



January 15, 2016

Dear Lincoln Dow,

Let me first introduce myself. My name is Jim Prappas, and I am the Animal Operations Director for Landry's, Inc. I greatly appreciate your passion and concern for animal welfare and the welfare of our tigers. Over the years I have met many young adults who are very dedicated and driven by the love they have for the animal world. I as well have had that same intense passion since I was 8 years old, which is why I have dedicated over 30 years of my life to animal care, conservation and education. I am driven by my passion for animals and the natural world in which we live. Much of my work has been in educating children and young teens with the hope of getting them interested and showing how they can make a difference. In my past, I have stood strong and determined for the ethics of animal health and welfare. However, I always have been tempered by the words of Benjamin Franklin, "If passion drives you, let reason hold the reins."

All great things in this world have been accomplished with passion and the leadership, position and reward obtained from such passion. However, I often caution young conservationists to never allow their passion to dominate their actions. Reason should always lead you and not just your passion. I feel that I need to help you understand why many professionals, including myself, disagree with your reasoning against the Downtown Aquarium Tiger Exhibit. Although we may never come to a mutual agreement, hopefully you will give my response some thought.

As passionate as you are in your belief that our tigers are "inhumanely" treated and should be sent to a sanctuary, I am equally as passionate that they should stay where they are at Downtown Aquarium – a facility where they will continue to receive the highest quality care and daily interactions from our staff. Our tigers are in excellent physical health and contrary to statements and conjuncture of others, do not demonstrate any clinical signs of depression or stress. Our veterinarians are some of the most experienced and respected in the country and visit our tigers two to three times per month. Their on-site evaluations of our animals' health and welfare are much more credible and objective than the short YouTube video you have used as a behavioral reference. Diagnosing stress and depression requires significant understanding of an animal's behaviors and physical functions. Any credible veterinarian or behaviorist would never make an evaluation based on a 1 minute 13 second video that merely shows thirty seconds of tiger behavior, none of which is deemed alarming.

Moving forward, I think we should come to a very basic understanding about animal behavior. Our tigers are not WILD tigers, and you cannot compare a wild tiger and a captive born/raised tiger on a behavioral matrix. It would be like comparing your dog to a wild dog. Our tigers were born in a captive

environment and raised by people, not their mothers. They do not possess the skills to hunt or the ability to survive in the wild. Captive raised tigers make a connection with their keepers and rely on them for interaction and stimulation and have developed a strong bond to their keepers. Additionally, captive raised tigers have no experiences of a wild environment, so there is no desire on their part to be released to enjoy something they have no experiences to reference. Because you think they would have fun or enjoy these things, is being anthropomorphic. You are describing human characteristics (emotion and feeling) and attaching them to a non-human being.

I believe your opinion as to the treatment of our animals as inhumane is again based on anthropomorphism. Being inhumane to an animal means that you are not exhibiting a quality of compassion or consideration for that animal. Sending our animals to a sanctuary in my professional opinion would be very inhumane. Just because the word "Sanctuary" is used, does not make these facilities ideal places for captive animals.

It is unfortunate that people respond to the word "Sanctuary" and are unaware of the substandard conditions that are maintained in most of these animal holding compounds. Sanctuaries generally have untrained staff, usually volunteers that are unable to manage or modify an animal's behavior. They cannot recognize or evaluate these animals' needs and lack the training to properly stimulate and enrich the lives of these animals. Most sanctuaries also lack many sustainable resources. They are usually cash poor and are constantly looking for donations to help with the most basic operational needs. The substrate (grass and dirt), which you claim is so important to the well-being of our animals, is poorly maintained in most sanctuary pens. The soil is never changed, rotated or treated, and the soil becomes saturated with urine and fecal matter. The bedding is poorly kept and becomes homes for rats and cockroaches that additionally spread disease. Typically the animals are provided low grade foods. Most of the food is donated, purchased at a discount because it is past the expiration date, or it is processed nutria, deer or other non-USDA regulated meat.

In addition, the animals in a sanctuary are provided medical care very sparingly. For example, blood work is rarely done, and in many veterinarians' opinion not often enough to properly manage the health and welfare of a large cat. Many of the large cats are overfed and overweight because owners want to reduce the animals' aggressive behaviors. Large cats, as many veterinarians will tell you, die a "king's death" at a sanctuary and do not live as long as their counterparts in accredited Zoos and Aquariums.

These reasons, among many others, indicate why most sanctuaries are not AZA or ZAA accredited facilities. As a professional of over 30 years, and with first hand experience on these conditions, I would with a high degree of confidence say that the lives of our tigers would be dramatically compromised if placed in a "sanctuary." Placing our tigers in a sanctuary is not being considerate and does not demonstrate compassion to these captive raised tigers, which by definition would be inhumane.

The purpose of our acquisition of the white tigers was to provide a unique animal experience for the city of Houston. While white tigers are certainly unusual, our white tigers are not the product of inbreeding nor were they bred strictly for our exhibit at Downtown Aquarium. Our white tigers are in excellent health and have no deformities or defects and are not "mutations." They are just white.

