



21ST CENTURY TIGER
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Phoenix Fund

Amur/ Siberian Tiger Conservation in Verkhnebikinsky Wildlife Refuge

Interim report
September 2004 – March 2005



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

I. Project Background



Industrial wood harvesting has been never conducted on 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 tripe 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.

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 particular regime of forest management in the Bikin River basin. According to that document, primary cuts were permitted but limited. At the same time, the territory of traditional nature use was not established. Thus, a logical gap appeared between particular regime of 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 Zakaznik 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 happened 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 the 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 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.

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 the 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



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The ranger is drawing the report on violation

teams were created to conduct regular patrols. Each team was formed 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" 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 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 confiscation of narcotics. 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 regular flew over the wildlife refuge. It meant that they landed on the north territories 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 began working out an action plan to strengthen protection measures in Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge.



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Working out an action plan



In winter 2004-2005 a number of anti-poaching patrols was carried out by joint team of public rangers, state law enforcement officers, forest and wildlife managers. Some of patrols resulted in revealing the facts 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, Northern Primorye. The goal of the patrol was to reveal logging and hunting violations, get acquainted with the western part of the refuge and conduct nature conservation lectures-discussions with local people.

Going up the Bikin River in snowmobiles the joint team met people ice-fishing on linok 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 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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The other man, Kuzenkov, took the gun without his permission, went hunting and poached a deer. The team drew up a report on violation of hunting regulations.

Besides anti-poaching activities the teams are going to mark 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. Now, the Phoenix Fund is developing design of the



Poached Siberian stag

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signs. In summer the teams will set the signs along the border of the refuge.

In October 2004 the Phoenix Fund started developing a design of informative booklet on Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge. It was decided to include 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) tourist routes. Besides, the Phoenix Fund selected the photos of archeological, geological and historical sites and tourist routes for the booklet.

Alexander Panichev, PhD of the Pacific Institute of Geography was involved in writing the texts for the booklet. The booklet will be published in May 2005.



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The rangers found a poached otter in a winter hut