



21ST CENTURY TIGER
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Phoenix Fund

Amur/ Siberian Tiger Conservation in Verkhnebikinsky Wildlife Refuge

Final report
September 2005 – August 2006



Vladivostok
2006



FINAL REPORT
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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 2005 – August 2006
Grant Period: September 2005 – August 2006

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 August 2006 Phoenix continued implementing the project with objective 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 anti-poaching 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 a patrol by helicopter

Since 2005, alterations in federal legislation have made most wildlife reserves in Primorsky region unprotected. Moreover, on September 15, 2005 the Governor of Primorsky krai signed a decree № 205 that called into question the existence of wildlife refuges and their roles in wildlife and habitat conservation. According to that decree it was allowed, for example, to conduct exploration and mining, house and road construction and research in Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge. It meant that any work was allowed in the only remaining unique place with its virgin forest 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 the public and environmental NGOs. Such a decision was illegal because it ought to have been taken only after government and public Environmental Assessment Review. In accordance with the legislation in force, logging 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 a 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.



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Participants of the International Ecological Forum

The regional authorities, ecologists, and environmental NGOs discussed the issue of protected territories in Primorsky region during a press conference in Vladivostok on November 02, 2005. The Primorsky Environmental Prosecutor brought an action against the Governor’s decision and on November 15, 2005 the decree was declared invalid. But Primorsky region administration appealed against the court decision. Nevertheless, on March 22, 2006 the Supreme Court declared

the decree № 205 invalid. The issue regarding Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge was raised again during the International Ecological Forum in Vladivostok, June 7-9, 2006. The message of the Governor of Primorsky region went on the air before the Forum: “The Year of Ecological Projects was declared in 2006 in Primorsky region. Because of that, special attention will be paid to the environment conservation and ecological well-being of the population of edge. I think that Primorsky region cannot consider raw materials as a point of growth of economy. We should pass to effective wildlife management. For this purpose Primorsky region should take all advanced world experience on arms. To develop joint projects we need to attract the largest ecological organizations. It is necessary to keep balance between a technology and biosphere.”

¹ Rosprirodnadzor - Primorsky Department of Federal Nature Use Service



After the Governor's speech there is a hope that logging enterprises will not repeat their attempts to get into the forest of the Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge.

Recently Phoenix attended the conference "Conservation of the Bikin River is the basis of development of the Udege communities in Primorsky region" that took place in Vladivostok. The main goals of the conference were to discuss the current problems of the indigenous people living in the Bikin river basin and to develop specific joint actions/measures for their solution. The representatives of federal and regional authorities, Russian and international non-governmental organizations, environmental law enforcement agencies, Association of Indigenous People of the North, Siberia and the Far East, as well as local Udege residents participated in this meeting. At the conference the representative of Primorsky region administration said that the Governor of Primorsky region had assured that no woodcutting would take place in the upper Bikin River, especially in Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge. Nowadays, this territory is considered as an ideal territory for ecological tourism. Local mass media gave wide coverage of the meeting.

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

Field activities



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Illegal woodcutting

In connection with the fact that on September 15, 2005 the Governor of Primorsky krai signed a decree № 205, the wildlife refuge regime was weakened. As a result, some enterprises and individuals were not slow to take advantage of it. They decided to use natural resources of the Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge until its status is determined. Thanks to support from the 21st Century Tiger, state and public rangers managed to conduct many-day patrols inside and along the Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge's borders to suppress poaching and illegal woodcutting. For the reported period two teams of state environmental law enforcement officers and public rangers conducted 48 checkouts, including 15 bases with chipping headrig and 33 logging sites with log

stockyards. Besides, the rangers checked over 200 vehicles transporting wood and revealed 35 violations in documents authorising woodcutting. The team members also organized 24 meetings with Pozharsky district authorities, forestries' 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. While patrolling the forest, the wildlife managers asked 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. To get a clearer picture of the problems and threats that Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge faces, please read the description of anti-poaching patrols below.

Patrols were conducted in cooperation with the public environmental investigation teams. Two anti-poaching teams of Rosprirodnadzor/Inspection Tiger had the authority to search vehicles and arrest violators. After an arrest, it became the public rangers' responsibility to ensure the



violators undergo adequate punishment. Two teams decided to operate in two directions. The first one conducted regular patrols from the western and northern parts of the refuge's borders (which coincide with the border between Khabarovsk and Primorsky regions), and the second one patrolled the southern and eastern parts of the borders.

In February a joint team of public and law enforcement rangers and officers of Economic Crime Police Department used the Mi-2, lightly armored transport helicopter. The flight covered Pozharsky, Krasnoarmeisky and Dalnerechensky districts and focused on Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge. One month earlier the team received information about 23 sites needed checking. As a result of the flight, the team revealed five violations, confiscated 30 m³ of oak and linden-tree.



