



• VEGAS STARTS HERE.™

July 31, 2012

The Honorable Doc Hastings
Chairman, House Natural Resources Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

We write today in opposition to H.R. 4122, the Big Cats and Public Safety Protection Act, which would prohibit the keeping, breeding, and display of tigers and other big cats currently held by institutions like ours.

The Mirage is home to the world-renowned Secret Garden and Dolphin Habitat, presenting some of the rarest and most endangered big cats on earth, including tigers, lions, and leopards. The opportunity to share these magnificent animals with the public and to educate our visitors about their unique abilities and intelligence is something we take very seriously, as we are aware of our responsibility to ensure their continued survival on the planet. We believe, and studies support, that people who experience our animals are more likely to support and engage in conservation activities.

Given our decades of experience working with these animals, educating the public, and supporting conservation of the species, we must respectfully disagree with the premise underlying H.R. 4122. In fact, we believe this legislation will do more to harm conservation efforts and survival of the species than to support it.

Advocates of H.R. 4122 suggest that captive breeding and the keeping and public display of tigers in the U.S. fuels illegal trade in tiger parts and products. In fact, there is no evidence to support this allegation, as acknowledged by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in a recent proposed rule, citing a report by TRAFFIC.

Similar to zoos, circuses, and animal parks, the Mirage is required to obtain an Exhibitors License from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in order to hold and display our animals to the public. Accordingly, we must comply with the Animal Welfare Act, which governs the housing, care, and handling of the animals in our care. We are furthermore subject to unannounced inspections by the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), and the results of these inspections are public information. In addition to USDA, the USFWS also maintains oversight of any big cats

listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), through the Captive-bred Wildlife (CBW) registration system and under the Captive Wildlife Safety Act (CWSA).

Rather than recognizing this significant federal license and oversight, H.R. 4122 would remove the current exemption under the CWSA for USDA licensees and instead grant exempt status only to members of a single zoo trade association, the AZA. Such a change discriminates against entities that choose not to, or are not eligible to, join this association. In addition, federal law should not mandate membership in a trade association as a condition for private enterprises to engage in regulated activities. In fact, to deny legitimate, federally licensed animal attractions from being allowed to continue to maintain, breed, and display big cats does little to prevent illegal trade and will do much to harm conservation education efforts in the U.S.

Further, the legislation fails to accomplish another of its stated goals, limiting the private ownership of big cats and improving public safety, as its scope is confined to those who are already federally regulated by USDA. The bill will do little or nothing to address state oversight of unlicensed operations that are not subject to federal licensing and do not impact interstate commerce and are, therefore, beyond the reach of federal regulation.

For these reasons, we respectfully oppose H.R. 4122 and ask for your consideration and support of our position.

Sincerely,



David Blasko
Director of Animal Care

cc: Hon. Buck McKeon
Hon. Shelley Berkley