



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES

Testimony in Opposition to SB 48
House Agriculture Committee
February 20, 2013

On behalf of The Humane Society of the United States and our Michigan members and supporters, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to SB 48. The HSUS joins highly respected bear experts, including those at the Detroit Zoo and the Association of Zoos and Aquariums in opposing this bill, which would significantly weaken Michigan's Large Carnivore Act. Michigan law currently prohibits private possession and direct contact with large carnivores including bears and big cats. SB 48 would allow Michigan's bear exhibitors, many of whom have a history of serious welfare and safety issues, to endanger the public by allowing children and adults to handle and come into direct contact with bear cubs up to 36 weeks of age (about 9 months) and who weigh up to 90 pounds.^{1,2,3,4,5}

The practice of handling and using bear cubs for photo opportunities with the public seriously compromises animal welfare and threatens public safety. It is extremely stressful for bear cubs to be prematurely removed from the nurturing care of their mothers—a common practice to facilitate public handling. During photo and play sessions with the public, the cubs may also be exposed to abusive and excessive handling. Even young bears have sharp teeth, powerful jaws, and non-retractable claws that can inflict serious and painful injuries.

SB 48 is directly in conflict with the federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA) regulations administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). USDA inspectors have cited animal exhibitors for violating AWA handling regulations when they allow unsafe public contact with bear cubs, including those significantly younger than 36 weeks of age. Unfortunately, most public handling activities are unmonitored by USDA inspectors and there will continue to be poor oversight if Michigan expands these activities since the state does not have the resources to adequately inspect and observe these operations either.

SB 48 could further burden law enforcement since it will likely result in an increase in the state's captive bear population and unwanted and potentially discarded adult bears. There is no legitimate justification for amending the state's long-standing law that for over a decade has protected Michigan's bears from being bred for use in this practice.

SB 48 will allow Michigan's bear exhibitors, many of whom have a history of serious welfare and/or safety issues as summarized below, to endanger the public by allowing direct contact with dangerous wild animals:

Oswald's Bear Ranch in Newberry: In 2010, Dean Oswald's Bear Ranch was cited by the US DA for using physical abuse to discipline a bear cub. A handler hit the bear cub twice while the animal was being used for photo opportunities with the public.⁶ Oswald had previously told a reporter who was handling a bear cub, "If he does something to you that you don't want done, slap him one."⁷ Oswald was apparently informed by state officials in June 2012 that the dangerous practice of allowing the public to handle bear cubs violated state law.⁸

100 Aker Wood in Mayville: During a 2011 pre-license inspection by the USDA, 100 Aker Wood was cited for not having a way to lock up the bears so employees could safely clean the enclosure and inspect the animals. Weeks after the other bears emerged from hibernation, employees discovered a dead bear who had not emerged from hibernation. The USDA inspector wrote, "Had employees been able to access the enclosure earlier it is possible that the bear may have been provided with treatment."⁹

Dakin's Dream in Ewen: In 2011, the USDA issued an official warning against Dakin's Dream after a member of the public was attacked and injured by a bear. The person entered the bear enclosure to provide water for the animals and was not aware that at least one of the bears was still in the pen. The bear was killed by a state police officer.^{10,11}

Summer Wind Farm in Brown City: In 2012, Summer Wind Farm accepted a settlement agreement with the USDA for chronic, serious Animal Welfare Act violations. The facility was fined \$500, had its license suspended for three months, and agreed not to acquire more animals for two years. Among the many violations were citations for a black bear enclosure that was in disrepair with wire panels that were beginning to bend and sag, excessive excreta in the black bear enclosure, and filthy, unsanitary drinking water receptacles.¹²

Wilderness Trail Zoo in Birch Run: A number of disappointed travelers have posted troubling comments at an online travel review site after visiting Wilderness Trail Zoo:

- “The poor animals at this facility have some very small and dirty pens. The poor bear and tigers especially have very little room.”¹³
- “We saw a bear that appeared half-dead -- it was very thin, appeared to have skin problems and was not moving. Pacing and lethargic animals were also very common.”¹⁴
- “[M]any of the enclosures seemed too confining for the animals ...”¹⁵
- “[T]he habitats for a good many of them are just substandard if not criminal. A lot of the cages have concrete floors and just chain link fence ... the pacing bear is still pacing.”¹⁶
- “The bear was pacing the cage and I felt that it was all it had to do.”¹⁷
- “Most of the exhibits in this small zoo are too small and completely unlike the natural habitats of the animals within them. We found ourselves just feeling sorry for the animals!”¹⁸

For the reasons cited above, we ask that you reject SB 48, which would weaken our state’s Large Carnivore Act and put people and animals at risk. Thank you.

