



THE WILDCAT SANCTUARY



2019-2025 Strategic Plan

“If I were to come back as a tiger, I would want to live out my days at The Wildcat Sanctuary”

Dr. Ronald Tilson – Senior Conservation Advisor and World-Renowned Tiger Expert/Researcher

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Wildcat Sanctuary (TWS) is a 501c3 non-profit big cat rescue located in Sandstone, MN. TWS provides a natural sanctuary to wild cats in need and inspires change to end the captive wildlife crisis. TWS is funded solely on private donations. The Sanctuary is a home for animals, not a zoo for people and is not open to the public. Combining natural and spacious habitats with a life free of exhibition and exploitation, TWS allows all residents to live wild at heart. As a true sanctuary, we do not buy, breed, sell or exhibit animals.

We have a strong-rooted belief that wild cats should not be pets, or used for commercial, entertainment or amusement purposes. We do not exhibit our animals and are a place of refuge where injured, abused or displaced wild cats are provided a lifetime of care.

Wild animals have wild instincts. Many of these wild animals can be dangerous either to the owner or the general public. Many people, who buy exotic animals such as tigers, buy them as cute and cuddly cubs. What they don't realize is that when they get older, they are massive carnivores with the potential to kill. Keeping wild animals in a backyard cage or in a house, just for personal gain and satisfaction of owning something exotic is a form of animal abuse. Cougars roam hundreds of miles in the wild searching for food and a mate, so imagine one being kept in a 10 ft x 10 ft corn crib for its entire life. No matter how well the animal is treated or how large its enclosure is, it will never replace its natural habitat.

As an advocate for wildlife, The Wildcat Sanctuary is committed to ending private ownership of wild animals and advocating for appropriate pets.

This strategic plan outlines the goals and strategies that The Wildcat Sanctuary will implement in the coming years to fulfill our mission and vision statements. Four broad goals will guide us in our future growth:

- Goal 1:** *Continue to be a premier wild animal sanctuary that puts the needs of the animals first.*
- Goal 2:** *Create a self-sustaining, financially secure organization that can perpetuate itself far into the future.*
- Goal 3:** *Decrease the number of wild animals needing sanctuary.*
- Goal 4:** *Decrease the health issues associated with captivity through education.*

MISSION

Provide a natural sanctuary to wildcats in need and inspire change to end the captive wildlife crisis.

VISION

Help create a world where wild animal sanctuaries are no longer needed.



THE WILDCAT SANCTUARY



STRATEGIC ANCHORS

Human safety is always first.

Treat all staff, donors and supporters as special as our cats

Go above and beyond to make our cats happy – always.

- Customize care for each resident
- Keep our cats at “sanctuary weight”
- Be proactive with medical care, husbandry, habitats and enrichment
- Compassionate end of life decisions are a gift

Inspire advocates at every touch point

BRAND ESSENCE

Wild at Heart

WHO WE ARE

The Sanctuary is accredited by the American Sanctuary Association, Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries and recognized by Tigers in America as a premier sanctuary and a member of the Big Cat Sanctuary Alliance. We are the only accredited big cat sanctuary in the Upper Midwest. The Minnesota Zoo and the University of Minnesota’s Veterinary Care Program have both acknowledged the need for The Wildcat Sanctuary and have endorsed its mission.

TWS is committed to serving public welfare through assisting authorities upon request in removing big cats that are owned illegally and most often pose a public safety risk and accepting surrenders from the private sector.

We help throughout the country to sheriff departments, humane societies, the United States Department of Agriculture, US Fish & Wildlife Service and civilians. Our skilled services include chemical immobilization of an animal, transport, temporary or permanent housing, veterinary services as well as expertise on inspecting facilities to ensure they are compliant with state and federal law. We also facilitate rescues and, as needed, transportation to a reputable sanctuary out of state.

TWS provides natural sanctuary to over 100 residents. Our goal is for our cats to be wild at heart in a captive environment. The animals are provided free-roaming habitats not cages. They have open spaces to explore, caves to lounge in, perches to climb on, pools to swim in and environments that allow them to engage in natural behaviors. Each habitat is equipped with water, electric, double door entries, holding yards and lockouts. Each animal can escape extreme weather in their temperature controlled central animal building. It is important to us that individual animals have the opportunity, often for the first time in their lives, to choose for themselves a path to walk and a place to lie down.

Enrichment activities and compatible social groupings encourage natural behaviors in the cats by producing change in their physical environment, stimulating natural predatory reactions and providing companionship. Our enrichment program is a powerful tool to stimulate physical and psychological well-being of our residents. We are a sanctuary that provides comfort care and takes into consideration the quality of life of the entire animal when making housing, veterinary and other decisions.