The word "mutation," as many of your activist followers are using, is not accurate. The white tiger is a natural occurring phenotype. Thanks to advances in technology, scientists have proven that their color is simply the result of a rare, but again natural, genetic variant in their species. So while yes some cases of inbreeding can be traced back as far as the '50s, that does not mean all white tigers are the result of inbreeding.

On that basis, recognizing that white tigers are part of the natural genetic diversity of their species, I would disagree that our animals have no significant conservation value. Our tigers have proved to be a valuable asset in education and conservation. Landry's has not only maintained its high quality commitment to our animals' health and welfare, we also have contributed to international conservation causes in an effort to save the tiger and other wildlife. We have funded significant projects in Cambodia to help prevent the slaughter of tigers in the wild. We have provided resources to train and equip rangers to fight poaching and the illegal animal trade. We have funded an animal nursery to help save orphaned wildlife. Whether you agree or not, our exhibit educates the public, it explains the plight of the wild tiger population and inspires concern and motivation for tiger conservation. The success of zoos and aquariums like ours is what makes the funding of conservation projects possible. I challenge you to find a sanctuary or an animal rights group that matches our contributions to international organizations in an effort to save and preserve wildlife.

Lastly, you may not think that our exhibit is large enough; however, as a professional, I disagree. Proclaiming it is too small and challenging USDA or AZA because you may have adopted an anthropomorphic viewpoint is not a reason to dispute the size of our exhibit. Again, these are not wild tigers and do not have to hunt for their food or search for a mate. We designed a state-of-the-art exhibit based on captive raised and managed tigers with assistance from veterinarians and management personnel from the zoological community. That you disagree with these standards does not make these standards wrong. Every critical exhibit detail was considered including spatial requirements, substrate, adequate holding areas, humidity, and water filtration. With regards to natural sunlight, every holding enclosure behind the scenes has a skylight, and there are windows and skylights on exhibit. All husbandry requirements, including veterinary care, behavioral enrichment, and nutrition are of the highest quality.

Whatever personal opinions you have that still remain about this exhibit at Downtown Aquarium, please understand that it meets or exceeds all standards of AZA, ZAA and USDA. In 2004, with the city's support, our Houston facility was accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). We are still in excellent standing with AZA having been re-accredited in 2015. In addition, we have recently been accredited by the Zoological Association of America (ZAA). Both associations have evaluated our tiger exhibit and associated animal health/welfare programs and found us to maintain

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excellent conditions for all our animals. The holding enclosures behind the scenes are a complex network of individual rooms that can be modified for adjustable square footage. There are a total of 6 individual enclosures that are changed and rotated several times daily for the tigers, ensuring they have access to as much area behind the scenes as possible.

We also take into consideration a cat's demeanor that particular day. Just like people, sometimes the cats do not want to interact with each other, and in those instances, we always give them the opportunity to decide where they would like to be, and if so, alone. This is one aspect of our behind the scenes enclosures that your group and other activists cannot see by sharing one photo of a tiger in a cage. That one photo is very misleading to the public. If our animals were subjected to having no ability to exercise or were just contained in 10' x 10' cages – as has been irresponsibly implied on social media – or were treated in less than a humane manner, AZA or ZAA would have not accredited the Houston Downtown Aquarium and would force us to move the animals or shut down the exhibit. In addition, as an animal advocate and passionate professional, if for one minute I thought our animals were mistreated or mismanaged, I would be outspoken and correct the issues.

My dedication to conservation and education has given me a very broad view of animals in captivity and their value to educating the public. You can do good things and at the same time do good business. It is businesses like ours that provide significant resources for education and conservation, while at the same time give our visitors a glimpse of the beauty and wonder of the animal kingdom. Without the efforts of zoos and aquariums, what child would become committed to getting involved in our environment and its long term care? How many wildlife organizations do you believe would have the funding to do very significant work?

You can rest assured that Landry's is committed to maintaining the highest quality in all of our ventures. We will continue to focus on education and conservation and will be aligning ourselves with like-minded organizations.

Again, I appreciate your passion and hope that I have been able to allay some of your concerns regarding our operation and provided you some food for thought. Remember, reasonable people with good intentions can still disagree over matter of substance.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Prappas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jim Prappas  
Animal Operations Director, Landry's, Inc.  
CC: Houston City Council

**Statement by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums on Downtown Aquarium Houston**

Only aquariums and zoos that meet the highest standards are accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA). Downtown Aquarium Houston is one of 230 accredited members of the AZA, having been most recently accredited in March, 2015. Fewer than 10 percent of all USDA public display permit holders are able to meet AZA's rigorous accreditation standards, and Downtown Aquarium Houston has done so since 2004.

