



March 12, 2025

City of Richmond Hill
Mayor & Council
cc: Stephen Huycke, Karen Cilevitz, Ava Daneshvar

Via email

Dear Mayor & Council,

Reference: AMO & World Animal Protection Municipal Resolution

I am writing to you today in support of Councillor Cilevitz's April Members Motion "Provincial regulations needed to restrict keeping of non-native ("exotic") wild animals".

Ontario is the *only* province that does not licence or control the keeping of non-native ("exotic") wild animals. Anyone can own and operate a zoo without professional training, adequate financing, or appropriate facilities. As a result, there are more [roadside zoosⁱ](#) and [private wildlife collectorsⁱⁱ](#) in Ontario than in any other province. Since there is [no provincial licence requirementⁱⁱⁱ](#), there are no records to tell us how many exotic wild animals are kept or where they are located.

The keeping of wild animals without adequate provincial oversight is a serious animal welfare and public safety issue. These issues have been downloaded to municipalities to address. This has resulted in a patchwork of different municipal bylaws governing the keeping of wild animals, for what is clearly a provincial issue.

Impacts on municipalities

"I strongly encourage each member municipality to have a look at your rules, because these things can jump up and bite you, and you don't see them coming. And you have absolutely no rules to deal with them," said [Tony Fitzgerald, Hastings Highlands Mayor in 2024](#). "This is something that hit us - kind of gobsmacked us in the face - a couple of years back, when somebody showed up and started setting up a roadside zoo in Hastings Highlands, and we were not prepared to deal with it - not even a little bit,"

[Half of Ontario's municipalities](#) have no bylaw whatsoever^v. Even municipalities that have bylaws in place are increasingly facing challenges from unregulated zoo-type facilities and wild animal owners who have sought bylaw exemptions or have attempted to [open roadside zoos](#) and [bring in prohibited wild animal species](#) despite existing bylaws.

[Escapes or injuries can and do happen^{vi}](#) because of low fences and flimsy cage construction. Other safety measures like stand-off barriers, perimeter fences and shift cages - which help prevent animal escapes or dangerous interactions - are usually inadequate or lacking. The lack of safety measures put animal care staff, visitors, first responders and communities at risk.

Captive wild animals are often deprived of opportunities to behave naturally. They frequently show signs of psychological disturbance, boredom, and frustration. These poor conditions for the animals can result in public outcry and significant negative media attention.

Municipal resolution

World Animal Protection, with support of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO) and the Municipal Law Enforcement Officers' Association of Ontario (MLEOA), is asking **municipalities to support and adopt this resolution to restrict the keeping of exotic wild animals in Ontario.**

Without a provincial approach to these issues, all municipalities are at risk. We are urging you to pass Councill Cilevitz's Members Motion, showing Richmond Hill's support uploading this issue to the Province, instead of downloading the burden to municipalities.

Support for the resolution

- [88% of Ontarians](#) support provincial regulations that would require all zoos to have a licence and meet animal welfare and public safety standards.
- Canada's leading animal welfare groups, the Toronto Zoo, AMO, AMCTO and MLEOA support a mandatory provincial zoo licensing system.
- More than 40 Ontario municipalities, and the Western Ontario Wardens Caucus (WOWC) and Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association (NOMA), have adopted our resolution calling on the Province to take action.
- There is cross-party acknowledgement and support that the roadside zoo issue in Ontario should be solved.

We thank you for your consideration and are here to answer any questions or provide support however we can for this resolution. We look forward to hearing from you and working with you to safeguard Ontarians.

Sincerely,

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ⁱ Roadside zoos are substandard facilities that keep animals in unnatural conditions. They often lack professionally trained animal care staff and the financial resources necessary to ensure the humane and safe keeping of the animals. These types of facilities often use wild animals for entertainment purposes such as encouraging close interactions between wild animals and visitors (e.g., feeding and petting).

ⁱⁱ https://www.worldanimalprotection.ca/sites/default/files/media/WAP_Roadside_Zoo_Report_FINAL_092322_LR_1.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/-anyone-can-own-a-zoo-in-ontario-highlighting-why-ontario-ranks-dead-last-in-zoo-regulations-report-card-824904598.html>

^{iv} <https://www.intelligencer.ca/news/hastings-county-asked-to-lobby-ontario-on-exotic-animal-rules>

^v <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2020/04/24/the-truth-about-exotic-animals-in-ontario.html>

^{vi} <https://actnow.worldanimalprotection.ca/page/140997/-/1?location=canada>