

Udege Legend Came True

On June 09, 2007, Russian government signed a decree on establishment of a national park "Udege legend", the second in the Russian Far East. It covers 88,600 ha of taiga.

Eight years have passed from Governor of Primorsky region's resolution to Russian Government's implementing order. Coordinator of WWF protected areas program Yuri Bersenev started preparing documents for the two just created parks, the above mentioned and "Tiger's call", 19 years ago.

Nature park "Udege legend", named in the old project documents Sredne-Ussuriisky, is a unique one as it solves three tasks at the same time: protects nature, preserves Udege's culture and develops eco-tourism. It is located in rich cedar-broad leaved forests of the western slope of the Sikhote-Aline mountains and reserves primeval complex of rivers that nourish the Ussuri and the Amur river. On a comparatively small territory one can see cold-loving and thermophilic species. Tracheophytes in need for protection alone are more than 30 here. On the same banner banks one might be lucky to observe brown bear, so characteristic of Siberia, and its congener - Himalayan bear. The territory is deep in Amur tiger habitat and secures stable habitation of one or two feline families. In 1935 the park wade a part of the Sikhote-Aline nature reserve but then, due to reduction of its surface, became no longer reserved but never lost its significance for preservation of biological diversity. The park will serve an ecological corridor between the reserve and the valley of the Bikin river, the last untouched forest massive of the Ussuri taiga.

As far back as 2002 the lot was suggested for a category "World nature heritage - Central Sikhote-Aline", but the decision in this regard was postponed until the territory had obtained a park status, Yuri Darman, Director of WWF Russian Far East comments, now we got a unique net of specially protected areas; "Udege legend", Verkhnebikinsky and Chukensky wildlife refuges connected with each other by corridor of walnut commercial zones take under protection more than 2 million ha of forest. All this together will provide 15% of all Amur tiger population with good conditions for living.

Ecological initiative team with its leader Fyodor Kronikovsky contributed enormously to this success. Unfortunately ecologists and their supporters had to cede 15,000 ha to logging purposes.

The park is located in Krasnoarmeisky district and includes the large part of the Bolshaya Ussurka river basin in the vicinity of Dalny Kut and Dersu villages. It is a centre of business activities of one of the last remaining groups of Udege people - Iman. They live by traditional agriculture. The Udege are direct descendants of Udzi (Uzhe) tribe that lived in Primorye before V century, Chinese chronicles say. Forty-one archeological monuments are found in the area. Later the tribe entered the Jurchens state Eastern Sya. With collapse of the empire due to invasion of the Mongols in XIII century, the Udege spread around taiga Primorye and lived by foraging, hunting and farming. When the Russian appeared in the middle of XIX century the square of their resettlement started dwindling quickly. At present their settlement still remain in basins of large rivers: the Bikin, the Samarga and the Bolshaya Ussurka. Up to 70th of XX century there was a large colony of the Udege - Ostrovnoye/Sanchikheza village, situated on the boundary of the recently created park. Nowadays 128 native persons found themselves onto the park's surface. Local Udege have their halidoms willed to them by their ancestors. They are five in the park and keep their spirituality, history, energetic able to

influence taigamen's fate. The best known is "Orochonsky God" natural landmark. Even now the Udege use these holy places for their cults and rituals.

Tourists also started to adopt some elements of the Udege ceremonies: they bind rags onto tree branches and cook dinner on the bank of the Armu river, which is known formerly for every Soviet water tourist. Annually numerous tourist groups came to the area, among them many foreigners, and took away unforgettable impressions after seeing more than 20 different place of interest. Tourist camp "Ust-Armu" as well as an eco-tourist centre "Sikhote-Tur" already operate in the park.

Ministry of nature resources played a great role in the issue and proved that it really fulfils its tasks of nature protection and determined the country's politics in this direction. It seems to be a fine beginning of President's decree and Government' s resolution on development of protected areas dated 2001 and also National strategy of Amur tiger conservation.