Jill Fritz
Michigan State Director
The Humane Society of the United States
jfritz@humanesociety.org
(517) 515-3839

¹ Lee Zion, “Girl bitten at bear park,” *Smoky Mountain Times*, September 2, 2010.

² U.S. Department of Agriculture, Complaint, Safari’s, Inc., Docket No. AWA 12-0340, April 6, 2012.

³ Garret Mathews, “Tender Moment with Cuddly Cub Almost Unbearable,” *Evansville Courier & Press*, July 20, 2005.

⁴ Charles Fiegl, “Game farm cited for violations,” *Post-Star*, September 14, 2006.

⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Inspection Report, License #52-C-0035, June 16, 2000.

⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Inspection Report, License #34-C-0123, November 9, 2010.

⁷ Garret Mathews, “Tender moment with cuddly cub almost unbearable,” *Evansville Courier & Press*, July 20, 2005.

⁸ meeta4, “You can no longer take pictures with the bear cubs!,” TripAdvisor, Oswald’s Bear Ranch, July 9, 2012.

⁹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Inspection Report, Customer #323804, Prelicense #1, September 8, 2011.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Official Warning, Violation of Federal Regulations, Case #MI-11090, September 19, 2011.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Inspection Report, License #34-C-0297, July 27, 2011.

¹² U.S. Department of Agriculture, Consent Decision and Order, Docket #11-0223, March 8, 2012.

¹³ Amanda S, “Dirty,” TripAdvisor, Wilderness Trails Zoo, September 13, 2012.

¹⁴ HomeSweetHome, “Would never go back,” TripAdvisor, Wilderness Trails Zoo, July 26, 2012.

¹⁵ MichiganMrs, “Seemed too Confining,” TripAdvisor, Wilderness Trails Zoo, July 20, 2012.

¹⁶ jwax67, “The poor animals!!!!,” TripAdvisor, Wilderness Trails Zoo, June 17, 2012.

¹⁷ cricketnest, “Very Disappointing Zoo,” TripAdvisor, Wilderness Trails Zoo, May 28, 2012.

¹⁸ Migrammi, “Disappointing,” TripAdvisor, Wilderness Trails Zoo, September 28, 2011.

Oppose Senate Bill 48, a bill to weaken Michigan's Large Carnivore Act

BEAR CUB INCIDENTS

July 21, 2010/Cherokee, North Carolina: A 9-year-old girl was bitten by a 6-month-old bear cub at Chief Saunooke Bear Park. The child sustained scratches on her palm and the back of her hand and tooth marks at her wrist bone. This was the second documented bite by a bear at the park within the span of a week.¹

June 8, 2010/Broken Arrow, Oklahoma: A volunteer was bitten by a bear cub at Safari's, Inc., while transporting the bear in a golf cart.²

July 2005/Newberry, Michigan: Dean Oswald of Oswald's Bear Ranch was bitten six times, hard enough to draw blood, by a recently acquired bear cub.³

2004/Queensbury, New York: A bear cub being exhibited at a AAA office by the Ashville Game Farm and Exotic Zoo bit a person in the face.⁴

June 11, 2000/Natural Bridge, Virginia: A visitor to Natural Bridge Zoo was bitten and/or scratched by one of a group of three Asiatic bear cubs.⁵

Contact Jill Fritz, Michigan state director, for more information:
517-515-3839,
jfritz@humanesociety.org

Senate Bill 48 would significantly weaken Michigan's Large Carnivore Act, which currently prohibits private possession and direct contact with large carnivores including bears and big cats. The bill will allow the public to handle and come into contact with bear cubs up to about 9 months of age.

The practice of handling and using bear cubs for photo opportunities with the public seriously compromises animal welfare and threatens public safety. It is extremely stressful for bear cubs to be prematurely removed from the nurturing care of their mothers—a common practice to facilitate public handling. During photo and play sessions with the public, the cubs may also be exposed to abusive and excessive handling. Young cubs are capable of inflicting painful injuries and by 9 months of age a healthy black bear cub can weigh more than 65 pounds.

SB 48 will likely result in an increase in the state's captive bear population and unwanted and potentially discarded adult bears and could further burden law enforcement. There is no legitimate justification for amending this long standing law that for over a decade has protected Michigan's bears from being bred for use in this practice.

