

Video Transcript for The Wild Animal Sanctuary, Introduction Part 1:

[Lion roaring in the background]

[Pat Craig speaking]

“My name is Pat Craig. I am the Executive Director at The Wild Animal Sanctuary, and we are located just outside of Keenesburg, Colorado, in the southern part of Weld County. It’s kind of an area I don’t think very many people really know about, but there’s wide-open spaces down here by Hudson and Keenesburg and that’s why we picked this place.

“Well, the Sanctuary was started 33 years ago. I founded the organization, and it wasn’t something that I’d planned on doing. I was actually a kid who had grown up on a farm east of Boulder, Colorado. I was born there – a native of Colorado. I grew up on a farm and loved animals but didn’t expect to do anything as a career with animals. I thought I would just end up having to go get a business degree. So right after high school, I started going to CU-Boulder, and a friend of mine had gotten a job at a zoo back East as a groundskeeper. During one of my breaks, I went out and visited him. He took me in the back of the zoo, and there were all of these animals in the back. So that was the first time I’d ever learned about surplus animals. That was something that was new to me and is still new to a lot of people.

“Basically, there were lots of lions and tigers and bears in the back of this zoo that were in small little cages. I was pretty surprised and said ‘What’s with these?’ And he said, ‘These are surplus animals.’

“I said ‘What do you mean surplus?’ And he said, ‘Well, we have the two out front, but if they have babies they go into the nursery, and when they grow up there’s no place for them so they keep them here.’

“So I said ‘Do they take turns out in front?’ He said, ‘No, they basically stay here.’

“I said ‘So they spend the rest of their life in these little cages?’ and he said, ‘No, we usually keep them a few years, and if we can’t find another zoo to take them, then we euthanize them.’

“I was like, ‘Wow – this is crazy! Lions and tigers are beautiful and majestic creatures, and they’re going to be euthanized?’ That just didn’t make sense, and I had never heard of that before.

“So anyway, I came back and went back to school. I was just starting to go to college at CU, and it just kept bugging me every day. I kept thinking that was terrible. So I called the state and federal government and said ‘Hey, can’t you make it illegal?’ and they said no. I said ‘Isn’t there a human society for these animals?’ and they said no there really isn’t. So I said ‘Well, what would you have to do to make one?’ They said you would have to build a zoo. I said, ‘Well, at 19 I don’t think I can do that.’ But anyway, I said ‘Alright send me the regulations so I can see what I can do.’



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“Luckily my parents still had the family farm and the buildings, and so it gave me some infrastructure to work with. I decided to go ahead and help, and I built a small facility and got it licensed by the USDA and the state government and everybody else.

“I got licensed, and I sent a letter to every zoo in the country at the time. I said ‘I know you have a lot of surplus, but if you are going to euthanize something let me know.’ I got over 300 responses in the first month. It was crazy! It was like ‘Wow – this is huge!’ So I almost didn’t start – thinking am I ever going to make a dent?

“But anyway, long story short, it was one of those things where I started getting phone calls from the people I had sent those letters to saying ‘Hey, please help. I don’t want to euthanize this lion or this tiger.’

“I started taking them in, and over the years, we started finding these things where people were getting them illegally and then starting to breed and sell them as pets. They started ending up in people’s basements and garages and apartments.

“I started getting phone calls not just from zoos but from law enforcement agencies as well. The Sanctuary kept growing, and we moved from Boulder, up near Lyons, Colorado, for about eight years – we ran out of space up there. So we really came out here to Weld County back in 1994, about 19 years ago. We were looking for big open spaces yet tried to be close enough to resources like Denver or Greeley or somewhere where we could get materials and things like that. It was perfect. We came out here, and this was just an ocean of wheat fields back then.

“We bought land out here and started building a whole new facility. That was 19 years ago, and now, today, we’ve grown to having 300 large carnivores – over 70 tigers, over 50 African lions, over 100 bears. So the facility has grown immensely. At this point we have 115 volunteers – it is a non-profit organization and so we survive on donations from people and volunteer help.

“Right now, it’s a pretty monstrous operation in the sense of, with 300 large carnivores, we feed 20,000 pounds of food a week here. It’s a large undertaking, and we have an army of volunteers that help as well as a small staff that helps guide all of that and makes sure that it all happens.

“We are here seven days a week and taking care of lots and lots of large carnivores. But at the same time, a big part of our mission is education. We really need to be able to get people to understand this problem, because just like I did (all those) years ago, I had no idea this problem existed. For us, it is important to let people know that, and it’s really hard to do that without getting people to come here and see what’s going on and to meet the animals and kind of really get an understanding.”

The Wild Animal Sanctuary is located at 1946 Weld County Road 53 in Keenesburg, CO. To learn more visit:

www.wildanimalsanctuary.org.



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