



October 19, 2011
For Immediate Release

Private Ownership of Wild Animals Proves Catastrophic

(San Andreas, CA) — After the tragic news from Zanesville, Ohio, early this morning, PAWS' founders, Pat Derby and Ed Stewart, are once again urging states to enact emergency regulations restricting the sale and possession of dangerous wild animals for private ownership.

The owner of a wild animal collection, Terry Thompson, opened the gates to the cages of as many as 56 wild and exotic animals — including bears, cheetahs, chimps, orangutans, wolves, lions, camels, giraffes and a white Siberian tiger — prior to committing suicide. Mr. Thompson had recently served a year-long prison sentence on a weapons conviction and had been cited for animal abuse and neglect as well. According to local authorities, in the last six years police officials have been called to Mr. Thompson's property 16 times for reports of animals at large, eight times for animal complaints and three times for animal cruelty.

"Today's tragedy illustrates what PAWS has been advocating since our founding in 1984 — that it is critical to restrict private sector ownership of wild animals," emphasizes Pat Derby.

"We see the terrible, and often deadly, results from these so-called private animal collections. PAWS has been involved with numerous rescues of animals who have suffered senselessly at these facilities. The animals are stuffed into rotting cages or filthy pens. They are more than likely malnourished and suffering from medical conditions," Ed Stewart points out.

"In fact," Pat Derby continues, "two of PAWS' rescued bears, Winston and Boo Boo, came from Ohio. But the truth of the matter is that most of our saddest and worst rescues stories have their roots in these unregulated animal collections and breeding facilities. If we could ban private ownership completely, there may be hope that someday places like the PAWS sanctuary might not have to exist. That, ultimately, is our goal!"

"Perhaps the most puzzling factor in this tragedy is Thompson's possession of cheetahs, orangutans and chimpanzees," says Derby. "If the reports that we have seen are correct, we are particularly concerned about their origins since these are species that are not usually found in the private sector."

Ed Stewart adds, "And to our knowledge, there are no breeders of cheetahs, chimps or orangutans allowed in the private sector. So, with the news of those species kept at the Muskingum County Animal Farm, we plan to investigate their origins. The question we want answered by the USDA and the Department of Fish and Wildlife is: Where did Mr. Thompson acquire these animals? We want to see the paper trail. Did they come from a zoo? Did they cross state lines? Just where did they originate?"

Due to the efforts of PAWS, and collaborations with other animal protection and public safety organizations, most states have permitting policies and restrictions in place. In 1985 PAWS sponsored California Assembly Bill 1620, authored by then Assembly member Sam Farr, that virtually eliminated private ownership of exotic animals and standardized the permitting process. However, eight states still allow these types of private wild animal menageries.

The following states have little or no regulations or permit requirements:

Alabama	Montana	South Carolina
Idaho	Nevada	West Virginia
Michigan	North Carolina	Wisconsin

PAWS urges citizens in the above listed states to write their state officials to ask that stronger regulations and bans be set in place to prevent more tragedies. PAWS is also launching a state and federal investigation into the source origin of these animals.