



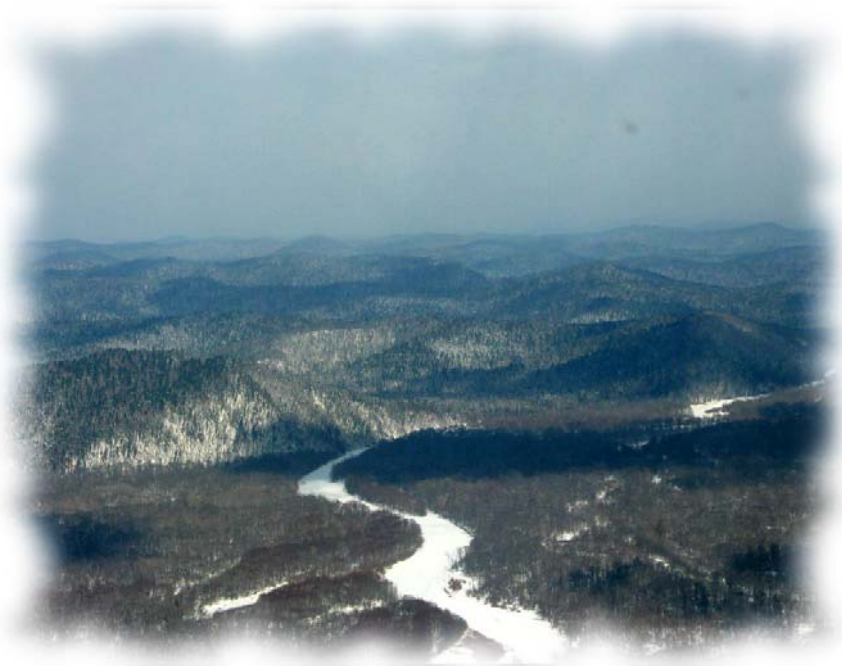
21ST CENTURY TIGER
giving wild tigers a future



Phoenix Fund

Amur/ Siberian Tiger Conservation in Verkhnebikinsky Wildlife Refuge

Final report
September 2005 – February 2006



Vladivostok
2006



INTERIM REPORT September 2005 – February 2006

Grantor: 21st Century Tiger
Project Name: Amur/ Siberian Tiger Conservation in Verkhnebikinsky Wildlife Refuge
Grantee: The Phoenix Fund
Report Period: September 2005 – February 2006
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I. Project Background



The upper Bikin has the last large virgin stands of the original Korean Pine forests that dominated Primorye. It is home to the largest tribe of indigenous people (the Udege), based in Krasny Yar village on the middle part of the Bikin River, and is important habitat for the Amur tiger, as well as other animals (e.g., wild boar, Asiatic black bear, Brown bear, sable, Siberian weasel, squirrel, badger, lynx, mink, hare, otter, Siberian stag, hazel grouse, wood grouse and storks on the lower Bikin). For the last three decades the number of Amur tigers inhabiting this area has been varying from 30 to 50

animals. It means that about 1/6 of the Amur tiger population concentrates on this territory. The uppermost part of the Bikin is not a great tiger habitat, but the middle to upper section is prime, and is at threat if logging opens up this basin, which is the intent of the Primorsky Krai Administration. Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge was created on September 15, 1998 and then Primorsky Governor has taken several attempts to liquidate it. If we let woodcutting in Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge and in the Bikin valley then people would never see virgin taiga in its original state. Many people do not understand that it is a unique world treasure, that it is the last remnant of Sikhote-Alin in the Far East. It should be preserved.

In 2005 thanks to support from the 21st Century Tiger Phoenix managed to strengthen protection of the Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge by creating two teams of state law enforcement officers and public rangers. From September 2005 to February 2006 Phoenix continued implementing the project the objective of which is to ensure Amur tiger habitat protection and population survival in the North of Primorsky region, including:

- Strengthening protection activities in tiger habitat by carrying out joint patrols consisting of state law enforcement officers and anti-poaching environmental investigation teams;
- Gaining in support from the local people and getting them directly involved in conservation work.

The mission of tiger conservation project is to protect the region's biodiversity by:

- Conducting regular patrols and arresting poachers,
- Working with local communities



II. Project description

Legal protection



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Illegal woodcutting revealed during the patrol by helicopter

Since 2005 federal legislation modifications have made almost all wildlife reserves in Primorsky krai unprotected. Moreover, on September 15, 2005 the Governor of Primorsky krai signed a decree № 205-pa that called into question existence of wildlife refuges and their roles in wildlife and habitat conservation. According to that decree it was allowed, for example, to conduct exploration work and mining, house and road building and research work in Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge. It meant that any work was allowed in the only remaining unique place with its virgin taiga where large-scale woodcutting had never been carried out. The last of the biggest virgin pine and broad-leaved forest in the world is conserved there.