THE WILDCAT SANCTUARY



We also provide industry leading veterinary care and nutrition. Our on-site veterinary hospital and network of veterinarians provide on-going preventive care and specialty procedures such as orthopedics, internal medicine and more. A wholesome, species-appropriate diet is provided to all residents.

TWS is committed to ongoing education through our *No More Wild Pets* program, educating via social media, outreach and advertising. The Wildcat Sanctuary offers educational opportunities to teach which animals do and do not make appropriate pets. Our supporters now circle the globe with over 2.8 million Facebook advocates strong for the cats. We educate more through our internships and outreach programs. Our *No More Wild Pets* message continues to inspire people to keep the wild in their heart, not their home.

TWS is committed to helping all wild cats lead a life free from abuse and neglect through *our No Wild Cat Turned Away* program. Acting as placement coordinator, our Director, fields and coordinates rescues from across the country to ensure as many cats are saved from abuse and neglect.

We collaborate on legislation to reduce the number of cats needing Sanctuary. Including federal legislation that would prevent the breeding and buying of big cats as pets, a bill preventing public contact with cubs decreasing the breeding surplus, an anti-declawing bill and a petition outlawing breeding of hybrid cats as pets.

TWS offers year-round internship opportunities for up to 16 college students with biology or animal husbandry focus to learn big cat husbandry, enrichment, as well as the issue surrounding the captive wildlife crisis. We also have a marketing/communications internship program to engage photographers, graphic designers and more into using their talents to advocate for a bigger cause.

On-site volunteers help build new enclosures, along with pools and perches, help with grounds maintenance, and daily chores. Off-site volunteers help with educational booths at industry adjacent conferences and public events, as well as help solicit items needed for day-to-day operations and fundraising efforts.

TWS generates nationwide public education and awareness through presentations and speaking engagements, as well as press releases, on-line newsletters and animal sponsorship programs. We work to educate the general public on the public safety issues surrounding the captive wildlife crisis and why wild cats do not make appropriate pets, as well as provide educational materials to humane societies and veterinary offices.

The private ownership of big cats usually involves inhumane and neglectful living conditions for the animals. In addition, these enclosures often prove to be unsafe to their owner as well as the public, as they are built inadequately for the size and strength of such large wild animals. But even when they are relatively well-cared for, this remains a public safety issue. These cats are powerful, wild animals. And there is no doubt that The Wildcat Sanctuary's services are the best solution not only for the public's welfare but also the animals' welfare.

HISTORY

The Wildcat Sanctuary was established in 1998 to provide a home to a tiger, cougars, lynxes and other wildcats in need of shelter. Founder Tammy Thies, a full-time advertising professional, became aware of the need for such a facility through her contact with big cats during photo shoots. She learned that, throughout the United States, tens of thousands of these animals are privately owned as pets, performers or for-profit breeding. Too often, the cats outlive their usefulness and have nowhere to go.

Experts estimate that more than 10,000 tigers, lions, leopards and other wild cats live in unregulated roadside and



THE WILDCAT SANCTUARY



amateur zoos, private backyards and even city apartments. The private ownership of these exotic cats is a horrendous threat to private and public safety, not to mention the inhumane conditions the cats endure.

For example, tigers Titan and Lilly came to TWS from a tragedy in Pine County, MN. The woman who owned these two tigers was mauled to death by her third tiger. Authorities were forced to kill this tiger and seize the remaining two tigers, Titan and Lilly. Authorities then called TWS for help; we were able to transport the wildcats to their new permanent home in Sandstone. Both tigers were malnourished; Titan weighed only 260 lbs. when he arrived. Today he weighs more than 500 lbs, a healthy weight for a male tiger. Titan and Lilly now have an expansive, free-roaming habitat (20,000 square feet) with temperature controlled, indoor enclosures. They have two pools with a waterfall and are engaged and stimulated by enrichment items ranging from scarecrows to snowmen to pumpkins.

A second example is when authorities were called to a residence in Coon Rapids, MN to capture a serval, a wild cat from Africa, which had escaped from a neighborhood apartment complex and was hiding in someone's garage. TWS was called in by the Animal Humane Society, took custody of the animal and after medical care, introduced it to the other servals living at TWS. It is now safe and healthy, but more importantly, the public is safe.

Despite the national patchwork of laws prohibiting private ownership of exotic animals, big cats continue to be obtained and kept illegally throughout the country. As greater control is brought to the largely unregulated practice of importing, breeding, buying, and selling wild animals as pets, there are likely to be increasing numbers of confiscated or abandoned exotic animals. The Wildcat Sanctuary is critical in responding to this increase with the provision of accredited, secure and humane facilities to provide appropriate life-long care for all these animals.

