

Minnesota Feline Refuge to Move

The Wildcat Sanctuary, which houses cougars, lynx and other large cats, is relocating due to a zoning dispute.

A 5-year-old animal sanctuary that became involved in a zoning dispute in its current home of Isanti County, Minn., is moving to a neighboring county.

The Wildcat Sanctuary, which houses 19 big cats on three acres in Athens Township, has purchased 40 acres in nearby Pine County.

The Athens Township board had threatened to revoke the facility's permit after a dispute over a Bengal tiger named Meme. The township forbids tigers, but gave temporary verbal permission to house Meme. Sanctuary founder Tammy Quist, however, said she thought the approval was permanent.

Refuge officials have already started moving the animals to the new location, on 40 acres of Sandstone Township in Pine County, where there is no zoning ordinance governing wildcats. The move is expected to be complete by the end of April.

The Wildcat Sanctuary is the only accredited wildcat refuge in the Upper Midwestern United States. Its general purpose is to provide a place for wildcats that people kept for pets or breeding, then abandoned.

Private ownership and breeding of exotic animals is considered a serious problem in Minnesota. Last year, the Wildcat Sanctuary placed 33 tigers at refuges elsewhere in the United States. Also, its officials say, the sanctuary fields about a dozen calls a week from private owners who want to get rid of their wildcats. Posted: April 6, 2006, 5:00 a.m. EST