



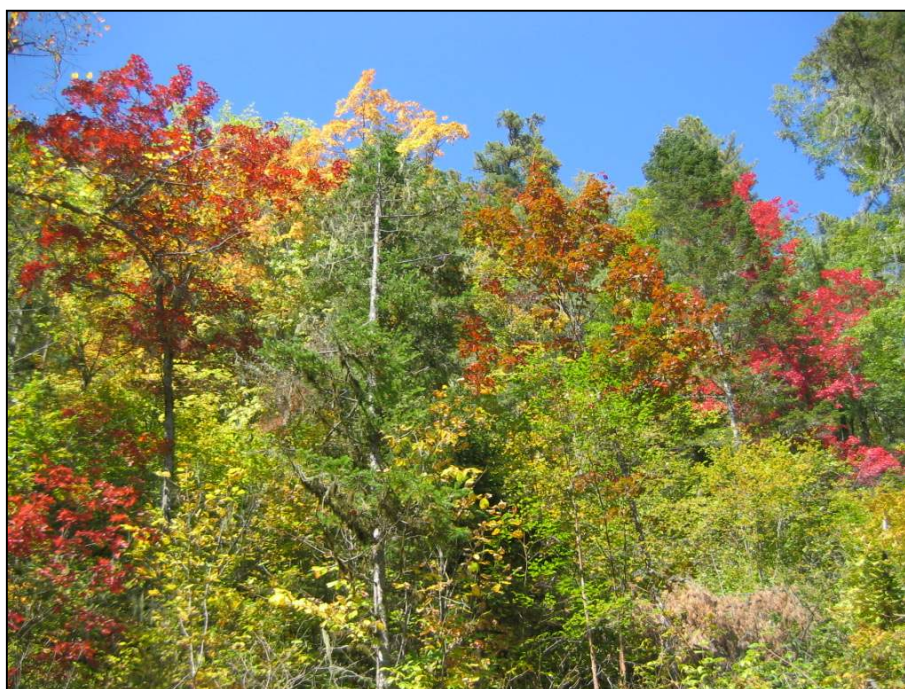
21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY TIGER  
giving wild tigers a future



# Phoenix Fund

## Amur/ Siberian Tiger Conservation in Verkhnebikinsky Wildlife Refuge

Final report  
September 2004 – August 2005



Vladivostok  
2005



## FINAL REPORT September 2004 – August 2005

**Grantor:** 21<sup>st</sup> Century Tiger  
**Project Name:** Amur/ Siberian Tiger Conservation in Verkhnebikinsky Wildlife Refuge  
**Grantee:** The Phoenix Fund  
**Report Period:** September 2004 – August 2005  
**Grant Period:** September 2004 – August 2005

### I. Project Background



Industrial wood harvesting has never been conducted in the area from Krasny Yar village to Okhotnichy village, Northern Primorye. 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 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.

#### Juridical aspects of territory protection

On June 11, 1992 the Governor of Primorsky krai signed a decree #165, according to which the territory of nut-harvesting zone of 407.8 thousand hectares was assigned to the Bikin indigenous community. It meant that it was not allowed to use the territory for industrial logging, other development and settling without consent of the Udege people. Nobody has revoked this decree until now. On February 24, 1993 the Minorities Council of Russian Supreme Soviet issued a decree "On conservation of natural complex in Pozharsky district of Primorye inhabited by the Udege, the Nanai and the Orochi people". Six months later, on August 25, 1993 a Small Board of





Primorsky Minorities Council of the Deputies passed a resolution #316 “Temporary status of the territory of traditional nature use of indigenous people in Primorye”. That status established a particular regime of forest management in the Bikin River basin. According to that document, primary cuts were allowed, but limited. At the same time, the territory of traditional nature use was not established. Thus, a logical gap appeared between the particular regime of the forest management in the upper Bikin and obscure status of the territory. In 1994, Association of Indigenous People of Primorye, in conjunction with scientists, developed a plan on biodiversity conservation and sustainable development of the territory in the Bikin River basin. It was an



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The Udege people

attempt to prove the need to create the territory of traditional nature use in the whole area of the Bikin valley based on scientific and economic assessments. The Krai Administration did not hasten to create such territory and entrust control over such big area to the Udege people. During the next four years there was a number of negotiations, meetings, conferences and as a result, on September 15, 1998 the Governor of Primorsky krai signed a decree #468 about creation of the Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge (zakaznik). The regime of forest management in the wildlife refuge was kept the same as in resolution #316. Since, the territory of “nut-harvesting zone” was equated with the territory of traditional nature use automatically. Consequently, the fate of “nut-harvesting zone” depends on the will of the Udege people, and the fate of the forest of the upper Bikin is in hands of the Krai Administration. The first attempt to check the solidity of the Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge occurred in spring 2003, when “Primorsky Forest Manufacturers” company addressed the Krai Administration with a request to reduce the refuge area and allow logging on unoccupied land. This issue was discussed several times at the Main Directorate for Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Primorsky krai (GUPR). There was a “war” between the Krai Administration trying to liquidate the Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge and the conservationists.