OUR PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

The following framework lays the foundation for the success of The Wildcat Sanctuary. While we strive for these successes, it is important to have a direction that guides us to meet our objectives. By implementing the following goals and strategies, The Wildcat Sanctuary can make significant contributions to help end the captive wildlife crisis.

Goal 1: Continue to be a premier wild animal sanctuary that puts the needs of the animals first.

We believe that animals belong in the wild – to be free and live as they were meant to be. However, animals that cannot be in the wild because they were born in captivity or are non-releasable wildlife deserve dignity and compassion.

It is our responsibility to create and maintain the most natural environment for the comfort and long-term care of our animals. This requires us to continually monitor the health of our animals, and provide the best diets and supplementary vitamins and minerals to ensure a healthy and long life. When animals do have medical problems, it is incumbent upon us to seek out the best care for that animal and to make decisions that put the health and well being of that animal first and foremost. It requires us to maintain large enclosures that provide a safe and natural habitat for each animal resident. It requires us to provide stimulating and enriching activities for our animals, particularly those activities that elicit natural behaviors.

The Wildcat Sanctuary has a long history of providing quality care for each and every one of our resident animals. We have accomplished this by continually challenging ourselves to create the best possible habitats and facilities. Sometimes this has involved difficult decisions, such as not taking in a new animal because we do not have the



THE WILDCAT SANCTUARY



resources. But it is these difficult decisions that allow us to maintain the quality of life of our current residents. It is our belief that we can continue to expand while maintaining our commitment to excellence.

Strategies for Goal 1

- As our current property is almost 100% built out, our goal is to restructure, and improve animal habitats and animal buildings as necessary to provide each animal with the largest, most stimulating, and comfortable enclosure possible.
- Attention to each individual animal's needs. All behavioral/psychological well-being is monitored for each animal. The animal care team documents and devises a husbandry profile for every cat, their housing area and socialization/behavioral modification needs of individuals.
- Continue to monitor diets, behavior and other special needs to provide the best care for all residents.
- As natural attrition occurs and funding permits, continue to accept and provide homes for additional wild cats in need.
- Be creative and innovative in enrichment programs and other quality of life issues to provide each animal with the best quality of life as possible.
- Make behavior modification and operant condition a priority to decrease stress, increase cognitive stimulation and gain voluntary participation in medical and husbandry procedures.
- Ensure all animal care staff is properly trained in feline husbandry, behavior, health and safety.
- Continue to network with and mentor other sanctuaries/animal organizations.
- Continue placement coordination for animals we don't have capacity for. Includes researching qualified facilities with open space, working with the owners or authorities, providing vet care, transport and even funds to the animals' final destination. Serve on the industry's BCSA rescue committee.
- TWS treats the entire animal – physical and emotional. TWS accommodates and provides the residents with what they need as individuals, it is not a one-size fits all approach or tough love approach given many of our residents have a traumatic history.

Goal 2: Create a self-sustaining, financially secure organization that can perpetuate itself far into the future.

It is imperative that The Wildcat Sanctuary create a source of financial income that maintains a stable environment in which we can pursue implementation of our vision. Although the financial market is always volatile and never completely predictable, it is essential that The Wildcat Sanctuary implements sound financial management practices and continues to pursue new sources of income in order to perpetuate itself into the future. Because of our commitment and responsibility to the captive wildlife crisis, it is especially important that we maintain a basic source of income for food, shelter, and care of these animals residing at The Sanctuary.

From our humble beginnings, we have grown to an annual income of \$2.4 million. We continue to grow exponentially every year and have almost a year of reserves in the bank to ensure sustainability.

While this is tremendous growth, it continues to need to be raised year after year. In order to continue to provide the quality of life for the animals, competitive wages, as well as our commitment to excellence, a sustainable income stream is necessary as well as a savings plan.

In addition to current operations of the facility, funding will be needed for The Wildcat Sanctuary's safety, including the purchase of adjacent land as a buffer to secure the existence of TWS for years to come.



THE WILDCAT SANCTUARY



Strategies for Goal 2:

- Raise consistent, perpetual funds to fully support day-to-day operations, particularly during the summer “building” months.
- Increase donor funds to support future staff, intern program, and facility expansion; including habitat upgrades, completion of the new Animal Care Center and offices, overnight quarters, offsite, housing, expansion of animal habitats, and other infrastructure development.
- Initiate a capital campaign to begin a fund to purchase the adjacent land, when it becomes available.
- Secure long-term funding to support key paid personnel, including benefits (healthcare, retirement) by developing planned giving programs.
- Develop a Legacy Pride program for bequests and legacy gifts.
- Implement a savings plan of at least 6 months reserve.
- Ensure programs target our key demographic for long term, committed support.
- Leverage volunteers and interns to help grow the business and awareness vs. only reliance on paid staff.
- Ensure TWS has a board in place that contributes to fundraising goals and has 100% participation.

