

Bear Farming Ends, Sanctuary Expansion Accelerates

- Goal to transfer and manage all 262 bears currently in Korea at sanctuary facilities by 2027
- Aim to protect 172 bears (65%) within the year, with efforts focused on expanding additional sanctuary facilities
- A cooperative system involving the government, animal welfare organizations, and farms will be operated to safely and healthily protect captive bears until formal sanctuary facilities are expanded

The Ministry of Climate, Energy and Environment (MCEE, Minister Kim Sungwhan) announced that consultations among the government, animal welfare organizations, and bear farmers on ending bear farming were concluded at the end of this month, and that it will focus its policy efforts on expanding additional facilities to protect captive bears.

Current status of the system and captive bear population

The MCEE animal welfare organizations, bear farmers, and local governments signed the ‘Agreement on Ending Bear Farming’ on January 26, 2022, reaching a social consensus and gradually advancing efforts to phase out bear farming.

Roles by Party under the “Agreement on Ending Bear

Farming” (January 2022)

- ▶ **(MCEE)** Legislation to end bear farming and the establishment and support of bear sanctuary facilities
- ▶ **(Local governments)** Active cooperation in and establishment and operation of bear sanctuary facilities within the region (Seocheon-gun, Gurye-gun)
- ▶ **(Farmers)** Safely manage captive bears until transfer to the sanctuary facility
- ▶ **(Animal welfare organizations)** Support so that captive bears can be rescued from farms and moved to sanctuary facilities

In addition, under the “Wildlife Protection and Management Act,” the prohibition on bear farming and bear bile extraction by farms took effect on January 1 of this year.

However, the MCEE had set a six-month grace period for the penalties and forfeiture provisions related to the ban on bear farming, considering that purchase negotiations were underway between bear farms and the animal welfare organizations (Korea Animal Welfare Association).

Accordingly, the grace period expired on June 30 this year. There are currently 262 captive bears in the country, of which 43 are being managed in sanctuary facilities*, while 219 captive bears remain at nine farms.

* Public facility in Gurye, Jeollanam-do (opened in September 2025): 28 bears, Private sanctuary in Hwacheon, Gangwon-do: 15 bears

Consultations on ending bear farming (animal welfare organizations–farms)

The MCEE actively mediated rescue negotiations between animal welfare organizations and farms during the grace period, and as eight of the nine farms (147 bears) agreed to transfer agreements and other rescue measures, bear farming has come to an end.

However, the farms and the MCEE agreed, taking into account that expansion of bear sanctuary facilities is underway, to transfer ownership of the captive bears to the government or local government (Gurye-gun), while operating a system in which some individuals will be temporarily kept by the farms until facility arrangements are secured.

Accordingly, until they are transferred to the formal sanctuary facility, the farms will provide stable care for the captive bears, the MCEE will support all costs related to individual management, health care, and facility improvements, and the animal welfare organizations plan to regularly monitor this.

Roadmap for expanding bear sanctuary facilities

The MCEE plans to immediately place 25 bears into the Gurye public sanctuary facility currently operated by the local government and into public zoos and implement protective measures.

For the Seocheon sanctuary facility and private sanctuary facilities currently under construction, the MCEE plans to complete construction as soon as possible and transfer an additional 104 bears within the year, bringing the total number of bears under protection to 172, in addition to the 43 bears already being protected.

In addition, the MCEE plans to negotiate with the budget authorities to secure additional public and private sanctuary facilities for the remaining 90 captive bears, while also providing administrative support for transfers to overseas animal sanctuaries pursued by animal welfare organizations on humanitarian grounds.

※ (Overseas sanctuary transfer case) In March 2022, Korea Animal Welfare Association and TWAS in Colorado, USA, reached an agreement (22 bears)

Minister Kim Sungwhan stated, “To support the end of bear farming, we plan to fulfill the state’s responsibility, including further expanding sanctuary facilities.” He added, “Through public-private win-win cooperation, we will raise the level of animal welfare in Korea, while carefully ensuring that even the very last bear is safely protected.”

Attachment : Implementation Roadmap for Expanding Bear Protection Facilities

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Attachment

Roadmap for Expanding Bear Protection Facilities

Timeline	Facility	Capacity
Currently Protected (43)	Gurye Public Facility + Hwacheon Private Sanctuary	43 bears
Immediate Relocation (25)	Gurye Public Facility and nearby facilities	12 bears
	Public Zoo	5 bears
	Private Sanctuaries (converted from former bear farms)	8 bears
By 2026 (104)	Temporary protection at farms until facilities are secured	64 bears
	Seocheon National Facility (Ministry of Climate and Environment)	10 bears
	National Park Facilities	30 bears
	Private Sanctuaries	30 bears
By 2027	Temporary protection at farms until facilities are secured	90+ remaining bears
	Additional Protection Facilities	90+ bears