© Phoenix Fund
Checking a logging site

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

1. Criminals pay front men from \$500 to \$1,000 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 returns to the owners who are often directly engaged in illegal logging. Thus, there is an atmosphere of permissiveness and impunity among local people. In 2005, no one received a real punishment for forest violations.

2. Mostly, local population consists of close friends and relatives. There are many cases when people responsible for investigation of forest violations detain 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 forestry who instead of conducting maintenance cuts harvested wood for commercial purpose.



© Phoenix Fund
Poached Taimen

4. There is no base to store confiscated wood. Numerous cases were registered when confiscated logs disappeared at night and, as a result, the rangers could not initiate criminal proceedings.
5. Traditionally, there are 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 per one vehicle with wood) to go through the post.

In spring 2006, "Green phone" started working in Primorye. A witness of any ecological violations can inform a group of specialists on the "green" phone. One of the first registered calls was about a large influx of hunters, fishermen, tourists and nut gatherers to



Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge in June. Upon receiving this information, the teams of state law enforcement officers and public rangers went towards the refuge to check hunting cabins and motorboats on the upper Bikin River. Every day the teams checked up to 30 boats. Every second boat has a catch exceeding authorized limits. There were rifles and fishing nets in every third boat. Usually, the boats' owners did not have a gun license. The rangers prevented poaching by confiscating illegal rifles.

In summer numerous boats and motorboats occupied almost all sandbanks of the upper Bikin River. Every week the Fishing Inspection officers conducted patrols to check fishermen and reveal poaching. People from Khabarovsk region turned out to be frequent visitors to those places. The expansion from Khabarovsk region is caused, first of all, by the pollution of the Amur River where fishing was completely prohibited this year. Therefore, many fishermen dashed into Northern Primorye to fish on the Bikin River.



© Phoenix Fund
Hunter shows his illegal rifle

Uncontrolled fishing tourism has been one of the main conservation problems for the last 5-6 years. For example, while patrolling the northern border of the refuge on July 14-17 the rangers detained two residents of Dalnegorsk town who had fished beyond established limits.

The violators had two taimen fish. This fish is called "Shark of Siberian rivers". Taimen is listed in the Endangered Species List of Primorsky region. This species can reach up to 200 pounds and 2 m long. The rangers drew up the reports on administrative violations, imposed a fine of 20,000 rubles (\$755) and initiated criminal proceedings.



© Phoenix Fund
Setting up warning signs

rangers and state law enforcement officers the restrained.

The Primorsky Department of Protected Territories, which now is in charge for supervising fishing and hunting in Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge, suffer from staff shortage, but thanks to the anti-poaching activities of two teams consisting of public movement of poachers deep into the refuge is

In early July one of the team patrolled the southeast border of the refuge. As a result, the rangers apprehended a vehicle Nissan Safari driven by Mr. Cherney who carried a rifle without a hunting license. The violator turned out to be a road policeman of Vladivostok city. The anti-poaching team examined the vehicle, but did not find any poached wildlife. The rangers drew up a report on administrative violation and imposed a fine on the detainee.



© Phoenix Fund
Checking hunters



During August 02-09, a joint patrol together with a ranger of Fishing Inspection was carried out down the Bikin River by a wooden boat to the western border of Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge. It was hard to move on the river because of shallow water and numerous logjams at the steep turnings of this mountainous river. The patrol started in Verkhny Pereval village to the entry of the Kluchevaya River. The patrol's aim was to reveal and prevent violations of fishing regulations in spawning season of salmon species and violations of hunting regulations. Another goal was to fix four warning signs marking the beginning of north-western boundaries of Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge in the outfall of the Kluchevaya River and on the left bank of the Bikin River up to the Rogataya arm.



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Patrol on the Bikin river

On August 02, the public officers stopped six rubber boats with amateur fishermen and two motorboats that were used for transportation of Korean pine. No violations of nature protection legislation were found on the first day of the patrol. The officers camped for night on the spit between Krasny Yar and Yasenevo villages.

On August 03, the public rangers reached the mouth of the Amba River that flows into the Bikin River and made a stationary post of Fishing Inspection there. Six rubber boats going down to Krasny Yar village were checked there. No fish or illegal fishing tools were discovered. A resident of Khabarovsk city, whose boat was examined, had no license for a loaded gun he kept in the bow of the boat. The

officers drew up a report on violation and passed it to the Hunting Management Department of Pozharsky district. On August 04, the rangers checked seven wooden boats and five rubber boats powered with an outboard motor.