SB 48 will allow Michigan's bear exhibitors, which have a history of serious welfare and/or safety issues as summarized below, to endanger the public by allowing direct contact with dangerous wild animals:

Oswald's Bear Ranch in Newberry

In 2010, Dean Oswald's Bear Ranch was cited by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for using physical abuse to discipline a bear cub. A handler hit the bear cub twice while the animal was being used for photo opportunities with the public.⁶ Oswald had previously told a reporter who was handling a bear cub, "If he does something to you that you don't want done, slap him one."⁷ Oswald was apparently informed by state officials in June 2012 that the dangerous practice of allowing the public to handle bear cubs violated state law.⁸

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Dakin's Dream in Ewen

In 2011, the USDA issued an official warning against Dakin's Dream after a member of the public was attacked and injured by a bear. The person entered the bear enclosure to provide water for the animals and was not aware that at least one of the bears was still in the pen. The bear was killed by a state police officer.^{10,11}



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Summer Wind Farm in Brown City

In 2012, Summer Wind Farm accepted a settlement agreement with the USDA for chronic, serious Animal Welfare Act violations. The facility was fined \$500, had its license suspended for three months, and agreed not to acquire more animals for two years. Among the many violations were citations for a black bear enclosure that was in disrepair with wire panels that were beginning to bend and sag, excessive excreta in the black bear enclosure, and filthy, unsanitary drinking water receptacles.¹²

Wilderness Trail Zoo in Birch Run

A number of disappointed travelers have posted troubling comments at an online travel review site after visiting Wilderness Trail Zoo:

- “The poor animals at this facility have some very small and dirty pens. The poor bear and tigers especially have very little room.”¹³
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- “[M]any of the enclosures seemed too confining for the animals ...”¹⁵
- “[T]he habitats for a good many of them are just substandard if not criminal. A lot of the cages have concrete floors and just chain link fence ... the pacing bear is still pacing.”¹⁶
- “The bear was pacing the cage and I felt that it was all it had to do.”¹⁷
- “Most of the exhibits in this small zoo are too small and completely unlike the natural habitats of the animals within them. We found ourselves just feeling sorry for the animals!”¹⁸

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bear incidents

Oppose Senate Bill 48, a bill to weaken Michigan's Large Carnivore Act

SB 48 would allow the public to handle bear cubs less than 36 weeks of age, posing serious threats to public safety. Typically purchased as cute, cuddly cubs, bears quickly develop a lethal combination of long claws, sharp teeth, powerful jaws, and unpredictable behavior. Six adults have been killed, and more than 45 injured, by captive bears since 1990. At least a dozen children, including four 4-year-old boys have been injured. One child's hand was nearly severed and three others lost fingers. The bears are victims, too. More than two dozen bears have been killed as a result of escapes or attacks. Following is a partial list of dangerous incidents involving captive bears, with some of the more notable items **highlighted**.

“He was full of life, had a wonderful sense of humor, was caring, and will be greatly missed by everyone who loves him.”

A mother's note posted on her son's Facebook page informing his friends that he had been killed by someone's pet black bear in Ohio

WELFARE CONCERNS

Bears are curious and energetic animals who are active for up to 18 hours per day and spend their time exploring, foraging, and eating a wide variety of foods. When confined to enclosures without room to roam and without opportunities to dig, forage, and express other natural behaviors, bears quickly become stressed, frustrated, and bored. Subsequently, they develop neurotic behaviors.

November 4, 2012/Bozeman, Montana: A 24-year-old man was mauled to death by one or both 500-pound male brown bears while cleaning their cage at Animals of Montana, a facility that trains wild animals for use in photo shoots and films. A trainer shot and killed one of the bears in order to retrieve the body. According to the Gallatin County Sheriff, the man had been “fiercely” attacked, had “many injuries,” and died of bite and claw wounds that hit major arteries.¹

October 18, 2011/Zanesville, Ohio: Fifty animals escaped from Terry Thompson's farm when Thompson opened all the enclosures and fences and then killed himself. The sheriff's office warned residents to stay in their homes and recommended that local schools close, and a sign on the Interstate cautioned motorists to stay in their vehicles. Forty-eight animals were subsequently shot and killed by sheriff's deputies—two wolves, six black bears, two grizzly bears, 18 tigers, three cougars, and 17 African lions. A baboon was killed by the big cats and a macaque monkey who was released and never found was believed to have been killed and eaten by the big cats. Three leopards, a grizzly bear and two monkeys were taken to the Columbus Zoo. Thompson had just been released from prison after serving a one-year term for weapons offences.^{2,3}

July 18, 2011/Ewen, Michigan: A member of the public was attacked and injured by a bear at Dakin's Dream A Little Black Bear Sanctuary. The person entered the bear enclosure to provide water for the animals and was not aware that at least one of the bears was still in the pen. The bear was killed by a state police officer.⁴

August 19, 2010/Columbia Station, Ohio: A 24-year-old man was severely mauled by a black bear as he fed the animal at the private menagerie of Sam Mazzola. The man was flown to a medical center, where he died approximately six hours later. He suffered more than 600 wounds, including a laceration to his left brachial artery, two broken ribs, a puncture wound to his heart, and lacerations of his spleen, left kidney, and left lung. According to the autopsy report, the man died from “multiple blunt impacts and sharp force injuries to the head, torso and extremities.”^{5,6}



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bear incidents

“She hasn’t slept much, and her little arm is tore up pretty bad.”

