act. However, these roadside zoos are not members of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). The AZA requires members to keep cubs with their mothers. Frostic said the USDA's move will serve as a warning to these zoos. If they fail to follow regulations, they will be brought to court and punished under the law.

Wild Tigers Could Be Targeted

Mistreatment of exotic cats affects more than their immediate welfare. Once the cubs have grown up, they are often handed off to larger zoos. These zoos have to find space and the money to care for the fully grown adult cats. These practices can also help fuel the market for poaching tigers.

Leigh Henry is a wildlife conservation policy adviser at World Wildlife Fund. Henry said he believes the treatment of captive tigers in the United States affects the conservation of tigers in the wild. U.S. captive tigers need to be regulated more carefully, Henry said. This will prevent parts from tigers born in captivity from entering the black market. When parts from tigers born in captivity are sold on the market, they create a demand for the parts. This, in turn, leads to more hunters poaching wild tigers.
Quiz

1. Anna Frostic would MOST LIKELY agree with which of the following statements?
   (A) Removing a cub from its mother is harmful to the cub’s development.
   (B) Illegal capturing of tigers is leading to inhumane treatment of tigers in zoos.
   (C) The black market allowing for tiger parts is driving the poor treatment of tigers in the United States.
   (D) The USDA should be strongly enforcing the Animal Welfare Act to protect tiger cubs.

2. What is the MOST important reason why welfare groups support the federal government’s decision about roadside zoos?
   (A) They believe that tiger cubs are being abused and are not being properly fed.
   (B) They believe that the decision will help to decrease tiger part sales made on the black market.
   (C) They believe that the current enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act is too weak.
   (D) They believe that the Natural Bridge Zoo and the Tiger Safari should be shut down for abuse.

3. Read the sentence from the section "Many Roadside Zoos At Fault."

   The cubs were punched and smacked to prevent them from playfully scratching or biting people.

   How do the words 'punched' and "smacked" affect the meaning of the sentence?
   (A) They show the harm mothers can inflict on their cubs.
   (B) They show the abuse tiger cubs suffer at roadside zoos.
   (C) They show the frustration and anger of the welfare groups.
   (D) They show the need for stricter regulations at roadside zoos.
This interrupts the feeding cubs receive from their mothers and alters their behavior.

Which answer choice is the BEST definition of the word "alters" as used in the sentence?

(A) tailors
(B) changes
(C) adapts
(D) varies