Surprisingly, so far GUPR stood up to the Krai Administration and refused to consider liquidation of the refuge. In response, the Governor tried to remove the head of GUPR. On January 16, 2004 the head of GUPR put out an appeal to help save Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge. As it is a Krai-level wildlife refuge (and not federal), funding for its maintenance should come from the Krai budget. Surely, the Krai Administration refused to fund it and could use the fact that nothing was happening there as an excuse to close it down. GUPR asked for financial support from the international community to demonstrate support for the refuge. And thanks to support from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Tiger, Phoenix managed to strengthen protection of the Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge by creating two teams of state law enforcement officers and public rangers.

The objective of this project 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 involved in conservation work.





## II. Project description

The project was launched in mid- September 2004, as in March 2004 Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia, announced a policy reform in the Russian Federation and since that time the restructuring of the Russian government began. Putin abolished 13 out of 30 ministries, leaving a truncated cabinet with just one deputy prime minister, instead of six. Most of governmental agencies were transformed into others that entailed many changes in their status, functions and responsibilities. As a result, we had to wait until it became clear what structure was responsible for monitoring and protecting the territory of the Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge. In the frame of the project two



© Phoenix Fund  
Jeeps of auto-club "Shatoon" are entering  
Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge



© Phoenix Fund  
The ranger is drawing the report on violation

temporary joint teams were created to conduct regular patrols. Each team consisted of one state law enforcement officer (Federal Nature Use Service) and public rangers.

The first patrol was organized on September 17, 2004. The director of Verkhne-perevalninsky forestry informed that cross-country vehicles of auto-club "Shatoon" had entered Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge in the North of Primorye. The joint team of wildlife managers, fishery and forestry inspectors, state law enforcement officer and public rangers went to check the information. They were patrolling the territory for the period September 20 –27. During the patrol the team

checked 16 vehicles and one motorcycle and drew up 2 reports on violations of fire-fighting regulations, 11 reports on violations of hunting regulations, 4 reports on violations of fishing regulations, and 1 report on possession of drugs. During patrols along the Armu River the public rangers, together with fishing inspectors, confiscated 300 meters of fishing nets and drew up 10 reports on violations of fishing regulations. The results of the patrol received broad coverage by local mass media.

Later on, the teams received information that helicopters flew regularly over the refuge. It meant that they landed on the northern part of the refuge where one can hardly make his way through impenetrable forests. There, the poachers could operate with impunity. Based on this information, the Federal Nature Use Service started working out an action plan to strengthen protection of Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge.

In winter 2004-2005 a number of anti-poaching patrols was carried out by the joint team of



© Phoenix Fund  
Working out an action plan



public rangers, state law enforcement officers, forest and wildlife managers. Some of patrols resulted in revealing of illegal logging and poaching in the refuge.



Poached fish

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For the period February 22 – 26 a joint team of public control rangers, wildlife managers and “Eco-patrol” NGO was formed to conduct a patrol on snowmobiles in Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge. The goal of the patrol was to reveal logging and hunting violations, get acquainted with the western part of the refuge and conduct conservation-oriented lectures-discussions with local people.

Going up the Bikin River on snowmobiles the joint team met people ice-fishing on linook salmon. Examination revealed a small over-catch. An allowed daily catch of this species is 10 fish per day, and it is allowed to transport 20 fish. The team explained the fishing rules to the fishermen.

On February 25, on the way back the team checked a winter hut in the mouth of the Taimenny spring of the Bikin River and met two men of Krasny Yar village. One of the men, Mr. K, explained that after the end of the hunting season he was going home and waiting for the passing snowmobiles to transport a shot red deer (the hunting season closed on February 15). The man had all hunting documents and rifle permits. From the outside of the winter hut the team saw fresh red deer liver and kidneys dripping blood. A shot male red deer was found 200 meters far from the hut. As the men explained, Mr. K went fishing in the morning and left his rifle in the hut.



Deer liver

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Poached Siberian stag

© Phoenix Fund

The other man, Mr. Kuzenkov, took the gun without his permission, went hunting and poached a deer. The team drew up a report on violation of hunting regulations. In spring, during thawing season the rangers did not patrol because of impassability of roads. For the rest time of the reported period the teams continued patrolling the territory. No serious poaching cases were recorded except minor violations done by local people. But violators received only warnings in connection with reorganization within Hunting Management Department.

