

H.R. 1380, Big Cat Public Safety Act

As ordered reported by the House Committee on Natural Resources on September 18, 2019

By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars	2020	2020-2024	2020-2029
Direct Spending (Outlays)	*	*	*
Revenues	*	*	*
Increase or Decrease (-) in the Deficit	*	*	*
Spending Subject to Appropriation (Outlays)	1	3	not estimated
Statutory pay-as-you-go procedures apply?	Yes	Mandate Effects	
Increases on-budget deficits in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2030?	No	Contains intergovernmental mandate?	Yes, Cannot Determine Costs
		Contains private-sector mandate?	Yes, Over Threshold
* = between -\$500,000 and \$500,000.			

Current law prohibits the import, export, purchase, sale, transport, and acquisition of big cats, such as lions and tigers, across state lines or the national border. H.R. 1380 would prohibit the breeding and possession of those animals, although wildlife sanctuaries, veterinarians, colleges and universities, zoos, exhibitions, and other entities that meet certain requirements would be exempt. In addition, people who already own such animals would be permitted to keep them if they register with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

H.R. 1380 would direct USFWS to issue regulations to implement the prohibition on breeding and possession. In addition, CBO expects that under the bill, the Department of Agriculture (USDA) would revise existing regulations on the licensing of entities that possess, exhibit, and breed big cats. Based on the costs of similar tasks, CBO estimates that developing those regulations would cost \$1 million in 2020.

Many states already prohibit ownership of the affected species and CBO expects that people who currently own such animals would register with USFWS. Thus, violations under the bill would probably occur infrequently. On that basis, CBO estimates that USFWS would incur costs of less than \$500,000 annually after 2020 to maintain the registry and conduct enforcement. In total, we estimate that implementing H.R. 1380 would cost \$3 million over the 2020-2024 period; such spending would be subject to the availability of appropriated funds.



Under H.R. 1380, violators would be subject to criminal and civil penalties, which are recorded in the budget as revenues. Some of those penalties can be spent without further appropriation. Thus, enacting the bill could increase revenues and associated direct spending; however, CBO estimates that the net reduction in the deficit would be insignificant over the 2020-2029 period.

H.R. 1380 contains intergovernmental and private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act (UMRA). CBO estimates that the aggregate cost of the mandates, which would include both lost revenue and additional expenses to comply with the bill's requirements, would exceed the annual threshold established in UMRA for private-sector mandates (\$164 million in 2019, adjusted annually for inflation). Because little data is available to establish whether public zoos would be able to meet the conditions for exemption from the bill's prohibitions, CBO cannot determine whether the cost would exceed the intergovernmental threshold established in UMRA (\$82 million in 2019, adjusted annually for inflation).

Approximately 360 facilities, both public and private, are licensed by USDA to possess and breed big cats, and an unknown number of private people own big cats as pets. The bill would impose public and private mandates by prohibiting entities and people from possessing and breeding the cats or by requiring them to meet conditions to be exempted from the prohibitions.

To qualify for an exemption, exhibitors licensed by USDA would be required to:

- Prohibit public contact with the big cats,
- Maintain a 15-foot gap between the public and the animals or erect a permanent barrier, and
- Develop a population management and care plan (approved by USDA) that would allow incidental contact with the animals as part of a conservation program.

Approximately 40 exhibitors, including public zoos, allow physical contact with big cats through seasonal encounters with the animals, and more than 200 exhibitors, mostly privately owned facilities, allow some form of direct contact with big cats during special fundraising events. Further, breeders and trainers provide big cats for movies and documentaries featuring wildlife. All of those activities would be prohibited under the bill. Using information from conservation groups and industry sources, CBO estimates that the income forgone from prohibiting those activities would be about \$170 million a year.

Exhibitors unable to meet the criteria for exemption would be unable to replace their cats after the current population dies. Based on information from industry sources, CBO estimates that zoos and other public exhibitors generate about \$14 billion per year in revenue, with about 30 percent of that amount driven by public interest in big cats. Because



the number of exhibitors that would fail to be exempted from the prohibitions is uncertain, CBO cannot estimate the amount of forgone revenue attributable to lower attendance because big cats were no longer on display. We expect those lost revenues would occur over an extended period of time as the population of big cats shrinks.

CBO has no data about the physical characteristics of the exhibition settings for big cats, the ability of currently licensed exhibitors to meet the new set-back and barrier requirements, or the number of exhibitors that would need to develop a conservation plan. Thus, CBO is not able to estimate the cost of those requirements.

In order to qualify for an exemption under the bill, wildlife sanctuaries would be prohibited from transporting and displaying their big cats outside of the sanctuary. CBO has no data on the number of sanctuaries that display big cats or the revenue associated with that activity, and thus, cannot estimate the cost of the prohibition.

For all other entities, H.R. 1380 would require people or organizations who own big cats born before enactment to register the animals with USFWS. CBO cannot estimate the cost of the mandate because regulations implementing the bill, including the cost to register the animals, have not been developed and the number of animals that would need to be registered is unknown.

Finally, the bill would prohibit those owners from breeding the cats. Approximately 200 cubs are sold each year at roughly \$8,000 per animal, according to industry sources; many of those cubs are born in facilities that would be unable to continue breeding big cats. CBO estimates the cost of the breeding prohibition would be less than \$1.6 million per year.

The CBO staff contacts for this estimate are Janani Shankaran (for federal costs) and Lilia Ledezma (for mandates). The estimate was reviewed by H. Samuel Papenfuss, Deputy Assistant Director for Budget Analysis.