

ANIMAL EXHIBIT

A WALK ON WILD SIDE

Fair-goers can expect to see more than just the average farm animal at this year's fair thanks to the return of A Walk on the Wild Side, a non-profit organization that rescues farm and exotic animals.

The 86-acre sanctuary is located in Hillsboro and is home to 175 animals of 84 species. Sanctuary owner Steve Higgs says that although the non-profit

started in 2009, he's been rescuing animals for 25 years.

"We love animals, and saw the plight these guys were in," he said, referring to industries that harm the natural habitat of wild animals and poaching that dwindles endangered populations every year.

The rescues began with farm animals, but ventured into the world of exotic animals when

a friend with a sanctuary had a mother cougar and asked Higgs to help out with the cubs. Later, the owner of a different sanctuary passed away, so Higgs adopted the exotic animals that were housed there.

"It just kind of snowballed after that," he said.

Some of the more unique rescues include a blind buffalo and five Barbary lions — large

A six-month-old Bengal tiger named Titan plays with a water jug in an enclosure at the Walk on the Wild Side animal exhibit at the Umatilla County Fair in Hermiston.

EO file photo

black-maned cats that have largely been extinct from the wild since 1922 due to poaching.

"We feel like we need to be there to keep them going so our kids' kids will have an opportunity to see these guys," he said.

It will be a surprise as to what animals are at the fair, since Higgs says the animals they bring depends on the mood the animals are in. However, fair-goers can expect to see a 6-year-old Siberian tiger named Sheena as well as six to eight other animals, which may include a baby wallaby, a Eurasian lynx, an African crested porcupine and a baby Patagonian cavy. The sanctuary is also bringing three camels that are available for two- to five-minute rides.

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