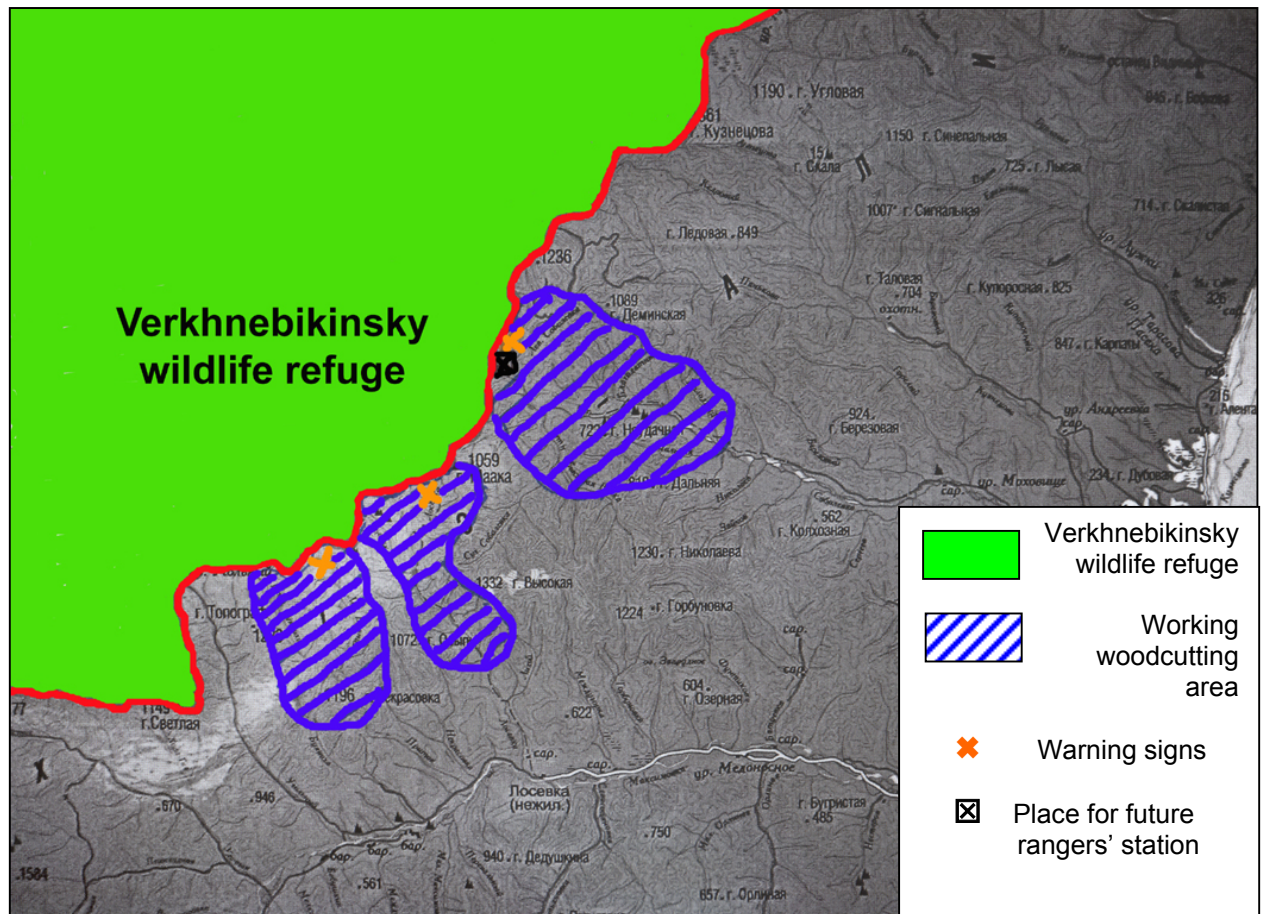
Besides anti-poaching activities the teams were marking the borders of Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge. The borders of Verkhnebikinsky





wildlife refuge were marked only on paper, in official standings about the refuge. Therefore, it is an important element in conservation procedure to mark the wildlife refuge borders and set the warning signs with Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge's name. The Phoenix Fund developed design of the signs and in summer the teams set 10 signs along the border of the refuge. For example, for the period August 9-11, 2005 the forest managers set signs in three places close to the border of Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge:

- on the current timber-carrying road in the Upper Buyanikha river,
- on the current timber-carrying road in the Upper Levaya Losevka river,
- on the current timber-carrying road in the Upper Sobolevka river.



