

# Statement from OAAO on 8/19/2010

## Captive Bear Attack

The tragic death of a man who died after being attacked by a captive bear at a facility near Columbia Station, Ohio, is already being exploited by the Humane Society of the United States as a tool to prohibit private ownership of exotic animals in Ohio. Their news release of 8/20/2010 ([http://www.humanesociety.org/news/press\\_releases/2010/08/statement\\_ohio\\_bear\\_death\\_082010.html](http://www.humanesociety.org/news/press_releases/2010/08/statement_ohio_bear_death_082010.html)) commends Governor Strickland for his commitment to prohibit private ownership of “dangerous wild animals” by “executive order”, claiming Ohio has put public safety and animal welfare at risk by failing to take action as other states have done. (Incidentally, Governor Strickland has not committed to sign an executive order; he has directed Ohio Department of Agriculture and Ohio Department of Natural Resources to write administrative rules, which is an entirely different process than an executive order.)

It is true that HSUS has lobbied for other states to ban ownership of certain exotic animals, and many of those states have done so. HSUS has lobbied the same here in Ohio for over 20 years, and they have failed. So, they point to the other states and insist that Ohio follow their example.

No one would trivialize what happened to this poor man Thursday night. Our prayers and sympathy are with his family and friends as they mourn his loss. While sharing in this grief, we ought also to remember that this young man enjoyed six years of doing what he loved most, which was caring for this bear and other animals at the Columbia Station facility.

In their news release, HSUS includes a list of “exotic animal incidents in Ohio” dating back to 2003. There are 19 incidents listed, most of which involved an animal escape and recovery, and no injury. Of the 19, there were 3 deaths by snakes, and 6 bitings by other animals that did not result in death. The other 10 incidents were of animals that got out and were recaptured, or were being kept in violation of local zoning regulations.

## **Facts:**

On June 30, an agreement was reached between Governor Ted Strickland, six Ohio agricultural commodity groups, Ohio Farm Bureau, and the Humane Society of the United States. These parties agreed to: pursue changes in housing of hogs, veal and poultry; urge passage of Ohio Senate Bill 95 (Dog Kennel Licensing Bill); urge passage of Ohio House Bill 108 (Cockfighting Bill); and prohibit private ownership of exotic animals such as bears, lions, tigers, primates, large constricting and venomous snakes, crocodiles and alligators.

Governor Strickland has since announced that he intends to exempt AZA (American Zoological Association) facilities from the ban on exotic animals. AZA is not a government agency. It is a private corporation that “accredits” zoos that can afford to pay thousands of dollars to purchase that accreditation. AZA is commonly referred to as the zoos’ “country club”. The majority of injuries and deaths by exotic animals nationwide has occurred at AZA accredited zoos. So why is the Governor so anxious to let AZA facilities have these animals? Is it because AZA and HSUS are closely affiliated, or is it because “money talks and others walk”?

The Governor has also announced that he plans to “grandfather” people who already own these animals (they would be able to keep the animals they have, but could not breed, sell, acquire new ones, or replace any that die.) One of those "grandfathered" individuals would be the owner of the Columbia Station facility where this 24 year old man was killed earlier this week. Interestingly, the Governor has **not** agreed to exempt **state and federally licensed and inspected animal facilities**. That means the drive-through animal parks in Ohio, and the other facilities that are licensed and regularly inspected by the state (Ohio Department of Natural Resources) and/or the federal government (U.S. Department of Agriculture) to ensure the safety of the public and the welfare of the animals would be **put out of business**, while AZA facilities remain open (can you say “eliminate the competition?”) and existing **non-licensed, non-inspected** owners are allowed to keep their exotic pets.

Does any of this make sense? What is our Governor thinking??? What were the other commodity groups and Ohio Farm Bureau thinking when they signed this deal with the radical animal rights Humane Society of the United States? We **know** what HSUS was thinking. This is their chance to drive up meat prices in Ohio (maybe more folks will go vegetarian or vegan like HSUS) and while they're at it, shut down Ohio's exotic animal industry and force people to buy their next puppy from out of state after Senate Bill 95 forces the federally inspected dog breeders out of business.

**If we ban exotic animals to prevent accidents from happening, should we also ban motorcycles and save far more lives---on the (bad) idea that no one really needs a motorcycle, as they can get a car which is safer and often cheaper?**

The Ohio Association of Animal Owners supports **fair** regulations and legislation. We do not support regulations and legislation that are designed to create a monopoly for AZA accredited zoos, or eliminate the exotic animal industry or any other facet of Ohio's animal industry. We live in America, folks. **We** get to choose whether we want to raise, sell, exhibit or eat animals. HSUS doesn't get to choose for us. The Governor doesn't get to choose for us.

And to HSUS – shame on you for exploiting this young man's death to further your political campaign to end animal ownership. It may have worked in some other states, but **it will not work in Ohio.**

Victoria Galle', President  
Ohio Association of Animal Owners