**Statement by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums on Sanctuaries**

Decisions to move animals are all about the welfare of the animals, and what is best for them. When an animal is transferred between zoos accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA), we know exactly what kind of environment they are going to be living in, exactly what type of care they are going to receive and exactly who is going to be providing the care. Because AZA does not accredit animal sanctuaries, these variables are often unknown for these types of facilities. AZA's preference, therefore, would be for animals to be transferred, whenever possible, to another AZA-accredited zoo rather than to an unknown environment in an animal sanctuary.



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January 18, 2016

Mr. Prappas,

Thank you for your letter. I deeply appreciate your willingness to discuss this issue in a civilized and productive manner, and I respect your passion for animal care.

That being said, I've noted several factual inaccuracies in your response relating to the white tiger exhibit and our campaign.

You make a valid point that reason and evidence are always superior to passion, but our campaign against the aquarium is based in fact. Although I myself do not have experience as either a veterinarian or a biologist, I'm working with experts at Animal Defenders International, Big Cat Rescue, Born Free USA, Tigers in America, and others. We're committed to ensuring the best for these tigers.

I've reviewed a thesis from Virginia Polytechnic Institute that summarizes the clinical indicators and unnatural behaviors as a result of stressful environments.<sup>1</sup> Stereotypical pacing has been observed at the Downtown Aquarium, and was brought to my attention by a visiting veterinarian. This is an indication of inadequate space.<sup>2</sup> Landry's is a for-profit corporation, and as such, testimonials from vets compensated by the company cannot be considered objective.

Your claim that the tiger enclosure is adequate because the animals have "no experiences of a wild environment" is also flawed. Large cats have evolved for particular environments, and no amount of care or enrichment from keepers in the current enclosure can recreate those environments. Similarly, bonds between animals and keepers are not

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.carnivoreconservation.org/files/thesis/pitsko\\_2003\\_msc.pdf](http://www.carnivoreconservation.org/files/thesis/pitsko_2003_msc.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/9/3.128>

adequate substitutions for interaction between animals. The AZA acknowledges this simple fact in their 2011 elephant standards.

Anthropomorphism is defined as “the attribution of human characteristics to a nonhuman,” but stress and the desire of freedom are not exclusive to Homo sapiens. Holding these animals captive for the sole purpose of entertainment and profit is both inhumane and immoral.

I’m intrigued by your description of animal sanctuaries. As mentioned prior, Big Cat Rescue, a sanctuary in Florida, is one of the several organizations assisting in our campaign. BCR is accredited by the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS,) which is generally regarded to ensure higher animal care standards than both AZA and ZAA. As a matter of policy, the AZA does not accredit sanctuaries, but this does not necessarily reflect on the conditions of any particular facility. Additionally, the USFWS clearly defines sanctuaries under the Captive Wildlife Safety Act. All sanctuaries are required to pass the same USDA inspections as the Downtown Aquarium.

If you’re interested, I would encourage you to visit the Cleveland Amory Black Beauty Ranch, located in Murchison, Texas. The ranch is accredited by GFAS and is an affiliate of the Humane Society of the United States. I’d be glad to make arrangements with the facility for you to tour the large cat habitats.

During the last 100 years, only 12 white tigers have been spotted in the wild, and the most recent spotting was in 1951. The allele that causes the abnormal coloring is recessive and is extremely uncommon.<sup>3</sup> Although not a mutation, the breeding that occurs today, including inbreeding, is more likely to cause these mutations. For this reason, the AZA has condemned the breeding of white tigers for display in zoos.<sup>4</sup>

The Downtown Aquarium has made significant monetary contributions to conservation efforts. Without reviewing your financial data, I cannot compare the efforts of Landry’s to sanctuaries or animal rights groups, but the contributions would still be possible without the white tiger exhibit. Last year, I had the opportunity to visit the China Conservation and Research Centre for the Giant Panda, located a couple of hours outside Chengdu in Sichuan Province. CCRCGP is a non-profit research facility that is leading the efforts to conserve the giant panda. Unlike the Downtown Aquarium, this facility is directly responsible for many conservation efforts, and does not solely provide funding.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0960982213004958>

<sup>4</sup> <http://bigcatrescue.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/AZAbansBreedingWhiteTigersLions2011from2008.pdf>

A similar argument can be made in regards to education. Documentaries, games, and live video are all more humane methods of educating the public about conservation efforts.

I'll leave you with a quote from Stanley Johnson, a UNEP conservation ambassador. "I have worked to conserve and protect wildlife for many years, and it is of grave concern that efforts to safeguard these same species in the wild are being undermined by those who continue to use them for cheap tricks, despite the opposition."<sup>5</sup>

Again, thank you for contacting me. I hope to continue this discussion and reach a mutual agreement regarding this issue.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lincoln Dow', with a horizontal line underneath.

Lincoln Dow

President, People and Pets Dog Airlines  
Youth Advisor, PETA

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.ad-international.org/animal\\_rescues/go.php?id=3734&ssi=0](http://www.ad-international.org/animal_rescues/go.php?id=3734&ssi=0)