Warning signs set along the eastern refuge's border

© Phoenix Fund

Besides, 7 patrols were conducted in the Upper Bikin River in order to check accessibility to the refuge's border.

The 1<sup>st</sup> patrol was carried out on an old geological road along the Udachnaya river. The team confirmed accessibility for URAL truck and GAZ-66 (a Russian 4WD all-terrain military truck).

The 2<sup>nd</sup> patrol – along the Ugolnaya river on the Old Believers' path towards Okhotnichy village.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> patrol – along the Buyanikha river on the current timber-felling road. The team recorded accessibility for UAS off-road car and jeep.

The 4<sup>th</sup> patrol – along the Losevka river on the current timber-carrying road. The forest managers recorded accessibility for UAS off-road car and jeep.

The 5<sup>th</sup> patrol - along the Sobolevka river on the current timber-carrying road. The team recorded accessibility for UAS off-road car and jeep.



The 6<sup>th</sup> patrol – along the Zeva river from Svetlaya village through Nakhtakinskoye plateau on the current timber-carrying road to Pozharsky district. The team recorded accessibility for URAL truck and GAZ-66.

The 7<sup>th</sup> patrol – on a new timber-carrying road through the Kabania river towards the upper Edinka river.



© Phoenix Fund  
Warning sign set near Sobolevka river, 1 km far from the refuge

The team recorded intensive woodcutting in the Upper Buyanikha river, the Upper Levaya Losevka river, the Upper Sobolevka river, and on the Nakhtakinskoye plateau (the Svetlaya river).

While patrolling the forest managers questioned local hunters about the wildlife in the Bikin river basin. The hunters confirmed the presence of Amur tiger, lynx, brown and Asiatic black bear, sable, squirrel, mink, otter and other.

All timber-lands adjoining to Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge from the side of Terneisky district

are hunting grounds. In connection with the construction of timber-carrying roads and accessibility to forest grounds there is an influx of “nature-lovers” to Terneisky district and the refuge’s borders. Thus, at present 50-70% of the land in the Upper Bikin river are clear-cut and accessible for poaching all-year-round. The situation can get out of hand in the next two years if no protection and poaching prevention work is done. For the reported period the forest team selected a final place for the rangers’ station (base) for protection of Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge and northern part of Terneisky district, the Upper Sobolevka river. In autumn the team plans to build a temporary lodge and set a warning sign in that place.



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Informative booklet on Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge

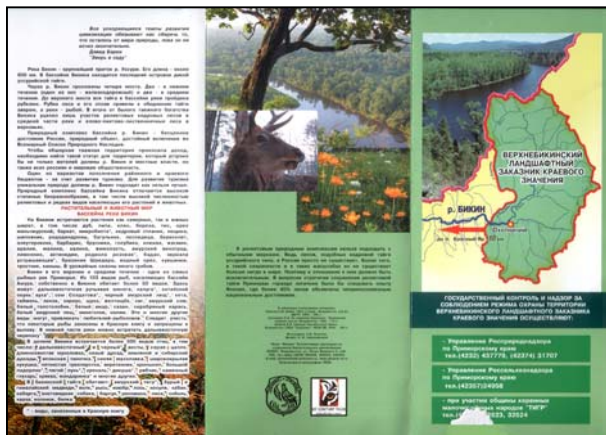
For the reported period the teams revealed 18 illegal forest cutting ( $1,441.75 \text{ m}^3$ ) in Verkhne-Perevalinsky forestry (see in the attachment) that entail a loss of 67,004,491 rubles (\$2,393,017). According found features, illegal woodcutting was conducted by people from Khabarovskiy krai:

1. Tracks of loaded transport led towards Khabarovskiy krai. The distance between the border of Pozharsky district (Primorsky krai) and Khabarovskiy krai is 10 km.
2. In most cases loggers cut lime-tree, but it is prohibited in Primorsky krai.

Administration of Verkhnee-Perevalinsky forestry considers that there is a need to create a stationary outpost on the border between Pozharsky district (Primorsky krai) and Khabarovskiy krai to curb illegal logging. Now this idea is under consideration.

The situation is complicated with the fact that precious tree species are saved on the territory of Sobolinoye forestry where illegal woodcutting takes place mainly. It requires strengthened forest conservation from unauthorized logging.





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Informative booklet on Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge

Within the framework of the project the Phoenix Fund developed an informative booklet on Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge. It has the following chapters:

- 1) history of the Bikin river basin;
- 2) the first description of the region by Arseniev and other writers and travelers;
- 3) ethnography;
- 4) archeological, geological and historical sites;
- 5) reasoning for conservation of the Bikin river basin;
- 6) Eco-trails. Besides, the Phoenix Fund selected the photos of archeological, geological and historical sites and tourist

routes for the booklet.