Father of an 8-year old girl who was mauled by a neighbor’s pet black bear in Oklahoma

July 21, 2010/Cherokee, North Carolina: A 9-year-old girl was bitten by a 6-month-old bear cub at Chief Saunooke Bear Park. The child sustained scratches on her palm and the back of her hand and tooth marks at her wrist bone. This was the second documented bite by a bear at the park within the span of a week.⁷

July 2010/Mulberry Grove, Illinois: A worker at the menagerie of Gregg and Karen Woody was bitten on the side of the breast by a bear. As she walked past the enclosure, the bear reached her head through a feeding slot and bit the woman, who was treated at a hospital.⁸

June 8, 2010/Broken Arrow, Oklahoma: A volunteer was bitten by a bear cub at Safari’s, Inc., while transporting the bear in a golf cart.⁹

March 5, 2010/Manitowoc, Wisconsin: One of two Asiatic black bears at the Lincoln Park Zoo bit a woman’s hand, biting off two fingers and partially severing two other fingers, when she tried to feed the bears. Her boyfriend was bitten when he tried to pry the bear’s mouth off her hand. The couple was fined \$681 each by the city for stepping over a barrier to access the bears. The U.S. Department of Agriculture issued an official warning against the zoo for failure to have an adequate safety barrier.^{10,11,12}

December 7, 2009/Cherokee, North Carolina: A 75-year-old caretaker at Chief Saunooke Bear Park was attacked by a bear as she was giving the animals water. The bear reached out of the cage and grabbed the woman, inflicting a serious injury to her right wrist and arm and lacerating her skin near her mouth and hairline. The victim was airlifted to a hospital for treatment.¹³

October 4, 2009/Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania: Kelly Ann Walz was attacked and killed by her 350-pound pet black bear while she cleaned the bear’s cage. A neighbor shot and killed the bear as the animal was about to leave the cage. The victim’s two young children, as well as the neighbor’s children, witnessed the attack. Walz was pronounced dead at the scene.¹⁴

September 24, 2009/Pickens County, South Carolina: A 21-year-old woman was hospitalized with severe injuries and underwent surgery to her hand and arm after she was attacked by a relative’s pet black bear. According to a DNR official, “The bear grabbed her hand in its mouth, pulled it in the cage and shook” when she went to pet the bear.¹⁵

March 8, 2009/Winston, Oregon: A 23-year-old keeper at Wildlife Safari was hospitalized in serious condition after she was attacked by a black bear as she was leaving the bear’s enclosure after feeding the animal. The bear grabbed the woman’s leg with her jaws when she used an electric prod to keep the bear away from her. She was bitten and clawed on her leg and hand.^{16,17}

Since 1990	
Incidents	92
States	31
Human Deaths	6
Human Injuries	60
Animal Deaths	27



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bear incidents

“[The bear’s enclosure was like] forcing a human to live in a small closet [causing] unjustifiable physical and psychological suffering.”

Judicial decision transferring custody of a bear from a roadside zoo in North Carolina to a sanctuary

November 24, 2008/Marengo, Ohio: One of three pet black bears escaped a chain-link enclosure and went to the home of a neighbor, who encountered the bear on his porch. The bear’s owner shot the bear with a .22 caliber rifle when the 300- to 400-pound animal reared up and charged him. The bear was hit above the eye and fled into the woods. Deputies and an Ohio Division of Wildlife officer using night-vision goggles searched for the bear, who was shot and killed approximately an hour and a half later.¹⁸

September 19, 2008/Mount Gilead, Ohio: A nearly 500-pound pet black bear escaped and was subsequently shot and killed by a sheriff’s deputy after the animal attacked and bit the officer in the leg. The bear had a history of escapes and aggressive behavior. The deputy was treated at a local hospital for two puncture wounds.¹⁹

June 24, 2008/Rising Sun, Maryland: Two black bears escaped from their enclosure at the Plumpton Park Zoo when a zookeeper failed to secure two latches and lock a door to the enclosure. One of the bears was euthanized because she became aggressive and the zoo did not have adequate safety equipment, trained personnel, and tranquilization equipment to safely recapture her.²⁰

April 22, 2008/Big Bear City, California: A 7½-foot-tall, 700-pound male grizzly bear named Rocky attacked and killed one of three men who were working with the animal at Predators in Action, a facility that trains animals for use in movies and television. The victim was bitten on the neck, could not be revived by paramedics, and was pronounced dead at the scene. Pepper spray was used to subdue and contain the bear, who had recently been featured in the movie “Semi-Pro.”²¹

