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October 28, 2011

The Honorable Governor Earl Ray Tomblin
Office of the Governor
State Capitol
1900 Kanawha Boulevard, East
Charleston, West Virginia 25305

Dear Governor Tomblin:

I am writing on behalf of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) concerning the private ownership of wild animals. A recent incident in Ohio, where dozens of wild animals were released from a farm, is a reminder to lawmakers and public officials that private ownership of wild animals should be limited or prohibited.

Since 2006, the AVMA has urged lawmakers to limit or prohibit private ownership of wild animals that pose a significant risk to public health, domestic animal health, or the ecosystem (including the health of indigenous wild species), as well private ownership of wild species whose welfare is unacceptably compromised by their captivity. Recognized research and conservation programs, as well as licensed and accredited wildlife sanctuaries, are exceptions to this policy. Such programs and entities subject to the federal Animal Welfare Act or other regulations help ensure the health and safety of the animals as well as the public, environment and other animals (wild and domestic).

It has come to our attention that West Virginia is one of a handful of states without robust oversight of private ownership of wild animals. The AVMA respectfully urges your administration to strengthen regulations restricting private ownership of these species, and would be happy to provide technical assistance on this matter.

The unfortunate situation in Ohio ended in tragedy, not only for the owner of the animals, but for the animals themselves, although necessarily so to prevent an additional community tragedy. Many of these animals have been destroyed, including members of a species currently listed as endangered. Hopefully, we can prevent similar incidents in the future.

The AVMA policy on private ownership of wild animals is available on the AVMA website at http://www.avma.org/issues/policy/wild_animal_ownership.asp. If we can be of further assistance on this issue, please contact Dr. Kristi Henderson, Assistant Director, Scientific Activities Division (847-285-6651 or khenderson@avma.org), or Dr. Gail Golab, Director, Animal Welfare Division, AVMA (847-285-6618 or ggolab@avma.org).

The AVMA, founded in 1863, is one of the oldest and largest veterinary medical organizations in the world. More than 81,500 member veterinarians worldwide are engaged in a wide variety of professional activities. The year 2011 is being celebrated by veterinarians around the world as Vet2011, the 250th anniversary of the birth of veterinary medicine and education.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rene Carlson, DVM
President
American Veterinary Medical Association
cc: West Virginia Veterinary Medical Association