The Governor's decision aroused indignation among public and environmental NGOs. Such a decision was illegal because it ought have been taken only after government and public Environmental Assessment Review. In accordance with the legislation in force, felling projects and plans shall be approved only after they receive a favorable judgment on the part of the public ecological expertise. Rosprirodnadzor¹ and local NGOs including the Phoenix Fund sent the letter to the Prosecutor's Office to inform about this violation. Besides, the environmentalists distributed this information with photographs illustrating environmental violations in the refuge among local mass media to raise public awareness about illegal actions.

The Primorsky Environmental Prosecutor brought an action against the Governor's decision and on November 15, 2005 the decree was declared invalid. But Primorsky krai administration appealed against a court decision. The case is to be continued...

The Phoenix Fund in cooperation with other NGOs continues defending human rights, especially rights of indigenous people (Udege), to favorable environment and supports their efforts to create the territory of traditional nature use in the Bikin valley. Thus, Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge and the territory of traditional nature use will create favorable conditions for Amur tiger conservation.

Field activities

Leskhoz (forestry) – state forest management unit, providing control over forest management, forest protection, reforestation, etc.



© Phoenix Fund
A joint team of rangers and police officers is going to conduct a patrol

¹ Rosprirodnadzor - Primorsky Department of Federal Nature Use Service



For the reported period two teams of state law enforcement officers and public rangers conducted 27 checkouts, including 8 bases with chipping headrig and 19 logging sites with log stockyards. Besides, the rangers checked 154 vehicles transporting wood and revealed 24 violations in documents authorising woodcutting. The team members also organized 12 meetings with Pozharsky district administration, leskhozoes' members and local people to inform them about current situation in the forest and involve them in forest conservation work. During the meetings the rangers distributed informative booklets on Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge.

During the last patrol in February a joint team of public and law enforcement rangers and officers of Economic Crime Police Department used the Mi-2, a small, lightly armored transport helicopter. The patrol was conducted over Pozharsky, Krasnoarmeisky and Dalnerechensky districts with focus on the territory of Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge. One month earlier the team has received information about 23 sites needed checking. As a result, the team revealed five violations, confiscated 30 cubic meters of oak and lime-tree.



For the reported period the rangers faced following problems in forest conservation:

© Phoenix Fund
Illegal woodcutting

1. Criminals use front men and pay them money (from 500 to 1,000 USD) to conduct woodcutting in such a way that people do not think they are doing anything wrong or illegal. As a result, when law enforcement officers arrest such men, all confiscated equipment are returned to the owners who are often directly engaged in illegal woodcutting. Thus, there is an atmosphere of permissiveness and impunity among local population. In 2005 no one received a real punishment for forest violations.
2. Mostly, local population consists of close friends and relatives. There are a lot of cases when people responsible for investigation of forest violation arrest their relatives or friends and then let them go without punishment.
3. As a rule, the main violators in timber industry are forestry's staff. They allow loggers to exceed quotas for cuts, provide them with permits and illegal felling tickets (official documents giving the right to cut a certain amount of wood on a certain area of forest), overlook violations by loggers and they are often negligent of their duties. For example, in October 2005 the team arrested workers of Roschinsky leskhoz (forestry) who instead of conducting maintenance cuts harvested wood for commercial purpose.



© Phoenix Fund
Ranger takes measurements

4. There is no base to store confiscated wood. A lot of cases were registered when confiscated logs disappeared at night and, as a result, the rangers could not initiate criminal proceedings.



5. Traditionally, there are a number of stationary posts where the rangers patrol to prevent and reveal forest violations. But illegal loggers often drive over such posts by pass roads. Sometimes, violators pay money (100 USD for one vehicle with wood) to go through the post.

There are several measures that can help to prevent illegal logging in the Bikin valley:

1. Involve in patrols the officers from Rescue and Recovery Service, Rosselkhoznadzor¹, Rosprirodnadzor, and specialists from Primorsky krai administration.
2. Organize patrols by plane to gather information not only on forest violations, but also on violations in river basins.
3. Gather and exchange information on illegal logging.

¹ Rosselkhoznadzor - Primorsky Department of Federal Service for Veterinarian and Vegetation Sanitary Supervision