**PETA seeks to block renewal of Safari’s captive-bred permit**

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* By Randy Moll rmoll@nwadg.com

GENTRY — People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, commonly known as PETA, has submitted official comments to the U.S. Fish &amp; Wildlife Service calling on the agency to deny the renewal of a captive-bred permit applied for by Gentry’s Wild Wilderness Drivethrough Safari.

According to the Federal Register, Vol. 80, Num. 14 ( Jan. 22, 2015), Wild Wilderness Drive-through Safari in Gentry requested “the renewal of a captive bred wildlife registration under 50 CFR 17.21(g) for the following species, to enhance their propagation or survival. This notification covers activities to be conducted by the applicant over a 5-year period.” Species listed include: ring-tailed lemur, black and white ruffed lemur, brown lemur, cottontop tamarin, mandrill, leopard, onager or kulan, Przewalski’s horse, Arabian oryx, red lechwe, golden parakeet, radiated tortoise and Galapagos tortoise.

Leon Wilmoth, son of Safari owner Freda Wilmoth, said the permit allows the Safari to keep and raise — as well as to participate with zoos and other animal parks in programs to preserve — species which are endangered, near extinct or extinct in the wild. In many cases, parks like the Safari are the only reason endangered species have survived, Wilmoth said, citing the example of the Pere David’s deer, though now nonexistent in the wild, brought back from the brink of extinction through the efforts of people who bred and raised them in captivity.

Wilmoth said the Safari had also been visited and inspected by representatives of the Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha, Neb., a well-respected zoo involved in numerous efforts to protect and preserve endangered species, about a joint effort to raise gaur, an Asian breed of cattle on the red list of threatened species. The Safari was being considered, in part, because of the grazing lands at the park which the Doorly Zoo does not have.

According to a PETA press release, a 2014 U.S. Department of Agriculture inspection “yielded the latest in a long history of gruesome findings, including a spider monkey who had lost the tips of his toes to frostbite, a baboon with an untreated lesion on his scrotum and another baboon who chewed off part of his tail while the inspector was present.

“Wild Wilderness has shown that it’s unable to meet even the most basic needs of the animals in its care, and PETA is asking authorities to put a stop to its plans to breed or acquire still more animals, who will be forced into a life of deprivation and suffering,” said PETA Foundation deputy general counsel Delcianna Winders.

“In addition to the USDA’s other recent findings, Wild Wilderness has repeatedly failed to provide isolated primates with enrichment, keep enclosures clean and provide veterinary care,” the release states.

The release states that the Safari’s failure to comply with the Animal Welfare Act led the Fish and Wildlife Service to deny the facility’s request for an expansion of its permit in 2012.

The PETA release states that “Wild Wilderness also has a history of endangering humans — according to a report from the Benton County Sheriff’s Office, a woman was bitten by a 14-week-old lion cub in October 2014.”

A January 2014 USDA inspection report did list correctives required of the Safari’s animal care, including documentation of veterinary care for injured animals, warmer enclosures for animals not acclimated to cold winter temperatures and ensuring that all food and water containers be kept clean at all times.

Wilmoth said the Safari made all the corrections the USDA required, and this year’s inspection — about two weeks ago — was near perfect, with only two minor infractions. Wilmoth said the inspection report was not yet published but should be available soon.

“What we lacked most was documentation,” Wilmoth said, adding that injured animals were being cared for by a licensed veterinarian but the Safari failed to document every visit and every time medication or prescribed treatment was given to the animals.

“Anytime you inspect 4,000 animals, you are not going to find all in perfect health,” Wilmoth explained, saying the same would be true if a city of 4,000 people was inspected, or a cattle ranch with 4,000 head of cattle. “There’s always going to be some who are sick or injured.”

Wilmoth said that, in its earlier days, the Safari staff treated many of the animal injuries but that now every injured or sick animal is treated by a licensed veterinarian. He said Siloam Springs Veterinary Clinic usually comes out weekly and sometimes more to examine and treat animals. Wilmoth called the veterinary service provided by the Siloam Springs clinic “wonderful.”

“Animals are our livelihood,” Wilmoth said, “and we have no intention of mistreating or abusing them.”

“I won’t deny there are challenges,” Wilmoth said, “but we are out here, 24-7, taking care of our animals.”

The Wild Wilderness Safari is visited by people from across the region and around the world. It is known as a place that cares for its animals and it receives favorable reviews from visitors, something that would not happen if the animals appeared to be abused, neglected or not receiving proper care.

“PETA is the largest animal rights organization in the world, with more than 3 million members and supporters,” the organization’s website states. “PETA focuses its attention on the four areas in which the largest numbers of animals suffer the most intensely for the longest periods of time: on factory farms, in the clothing trade, in laboratories and in the entertainment industry.”

PETA’s motto reads: “Animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, use for entertainment, or abuse in any way.”

The organization encourages families to avoid parks where animals are “imprisoned for human amusement.” Included under human amusement would be educational trips by schools — and the Safari is a popular spot for area-school field trips.

PETA is also listed numerous times on USDA monthly logs of freedom of information requests, apparently seeking any violation information for zoos and animal parks to be used for PETA’s stated purpose of shutting down such places.

“PETA opposes zoos because cages and cramped enclosures at zoos deprive animals of the opportunity to satisfy their most basic needs,” the organization’s website states. “The zoo community regards the animals it keeps as commodities, and animals are regularly bought, sold, borrowed and traded without any regard for established relationships. Zoos breed animals because the presence of babies draws zoo visitors and boosts revenue. But the animals’ fate is often bleak once they outgrow their ‘cuteness.’ And some zoos still import animals from the wild.”

According to Wilmoth, the Safari started by his parents, Ross and Freda Wilmoth, exists because of a love of animals and the desire to educate the public about them.