Goal 3: Decrease the number of wild animals needing sanctuary.

The work we do as a sanctuary is so extremely important, but we know the solution does not lie in housing all the cats in need. Instead, our role is to decrease the number of animals in need of sanctuary in the first place. Roughly, **95% of all tigers** in the US are privately owned not in accredited zoos.

Even though big cats can be deadly, **several states in the US still refuse to require even a permit or license in order to buy one.**

Even though national cases highlighting illegal sales and exploitation, like Joe Exotic have brought greater awareness to the captive wildlife crisis, the misconception that wild animals can be tamed still exists. Shows on Animal Planet and Discovery glorify the general public owning zoos, treating primates like pets and wrangling alligators. The internet is flooded with photos of people and wild animals in a ‘pet like’ experience and these snapshots do not tell the truth.

Therefore, there is still a critical need to continue the ***No More Wild Pets*** Campaign. The Wildcat Sanctuary advocates through education but it will be just as important to partner with other reputable groups to help change legislation and ensure enforcement.

Our ultimate goal is to help create a world where wild animal sanctuaries are no longer needed.

Strategies for Goal 3:

- Share our ***No More Wild Pets*** campaign with broad-reaching channels through social media, live posts and enews alerts.



THE WILDCAT SANCTUARY



- Expand educational platforms to: *The Truth About White Tigers*, *Say No to Cub Petting* and *Say No to Hybrid Cats*.
- Establish TWS as a ‘go to’ resource on the issue for news outlets, reporters, writers and more.
- Provide expertise and testimony for legislation that bans the breeding of selling of wild animals as pets and share with our supporters so they can voice their opinion.
- Participate in industry education/advocacy committees and panels that raise awareness.
- Speak and provide educational tools/resources for industry adjacent organization (Sheriff’s Association, Veterinary Associations, Humane Societies, Legislatures).

Goal 4: Decrease the health issues associated with captivity through education.

Meeting a cat for the first time during a rescue, looking into their eyes, you learn a lot about who they are. They provide so much information without speaking the English language. That’s when the healing process begins.

We knew bobcat Luna had been kept as a pet and rehomed several times. Looking into her wide eyes as she sat in a wire crate in the back seat, you could see the fear of the unknown and the distrust. Emotionally, she’d been broken.

But that’s only half her story. Once we performed her medical intake exam, we saw even more trauma she endured – this time physically. She’d been declawed on all four paws to try and make her a safe pet. Her canines had been brutally cut off at the gum line, exposing all the nerves. What extreme pain she must have endured.

All of this was done to try and make her a household pet. Yet in the end, she was still a bobcat, who’d been mutilated and passed around from home to home because she didn’t trust humans. Who could blame her?

With privately-owned wild cats, we’ve seen so much in our hospital. From serval Scarlet, whose metabolic bone disease caused a fracture to her leg and her rib cage due to the poor diet she was fed. To tiger Mohan’s crippling arthritis from torn ACL’s that went untreated. To tiger Titan’s rotting teeth that took four root canals to help, to lynx George’s inoperable leg that needed amputation. We’ve seen you can truly love an animal to death, or almost death.

We’ve seen the damage first-hand. Participating in intake exams, scheduling diagnostics and surgeries with specialists, watching dentists perform root canals on rotten teeth, providing comfort care to so many suffering with arthritis from debilitating declaws.

And it’s why we are so passionate about ending the captive wildlife crisis.

Our vision now is to share this future with vet students, legislators, our followers and whoever else can help stop the suffering of animals. At the same time, it’s important we share our knowledge and experiences with other facilities to make lives better for all wild cats living in captivity today.

The best way we can do that is through a new Animal Care and Education Center.

Strategies for Goal 4:

- Continue to provide state of the art medical care to all of our residents, including intake exams, preventative care, wellness checks and geriatric comfort care



THE WILDCAT SANCTUARY



- Demonstrate the damage done by private ownership and life in captivity through closed circuit TV's, videos and live social media posts
- Educate future veterinarians and interns through growing our vet team, creating a pre-vet externship program and including a viewing room above the surgery suite for observation and teaching
- Increase technical equipment so additional procedures can be performed onsite, specialists can come to TWS vs. transporting the animal
- Share our additional programs that ensure physical and emotional health from our operant conditioning/enrichment programs, laser therapy, Healing Touch and energy work for pain management

Every single cat deserves the chance to thrive and overcome the issues they arrive with or develop as they age. And it's important to us that we provide as many tools as possible to help them heal.

But we also need to end future cats from enduring these issues. Education and exposing the truth is key to making change.