

Legislation to Protect Big Cats Advances

The Great Cats and Rare Canids Act gets overwhelming approval in House of Representatives.

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Big cats such as cheetahs would receive greater protection under a measure passed in the House. It now moves on to the Senate. Wildlife advocates are praising the recent passage of an act that seeks greater protections for endangered and iconic cat and dog species, including leopards, cheetahs and African wild dogs.

The Great Cats and Rare Canids Act, introduced by Rep. Jay Inslee, D-Wash., garnered overwhelming approval by the House of Representatives on Tuesday, April 21. Passage of the act supports conservation programs, educational resources and increased monitoring and law-enforcement measures to prevent poaching and illegal trafficking.

The legislation would provide financial resources to restore populations of rare wild cat and canine species and protect their habitats. The bill was approved by a vote of 290-118.

The bill defines "rare felid" to: (1) mean any of the felid species lion, leopard, jaguar, snow leopard, clouded leopard, cheetah, Iberian lynx, and Borneo bay cat, including any subspecies or population of such a species; and (2) exclude any species, subspecies or population that is native to the United States and any tiger.

The act, HR 411, builds upon an existing program, the Multinational Species Conservation Fund, which provides funds to benefit tigers and other wild animals.

This new legislation expands that program to provide funds for additional wild cats, according to the World Wildlife Fund.

"Wild and rare cat and dog species are some of the most iconic animals on the planet," said Dr. Sybille Klenzendorf, managing director of species conservation at World Wildlife Fund. "The bipartisan bill that passed the House will help ensure these majestic creatures continue to roam the wild for generations to come."

Supporters said that the passage marks an important stride in the battle to save great cats from the loss of habitat and food sources. A vote in the Senate is pending.