November 17, 2007/Farmington, Pennsylvania: A young woman was attacked by a Himalayan bear at Woodland Zoo & More when she approached the animal’s cage during a “behind-the-scenes” tour. The bear swiped at her and then tried to drag her hand further into the cage. She was flown via medical helicopter to a hospital. The man who had stepped in to release her from the bear’s grip required stitches for a severe laceration.^{22,23}

November 2, 2007/Coram, Montana: An employee at the Great Bear Adventure drive-through park was attacked by a brown bear and flown to a hospital to be treated for multiple bite wounds.²⁴

September 15, 2007/Pigeon Forge, Tennessee: An employee at the Smoky Mountain Zoological Park was attacked by an Asian Sloth Bear as she cleaned the animal’s pen. A malfunctioning gate allowed the bear to re-enter the pen and maul the woman, tearing away most of the ligaments and tissues above her right hip and causing permanent injuries and disfigurement. The victim and her husband filed lawsuits seeking \$275,000 in damages against the zoo and its owners, who refused to pay her medical bills.²⁵



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bear incidents

WELFARE CONCERNS

August 10, 2010/Newberry, Michigan: Dean Oswald's Bear Ranch was cited by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for using physical abuse to discipline a bear cub. A handler hit the bear cub twice while the animal was being used for photo opportunities with the public. Oswald had previously told a reporter who was handling a bear cub, "If he does something to you that you don't want done, slap him one."

June 27, 2007/Sandusky, Ohio: Wild Acres Ranch, a facility that uses bear cubs for photo opportunities with the public, was cited by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for storing bear cubs in transport enclosures inside a garage cluttered with a gas grill, gasoline, a lawn mower, and a car. The facility also sells meat from slaughtered black bears.

March 20, 2007/Benton County, Minnesota: Sheriff's deputies confiscated a 1-year-old pet bear who was chained to a line between two trees. The bear was less than half the size she should have been for her age, and was wearing a collar that was so tight it had created a ring of open sores around her neck.

October 4, 2006/Rapid City, South Dakota: Bear Country USA, a drive-through wildlife park described by a federal agent as a "puppy factory" for bears, was fined by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for illegally selling gall bladders from slaughtered bears.

September 6, 2007/Fort Lauderdale, Florida: A black bear escaped from a cage at Seminole Okalee Indian Village when a handler left a cage door open. The bear was chemically immobilized and recaptured.²⁶

May 11, 2007/Gulf Shores, Alabama: An employee of Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo needed about 100 stitches after he cut his arm on fencing while pulling his arm free from the jaws of a bear who bit him when he went to pet the animal.²⁷

December 2, 2006/Uhrichsville, Ohio: A 4-year-old boy was airlifted to the hospital after one of his fingers was bitten off at the first knuckle by a black bear. The boy had stuck his hand into a cage housing two bears at the Patterson Wildlife Ranch, owned by his grandfather.²⁸

October 2006/Branson, Missouri: A grizzly bear at Predator World escaped from an enclosure, gained access to an adjoining enclosure, and killed an adult female tiger.²⁹

May 22, 2006/Ashtabula County, Ohio: A woman was mauled by a 500-pound black bear who had escaped from a 10-foot by 12-foot cage at a nearby animal compound known as Grand River Fur Exchange. The bear forced his way into the woman's home, knocked her to the floor, and attacked her. The woman's daughter hit and tugged at the animal, but was unable to stop the attack until she lured the bear away with food. The woman was flown by emergency medical helicopter to the hospital and taken into surgery. She sustained a bruised lung, a broken rib, a severe laceration on her head, significant damage to one ear, and lacerations and bites from the top of her head to her feet. The bear was shot through the lung and killed at the scene.^{30,31}

February 18, 2006/Richmond, Virginia: A 4-year-old boy was bitten by a black bear at Maymont Park when he climbed a 4-foot wooden fence and stuck his hand into a cage housing two bears. The boy was treated at a nearby hospital, and both bears were killed to be tested for rabies.³²

February 16, 2006/Shelby County, Indiana: A woman was attacked by her son's 500-pound pet black bear as she entered the cage to feed her. The bear ripped through her hand, possibly causing her to lose a finger, and scratched a chunk of her back. The bear had been purchased at a pet shop eight years earlier.^{33,34}

February 1, 2006/Flora, Illinois: An 80-year-old man was killed by a black bear who had escaped from a cage at a defunct petting zoo. The bear was shot and killed by a sheriff's deputy during the attack. Later, another bear at the zoo was killed by an off-duty deputy at the owner's request.³⁵



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bear incidents

“The bear grabbed her hand in its mouth, pulled it in the cage and shook.”

