Animal Care Resource Guide Issue Date: October 13, 1998

Subject: Proper Diets for Large Felids Policy #25

References: AWA Section 13

9 CFR, Subpart F, Section 3.129

History: This is a new policy statement.

Justification: To clarify what is considered acceptable nutritious food for large felids (lions,

tigers, cougars, pumas, jaguars, leopards, snow leopards, clouded leopards,

and cheetahs).

Policy: The diet for large felids must be wholesome, palatable, and free from contamination. A number of commercially prepared diets are available which are appropriate for the varying needs of large exotic felids. If such diets are not used, the attending veterinarian--preferably in consultation with a nutritionist--must approve, in writing, a nutritionally complete alternative diet. The written diet is to specify the type, quantity, and frequency of any

nutritional supplements. A diet composed exclusively of poultry necks or red muscle meat is not nutritionally complete, and will result in metabolic disease and severe structural damage, if not the death of the animal. A diet based on

muscle meat alone will result in a vitamin A deficiency.

The feeding of road kills should be discouraged. If they are used, they must be fresh, wholesome, and fed as soon as possible. The carcass must be removed when spoilage begins, or 12 hours after it has been placed into the enclosure. If not immediately fed, it must be processed into smaller pieces and frozen for future use. Sick animals, or animals that have died of illness or unknown causes, must not be used for food. Animals euthanized with chemical euthanizing agents must not be used for food because of the danger of poisoning. When food animals have been euthanized by gunshot, the lead shot should be removed to prevent lead poisoning from ingestion of the pellets. Downer animals exhibiting signs of central nervous system disorders, including dairy and beef cows, horses, other livestock (particularly sheep), and wildlife species, must not be used for food because of the risk of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies. This includes animals suffering from scrapie and any chronic wasting disease. If the downer animals were clearly harvested because of physical injuries only, they may be used for food when properly processed. In addition, animals known or suspected of being affected with Johne's disease should not be fed to large felids.

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Adherence to a strict feeding schedule is strongly recommended. Scheduled feedings will result in the animals consuming the meal more quickly, decreasing the time for potential spoilage. Meals should be of proper proportions, to facilitate consumption before they spoil or become contaminated. If spoilage does not require earlier removal, food not consumed within 12 hours must be removed and disposed of properly. Stored meat must be refrigerated, or wrapped and frozen. Frozen meats must be handled appropriately to prevent contamination; i.e., thawed under refrigeration. Bakery products are not to be fed since felids do not have the enzymes necessary to digest food with a high carbohydrate content. Outdated meats from grocery stores may be fed if kept refrigerated or frozen until used. If fish are provided as a part of the diet, appropriate vitamin E and thiamine supplementation is required to compensate for thiaminase and high polyunsaturated fatty acid content.

In order to mimic natural feeding behaviors and when approved by the attending veterinarian, animals may be fasted for 1 or 2 nonconsecutive days per week. During fasting, long femur bones, oxtails, horsetails, or rawhides should be fed in order to promote periodontal health and provide an opportunity for the animals to engage in more natural feeding behaviors. This is a good practice even when the animals are not fasted.

If young felids are not kept with the dam until weaned, a balanced formula and an appropriate feeding schedule should be approved in writing by the attending veterinarian.

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