Dr. Alexander Panichev of the Pacific Institute of Geography helped write the texts for the booklet. 3,000 copies of the booklet were published in May 2005. The Phoenix Fund and anti-poaching teams have been distributing it among the local indigenous people, tourists, hunters and others. In August Phoenix staff visited a school in Krasny Yar village, talked to local people including the Udege about coexistence with large cats, distributed informative materials, education kits and booklets.

It was the first year of the project implementation and it resulted in a number of patrols, revealed ecological violations and examination records. Some events described in the report were featured on a local TV channel. Most attention was paid to contacts with local people to gain their support and get them involved in conservation work. We hope that the teams will achieve good results in protection activities in tiger habitat by carrying out joint patrols consisting of state law enforcement officers and anti-poaching environmental investigation teams in future.

### III. Acknowledgement

This project is the result of joint efforts of many people and organizations, such as Directorate for Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Primorsky krai (GUPR/Rosprirodnadzor), Hunting Management Department, Russian Nature Conservation Society and other. Thanks to support from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Tiger, we managed to increase the capacity of the anti-poaching teams to reduce poaching, enhance protection of the tiger prey populations and habitat in Northern Primorye, and increase awareness among local people and authorities about the importance of wildlife and habitat conservation. We show our appreciation to Ms. Hanna Beach and Ms. Sarah Christie for all patience and assistance and hope for our fruitful co-operation in future.



**IV. Attachment****Illegal woodcutting in Verkhnee-Perevalinsky forestry  
(from January to September 2005)**

January			
1. V-8.5 m <sup>3</sup>			V-8.5 m <sup>3</sup>
Loss -288,250 rubles (\$10,295)			Loss -288,250 rubles (\$10,295)
February			
1. V-71.82 m <sup>3</sup>			V-71.82 m <sup>3</sup>
Loss – 1,645,150 rubles (\$58,755.354)			Loss – 1,645,150 rubles (\$58,755.354)
May			
1. V-76.85 m <sup>3</sup>			V-175.32 m <sup>3</sup>
Loss – 1,146,885 rubles (\$40,960.178)			Loss – 3,099,735 rubles (\$110,704.82)
2. V-98.47 m <sup>3</sup>			
Loss – 1,952,850 rubles (\$69,744.642)			
June			
1. V-23.37 m <sup>3</sup>			V-150.36 m <sup>3</sup>
Loss – 970,120 rubles (\$34,647.142)			Loss – 2,469,441 rubles (\$88,194.321)
2. V-19.03 m <sup>3</sup>			
Loss – 357,050 rubles (\$12,751.785)			
3. V-38.92 m <sup>3</sup>			
Loss – 626,251 rubles (\$22,366.107)			
4. V-47.37 m <sup>3</sup>			
Loss – 361,020 rubles (\$12,893.571)			
5. V-21.67 m <sup>3</sup>			
Loss – 155,000 rubles (\$5,535.714)			
July			
1. V-57.20 m <sup>3</sup>			V-169.47 m <sup>3</sup>
Loss – 3,533,562 rubles (\$126,198.64)			Loss – 6,722,827 rubles (\$240,100.96)
2. V-51.52 m <sup>3</sup>			
Loss – 956,735 rubles (\$34,169.107)			
3. V-60.75 m <sup>3</sup>			
Loss – 2,232,530 rubles (\$79,733.214)			
August			
1. V-104 m <sup>3</sup>			V-817.64 m <sup>3</sup>
Loss – 10,014,620 rubles (\$357,665)			Loss – 51,690,866 rubles (\$1,846,102.3)
2. V-101.64 m <sup>3</sup>			
Loss – 12,747,291 rubles (\$455,260.39)			
3. V-139 m <sup>3</sup>			
Loss – 6,697,955 rubles (\$239,212.67)			
4. V-131 m <sup>3</sup>			
Loss – 6,157,000 rubles (\$219,892.85)			



5. V-342 m <sup>3</sup> Loss – 16,074,000 rubles (\$574,071.42)	
September	
1. V-48.64 m <sup>3</sup> Loss – 1,088,222 rubles (\$38,865.071)	V-48.64 m <sup>3</sup> Loss – 1,088,222 rubles (\$38,865.071)
<b>TOTAL: 18 ILLEGAL WOODCUTTING</b> <b>V<sub>(total)</sub> – 1441.75 m<sup>3</sup></b> <b>Loss<sub>(total)</sub> – 67,004,491 rubles</b> <b>(\$2,393,017.5)</b>	