South Carolina Dept. of Natural Resources lieutenant after a woman was attacked by a relative's pet black bear

December 19, 2005/Chanute, Kansas: A pet bear who repeatedly escaped from a cage followed a sheriff's deputy to his patrol car and climbed on top of the car. When the animal grabbed the driver's side mirror, the deputy beat the bear's nose with a flashlight. The bear's owners took the animal back home, but the bear went missing again shortly thereafter.³⁶

July 2005/Newberry, Michigan: Dean Oswald of Oswald's Bear Ranch was bitten six times, hard enough to draw blood, by a recently acquired bear cub.³⁷

November 6, 2004/Sarasota, Florida: A trainer was bitten by a bear at the Rosaire Big Cat Habitat and flown to the hospital to be treated for injuries.³⁸

September 11, 2004/Hanna City, Illinois: An employee at Wildlife Prairie State Park was attacked by a 300-pound black bear who had escaped from an unlocked cage. The man suffered bites to his right shoulder and left leg, and the flesh and muscle were torn from his right leg below the hip and above the knee, resulting in nerve and artery damage.³⁹

July 21, 2004/Coram, Montana: A grizzly bear at the Great Bear Adventure drive-through park swatted at a visitor's car window, breaking it. The driver sustained multiple cuts to her arm from broken glass.⁴⁰

July 10, 2004/Coram, Montana: An employee at the Great Bear Adventure drive-through park was flown to a medical center after he was attacked by a 600-pound grizzly bear. The man was knocked to the ground by the bear and sustained numerous puncture wounds and a punctured lung.⁴¹

May 23, 2004/Brutus, New York: A 22-year-old college student lost her forearm after she was mauled by a caged Himalayan bear kept at Glenn Donnelly's private menagerie. One of two bears grabbed her arm when she reached into the cage.⁴²

May 1, 2004/Silver Springs, Florida: A worker at Silver Springs' World of Bears theme park was attacked by a Kodiak bear who gnawed on her arm and caused severe injuries requiring extensive reconstructive surgery and physical therapy.⁴³

February 15, 2004/Xenia, Ohio: Three 250-pound black bears escaped from a private menagerie. A neighbor was frightened when one of the bears approached her back door and a sheriff's deputy fired at one bear. The bears' owner was able to coax them back into the enclosure.^{44,45}

2004/Queensbury, New York: A bear cub being exhibited at a AAA office by the Ashville Game Farm and Exotic Zoo bit a person in the face.⁴⁶



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bear incidents

“A chronic problem among confined bears is the development of morphologically fixed, repetitive, apparently purposeless behavior patterns, termed stereotypies.”

Carlstead K,
Seidensticker J, and
Baldwin R. 1991.
Environmental
Enrichment for Zoo
Bears. Zoo Biol 10:3–16

2004/Perrysburg, Ohio: Kenneth Hetrick, owner of a roadside zoo called Tiger Ridge Exotics, was mauled by two grizzly bears while he cleaned the animals' cage. As a female bear grabbed him and tried to drag him into her den box, a 700-pound male bear attacked him from behind. The male bear hit Hetrick on the head, almost knocking him unconscious, then picked him up, threw him, and shook him multiple times. Hetrick stated, “I looked like I had been in a hatchet fight,” and said that it had taken hours for the doctor to stitch up his many wounds.⁴⁷

December 11, 2003/Natural Bridge, Virginia: Two Asiatic bears escaped from their enclosure at the Natural Bridge Zoo when a worker failed to latch a gate properly. One of the bears broke into a residential home through a window, “stood up and growled” when he encountered the homeowner, and then was shot dead by the zoo owner and a sheriff's deputy. The second bear took a swipe at the man as he ran from his home, was shot twice, then ran into nearby woods where she was shot and killed by a hunter two days later.⁴⁸

August 26, 2003/Rainier, Washington: A black bear escaped for the fourth time from a private exotic animal menagerie and was on the loose for an hour before being lured back into a cage by neighbors and a sheriff's deputy.⁴⁹

June 15, 2003/Wynnewood, Oklahoma: A volunteer at G.W. Exotic Animal Park was bitten by a bear when entering the bear's cage.⁵⁰

June 14, 2003/Idaville, Indiana: A woman on a tour of Great Cats of Indiana had part of her left index finger bit off by a bear when she reached into the animal's cage.⁵¹

May 14, 2003/Palo, Iowa: A 300-pound black bear was loose for a day after escaping from a cage that blew over during a thunderstorm at a private menagerie.⁵²

March 7, 2003/Golconda, Illinois: The Pope County sheriff's department warned residents to beware of a 7-foot, 500-pound pet black bear who had escaped from a man's home.⁵³

