



August 29, 2023

## OPPOSE AB 124 / SB 126

# Don't Change the Definition of Public Zoos

*There are thousands of roadside zoos in the U.S. that are unable to provide the level of animal care needed to become accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). The deceptively named Zoological Association of America (ZAA) "accredits" those roadside zoos that don't meet the AZA's strict standards. The ZAA stamp of approval leads roadside zoo visitors to falsely believe these menageries are legitimate, while the zoos profit off the exploitation of captive exotic animals.*

- Wisconsin is one of only four states in the U.S. with **no laws regulating or prohibiting dangerous wild animals as pets.**
  - ZAA promotes and supports private ownership of exotic animals, allows hands-on public interactions with wild animals and opposes legislation to regulate exotic animals.
- Judy Domaszek is the owner of Wildwood Wildlife Park in Minocqua which is the only ZAA accredited facility in Wisconsin and she's also on the ZAA board of directors.
  - This bill would exempt Wildwood Wildlife Park from state wildlife regulations. ZAA could then rubber stamp accreditation so any roadside zoos that apply would no longer be subject to state regulations.
- ZAA standards are lax and pale in comparison to AZA standards. ZAA often doesn't enforce its standards at violative roadside zoos.
  - The ZAA's administrative director, Meghan Lampert née Mogensen, has a past conviction for intentionally drowning a wallaby in 2012 and served jail time; which is in violation of ZAA standards that members "have not been convicted of charges laid by a regulatory or enforcement body that is linked to the zoo and aquarium community."
  - When the Columbus Zoo in Ohio lost its AZA accreditation due to a 2021 documentary showing its participation in the underground big cat trade and later evidence that zoo officials misused \$630,000, ZAA accredited the zoo.
  - Several ZAA accredited zoos are prolific wildlife traffickers, with records showing transactions with Joe Exotic and Doc Antle of Tiger King infamy.
  - There are no publicly available records indicating a zoo has ever lost ZAA accreditation due to noncompliance with animal care standards or other violations.
- Changing the definition of zoo to include ZAA accredited facilities is a veiled attempt to remove state oversight at roadside zoos, putting the public at risk of disease and injury and exposing thousands of animals to poor care and conditions.

**Wild animals are NOT pets. Please don't exempt ZAA accredited roadside zoos from state regulations.**

Respectfully submitted,

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