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The Edwin Mason Wildlife Protection Bill: Sensible Protection for Vanishing Carnivores

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Introduction and Summary

Extermination of any animal species is a problem of emotional concern to conservationists. The New York legislature has a choice which is critical in affecting the extermination of a number of fur-bearing animals. The Edwin Mason Wildlife Protection Act (Senate 7341, Assembly 4270) protects furbearers and other animal species in-danger of immediate extinction due to the fur trade. If it is passed, several species may be saved, among them are the large cats, bears and alligators.

WHEN NATURAL POPULATIONS ARE SMALL AND HAVE LOW REPRODUCTIVE POTENTIAL
EXTERMINATION IS A REAL DANGER.

Large carnivores have a small number of young each year. Over eons of time, a stable, delicate relationship between their reproductive potential and mortality imposed by the environment has been established.

The large carnivores occupy the upper trophic or food levels in the ecosystem. Even without human intervention their numbers are normally comparatively small. Man by his over-utilization of these furbearers has severely reduced their numbers. Slow population turnover and small numbers render them extremely vulnerable. Thus, many of these furbearers are now on the verge of extinction.

THE LARGE CATS ARE ALREADY SO REDUCED IN NUMBER THAT IMMEDIATE ACTION IS
ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL.

The estimated world populations of endangered furbearers are: Tiger 8 subspecies 300-600 each; Snow leopard (Asia) 400; African leopards, 5 subspecies 400 each; Polar bear 5-10,000; Vicuna 8,000 more or less (was 40,000 just 12 years ago); Red wolf (Texas) 150. When the population is few enough to count, it is almost too late. It takes 10 leopards to make one coat.

NEW YORK STATE CAN LEAD THE NATION IN THIS VITAL LEGISLATION.

In 1910, New York led the nation in saving the egret by banning it from the millinery trade. Now we have a chance to save another part of our global heritage.

On February 19th Governor Rockefeller introduced a bill to prohibit some 89 species from trade in the state. However, all the species listed were American and 50 were birds. Naturalists who looked at the Governor's proposal noted that almost all these are already protected and few are of significant commercial value. The Governor's bill is harmless, and it is also irrelevant to the problem of endangered furbearers.

The Edwin Mason bill is the only bill which will do the job. There is no definite date for the hearing as yet, but widespread support from local constituents expressed to their legislators is vital.

BY PROTECTING THESE FORMS THERE WILL BE NO LOSS OF INCOME TO THE STATE.

All the cat species constitute less than 2% of the fur business. This bill will not destroy jobs; however, its failure will mean the loss of some of the most beautiful animal forms on earth. A species arises only once, and becomes extinct only once.

Today, the fur business is based on domesticated fur (mink) or forms which are not in danger. Asian and African cats make up less than 1/2% of the fur trade. All the South American cats add 1 1/2%. This bill will hurt only a few importers, profiteers, and poachers - not the majority of furriers. Jacques Kaplan of New York has voluntarily stopped carrying these furs. Unfortunately, not all furriers are as conservation minded as Mr. Kaplan.

WHAT WILL THE EDWIN MASON BILL DO?

The Edwin Mason bill will prohibit the importation and sale of the skins of the following:

- Six months after enactment: three species of leopard, cheetah, tiger, polar bear, vicuna, red wolf, all crocodiles and alligators.
- Eighteen months after enactment: ocelot, jaguar, cougar and margay.

WHY MAY THE EDWIN MASON BILL WORK WHEN OTHER METHODS HAVE FAILED?

Protective efforts for these species have been like trying to cure heart condition by operating on a foot. No matter how hard game wardens and other law enforcement agencies try to protect these forms in the wild - profits mean poachers will operate: the polar bear is completely protected in the U.S. and U.S.S.R. but still appears in the fur trade.

The majority of cats taken in the world are killed illegally in spite of protection efforts. The number is astounding, 1,000 leopard skins enter New York City in a month. The present fur industry provides the incentive for these unscrupulous operators. The way to stop this is by removing the profit from poaching. This is what the Edwin Mason bill will do. However, to do this the bill must first be passed and it needs your supporting efforts on its behalf.

BEYOND THE MASON BILL.

One of the monitors of this bulletin suggested that the need is for prohibition on the sale of completed garments of endangered species. Also, if a social stigma can become attached to owning and wearing fur garments of such species, the status value of ownership would be reversed.

Note: The Edwin Mason Wildlife Protection Bill was passed by the Assembly on April 14. One of its supporters and sponsors was Frank Carroll, a local Congressman.