November 8, 2002/Omaha, Nebraska: A 5-foot black bear at Kipling's Animal Refuge escaped by digging his way out of an enclosure. The bear was spotted on the road by a passerby and recaptured by deputies.⁵⁴

July 4, 2002/West Concord, Minnesota: A 7-year-old girl was hospitalized following an attack by her grandfather's pet black bear. The bear lunged at the girl, biting her leg and taking her to the ground while she was in the cage along with her grandfather. The bear was euthanized for rabies testing.⁵⁵

December 11, 2001/Racine, Minnesota: A 10-month-old bear cub escaped from Bearcat Hollow animal park and damaged a neighboring farmhouse a mile away.⁵⁶



bear incidents

“[The bear] came flying through the back window. He came around the corner, stood up and growled at me.”

Virginia resident describing the escape of an Asiatic bear from a nearby roadside zoo while he was relaxing in his home

August 26, 2001/Marshallville, Ohio: A 4-year-old black bear attacked a 2-year-old boy who was climbing around the bear cage. After being bitten and clawed, the boy was rushed to the hospital, where he was admitted for reconstructive surgery to his calf. Purchased at an auction, the bear was his grandfather's pet, and the family disposed of the bear after the incident.⁵⁷

August 26, 2001/Tonganoxie, Kansas: A man was treated at a hospital after he was bitten on his forearm when he reached into a cage to pet a neighbor's black bear.⁵⁸

April 10, 2001/Verndale, Minnesota: A man was hospitalized in stable condition after he was mauled by a pet bear kept by his family in a backyard corncrib cage as he was repairing the cage.⁵⁹

June 11, 2000/Natural Bridge, Virginia: A visitor to Natural Bridge Zoo was bitten and/or scratched by one of a group of three Asiatic bear cubs.⁶⁰

June 6, 2000/Broken Arrow, Oklahoma: For the second time in less than a week, a 3-year-old black bear at Safari's Exotic Animal Sanctuary who had been spayed and declawed viciously attacked a handler when he entered the cage for feeding. The handler was hospitalized with bite wounds to his arms and legs and a severed artery. One gash was 4 inches long, half an inch wide, and half an inch deep. Handlers routinely enter bear cages to "hug" the animals at this facility. This is the same bear who attacked a different handler on June 1.^{61,62}

June 1, 2000/Broken Arrow, Oklahoma: A 3-year-old black bear at Safari's Exotic Animal Sanctuary attacked a handler, who required 20 stitches after being bitten on both wrists.⁶³

March 30, 2000/Adrian, Michigan: A declawed 200-pound black bear broke a leash and dug its way out of a barn. A neighbor spotted the bear in his garage as the bear was trying to get into his kitchen. He called police and the bear was returned to its owner.⁶⁴

December 13, 1999/Ellijay, Georgia: A 500-pound, 7-foot Himalayan bear attacked a man feeding the bear at a roadside zoo called Ellijay Wildlife Rehabilitation Sanctuary. The man was hospitalized in serious condition and underwent surgery to his arm. The bear was shot and killed.⁶⁵

November 20, 1999/Chippewa Township, Ohio: A 300-pound pet black bear escaped and was loose for 12 hours before being recaptured on a neighbor's property.⁶⁶

November 13, 1999/Tonganoxie, Kansas: A caged black bear belonging to a neighbor grabbed a 13-year-old girl by the arm and bit her hand when she attempted to pet the animal. The girl was treated at a hospital for puncture wounds and underwent rabies prevention shots.^{67,68}



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bear incidents

“It’s in my living room, it’s on top of her and it won’t let her go.”

Girl on a 911 call while her mother was being attacked by a neighbor’s escaped bear in Ohio

October 1999/Shawnee County, Kansas: A pet bear with no teeth bit the arm of a young woman who was feeding the animal while the owners were out of town. The woman sought medical treatment and a SWAT team was called in to remove the bear. The county ended up paying \$625 to quarantine the bear.⁶⁹

August 27, 1999/Clermont, Iowa: A 5-6 month-old black bear cub died after several hours of acute central nervous system symptoms. Preliminary tests indicated the bear had rabies. The bear was part of the Swenson’s Wild Midwest Exotic Petting Zoo where visitors fed, wrestled, posed with, “kissed,” and may have been nipped by the bear. The bear also was taken to off-site exhibitions, where it reportedly nipped people. An estimated 400 people from 10 states and Australia had contact with the bear cub. Scores of people subsequently received rabies prevention shots. Additional testing by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention were negative for rabies.^{70,71,72}

May 14, 1999/Rexburg, Idaho: An employee at Yellowstone Bear World was treated at a hospital after she was bitten by a bear.⁷³

