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## Animal reserve's future is up in air

BY RICK NEALE  
FLORIDA TODAY

Construction of a caged compound for carnivorous cats could decrease property values and fill the nighttime air with "the blood-curdling cries of tigers," Raymond VanderBleek worries.

VanderBleek lives north of Scottsmoor, where the Central Florida Animal Reserve hopes to build a sanctuary for lions, cougars, leopards and the like on 17 rural acres off U.S. 1.

"Up to 80 tigers living within 500 feet of my home and other nearby residences will have a significant impact upon the peaceful quality of life in the neighborhood," VanderBleek e-mailed the Brevard County Commission.

Thursday, the commission is scheduled to debate a captive-wildlife conditional use permit for a Scottsmoor facility for CFAR. But Commissioner Robin Fisher said he would request to table the matter until May 27 for further discussion.

"I'm not comfortable even entertaining such a controversial issue, and changing the zoning at this point," Fisher said Monday.

See FUTURE, 2A



Craig Rubadoux, FLORIDA TODAY file

**Moving?** The Brevard County Commission may discuss the future of the Central Florida Animal Reserve and its tigers, above, during Thursday's meeting.

## Concerned residents can tour cat facility

FUTURE, from 1A

The proposed permit calls for construction of 59 animal enclosures and a 5,000-square-foot educational center. CFAR hopes to offer guided tours of its endangered menagerie.

Kevin "Simba" Wiltz, senior vice president, invited concerned residents to tour the nonprofit organization's current 1.8-acre Canaveral Groves compound to view operations for themselves.

"I don't think we would be averse to working with the community. We understand that there's going to be questions that people have," Wiltz said. "We want to try and allay any fears that anyone has."

The Scottsmoor permit in question calls for minimum 300-foot easements between cat cages and neighboring homes. Fisher said CFAR should consider rearranging its proposed animal-enclosure layout to help alleviate neighbors'

worries.

Fisher raised another concern: scrub jays. Biologists cannot perform a required survey until after Wednesday, CFAR President Thomas Blue informed the commissioners — and mitigation costs could scrap the site if the birds are present.

Today, CFAR houses 51 great cats that were born in captivity. After a zoning dispute with the county, the group must find a new location by next year.

The Scottsmoor zoning permit would allow up to 80 cats. But "breeding is not part of our program presently or for the future," according to a new "CFAR's Move: Myths and Realities" section on the group's Web site, at <http://www.cfar.org/>

In December, the county Planning and Zoning Board, an advisory committee, unanimously recommended approval of the permit.

Wiltz said the exotic cats

do not emit offensive noises or odors. The Canaveral Groves neighbors are supportive, he said, and CFAR is collecting donations for its future home, which may cost up to \$1 million for land and construction.

Gary Blair, who lives across U.S. 1 from the North Brevard site, supports the project.

"I think it's time that we have some growth in Scottsmoor. In several years, people will be happy and glad that the people had the foresight to do this," Blair e-mailed to Brevard zoning officials.

But Harold and Patricia Birkhead, Blair's next-door neighbors, disagree. They think CFAR possesses too many cats already, let alone up to 80 some day.

"That's a far cry from the few we were originally told would occupy the area. The smell and the noise would be overwhelming," the Birkheads wrote to Fisher. "This is a peaceful and quiet community and we would like it to stay that way." ■