March 28, 1998/Reform, Missouri: A 600-pound pet black bear kept in a 15-by-15-foot cage for a decade bit and nearly severed the hand of a 6-year-old boy who tried to pet him on his grandfather’s farm. Doctors reattached the boy’s hand, which was connected by 1½ inches of skin. The bear was killed.⁷⁴

October 20, 1997/Norwood, Ohio: A pet bear bit a 4-year-old boy in the stomach. The bear belonged to a friend of the boy’s neighbor.⁷⁵

April 19, 1997/Folsom, California: A 400-pound black bear escaped from a pen at Folsom Zoo and climbed a tree near the cage. Zoo officials cleared the park, police stood guard, and the state wildlife agency was called in to tranquilize the bear.⁷⁶

March 18, 1997/York, Pennsylvania: Two 150-pound pet black bears escaped from a barn and were gone for hours before being recaptured. A third bear also escaped but stayed on the property. The three bears had been purchased from Gettysburg Game Park.⁷⁷

March 17, 1997/Grand Rapids, Michigan: A muzzled and caged bear with Tarzan Zerbini Circus performing for Shriners bit off the tip of a 2-year-old child’s finger. The child had to undergo surgery to repair her finger. There were no safety barriers around the bear cages, and 30 other children had been petting the bear.⁷⁸

December 29, 1996/Coal County, Oklahoma: An 8-year-old girl was clawed by a neighbor’s 6-foot-tall 300-pound pet black bear when she tried to pet the animal. The girl suffered a broken arm and deep gashes or bite marks. The bear was euthanized for rabies testing.^{79,80}



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“Couldn’t believe it...to be truthful. It’s not something I ever thought I’d see in my career.”

County sheriff in Illinois who was forced to shoot and kill a black bear at a petting zoo while the bear was mauling an 80-year old man

September 28, 1996/Whitmire, South Carolina: An 8-year-old boy lost part of his finger when he was slashed by his great-grandmother’s pet bear while helping to feed the animals.⁸¹

April 19, 1996/Maquoketa, Iowa: A black bear broke out of a cage in a barn and escaped from a private menagerie that included wolves, a cougar, and lynx. Startled drivers who encountered the bear contacted the sheriff’s department. Neighbors helped capture the bear.⁸²

August 5, 1995/Randolph Township, Ohio: A 120-pound pet black bear who had been purchased at an auction escaped from a steel-barred cage and wandered three miles away. One neighbor spotted the bear rummaging through a garbage can. The bear was captured by a county sheriff’s deputy after a man in Rootstown Township discovered the bear in his garage.⁸³

July 27, 1995/Brookings, South Dakota: The City Commission considered an ordinance that would ban bears and other wild animals as pets after a resident’s pet bear attacked a neighbor.⁸⁴

May 20, 1995/Spring Hill, Kansas: A woman was hospitalized after she was bitten on the thigh by her pet black bear as she was attempting to move the animal into a truck to transfer him, along with a tiger and another bear, to her new home.⁸⁵

September 25, 1993/Prophetstown, Illinois: A “trained circus” bear inflicted bite wounds to a man’s arm and legs when the man tried to pet him through the cage. The bear was later killed. This is the same bear who mauled a person in October 1992.⁸⁶

September 20, 1993/Newberg Township, Michigan: A man was fatally mauled by his brother-in-law’s pet black bear when he entered the pen for feeding. Police killed the bear.⁸⁷

September 5, 1993/Riddle, Oregon: Hunters shot and killed a 240-pound Grizzly bear who had pried her way out of a cage at Wildlife Images and was loose for four months.⁸⁸

July 28, 1993/Patterson, New York: A 23-year-old declawed and defanged Himalayan black bear used in circuses escaped from an enclosure and disappeared into nearby woods.⁸⁹

October 1992/Prophetstown, Illinois: A “trained circus” bear mauled a man.⁹⁰

June 13, 1992/Spokane, Washington: A 550-pound black bear broke through a chain link fence at the Walk in the Wild Zoo. The county sheriff’s department delayed opening the zoo for two hours while officials searched for the bear. The bear was later found on zoo grounds and tranquilized.⁹¹



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May 1992/Blendon Township, Michigan: A pet Syrian bear, purchased from an Ohio breeder for \$1,000 and raised inside a home until she was 3 years old, wandered into the kitchen and bit a woman on the leg.⁹²

February 25, 1992/Dane County, Wisconsin: A man underwent surgery to repair torn tendons in his ankle after he was attacked by a bear while participating in a bear "wrestling" event sponsored by Jungleworld Animal Rental Agency.⁹³

October 27, 1990/Galesburg, Michigan: A 10-year-old boy, his mother, and his grandfather were mauled by one of the family's pet bears while cleaning the cages.⁹⁴

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