On August 05, the officers went up the river and reached the boundaries of Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge in the estuary of the Kluchevaya River. On the right, near Kailu natural landmark, they saw a man hiding in a wooden boat. There were goldilocks and a preyed duck near the man. The violator fished with nets. Several minutes later two other men appeared out of the bush. One of them carried a gun. He turned out to be a surgeon of Khabarovsk city. He had no hunting license with him. The rangers made a report on the violators. The duck and the fish were confiscated. Later, near Tashanza channel, in one of the river bays the officers found seven fishing nets with fish in them: goldilocks (30 fish), Siberian salmon (1 fish), and graylings (8 fish). They had not enough time to search for the owners of the nets as they had to cover 38 km (23.6 miles) more up the Kluchevaya



© Phoenix Fund
Checking fishermen (background) and revealed illegal rifles (foreground)

river and it was already getting dark. It was difficult to boat because of strong shoals and shallow water. The rangers stopped for a night in a winter cabin.



On August 07, at 8 a.m. the rangers heard a roar of a motorboat. Fishing ranger with the help of a red flag made them a sign to stop. But four men in the boat speeded on. The officers started chasing them and in 10 minutes caught up with the boat. Public ranger made them a sign to stop and presented himself. No reaction except cursing followed. The man in the bow grabbed a pole and tried to push off from the rangers' boat. In the end the officers managed to force the other boat out onto a spit. They recognized the men. They were locals of Krasny Yar village. One of them caught an axe and tried to hit the public ranger threatening him loudly. Another man wanted to grab another axe in the stern of the boat, the fishing ranger intercepted it. The men tried to start the engine; two others began to push away from the bank with poles. Public ranger caught a stern of the violators' boat and tore off a fuel hose but could not hold the boat. The action took place 30 meters far from two fishermen. One of them agreed to act as a witness and joined the rangers who started pursuing the suspected men again. The public ranger filmed them with his camera, but as they repulsed with an axe and poles he had to switch it off. One of the men hit him with an oar. Fishing ranger took a decision to give up the drive. The rangers had three material evidences of the violation: an axe with pieces of meat of red deer, a fuel hose and an oar. The witness, resident of Khabarovsk city, gave detailed written description on the fact. The officers passed the documents to the district prosecutor's office.

On the same day six reports on fishing violations and two on hunting violations were drawn up.

On August 17-20 both teams conducted a joint patrol to reveal illegal woodcutting along the border of the refuge or in it. As a result, on August 18, the rangers detained a resident of Putsilovka village of Ussuriisky district carrying a gun without a hunting license by him. The rangers seized the gun and imposed a fine on the violator. No violations of the Forest Code were revealed. By arresting poachers and confiscating their illegal rifles the rangers help prevent/minimize illegal hunting on tiger and its prey base.

During the reported period the teams regularly checked the warning signs set up in 2004-2005 along the border of Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge. A couple of the signs were torn down by strong wind, and the rangers reset them and placed three new ones.

Education activities



For the reported period the educator in Pozharsky district touched the problems of Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge during the ecological lectures. She told that Primorsky Krai administration had signed a new decree that allowed exploration work and mining, house and road construction and research in Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge. She also informed that Pozharsky district administration had signed a resolution on inadmissibility of granting the lots for building aims and necessity of taking prompt measures for preserving biodiversity of the refuge. At the end of the lessons the children watched a video and wrote a short essay on protected territories.

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Teacher gives a lesson on protected territories



Output

For the reported period we can emphasize the following important changes:

- Increased awareness among local people and authorities about the importance of wildlife and habitat conservation. Primorsky region administration got into contact with indigenous people and environmental NGOs to solve local ecological problems. A newly established Primorsky Department of Protected Territories, in spite of staff shortage, started its work. Local Udege and other concerned people became more active in protection of human rights and nature conservation.
- Enhanced protection of the tiger prey populations and habitat in Northern Primorye. Thanks to support from the 21st Century Tiger, state and public rangers managed to conduct many-day patrols inside and along the Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge's borders to suppress poaching and illegal woodcutting.
- The Governor of Primorsky krai assured that no woodcutting would take place in the upper Bikin River, especially in Verkhnebikinsky wildlife refuge. Nowadays, this territory is considered as an ideal place for development of ecological tourism.

III. Acknowledgement

The project was launched in September 2004 and thanks to support from the 21st Century Tiger, we helped keep the wildlife of "Verkhnebikinsky" wildlife refuge stable, managed to increase the capacity of the anti-poaching teams to reduce poaching and enhance wildlife and habitat protection in Northern Primorye, and increase awareness of the local communities about the importance of wildlife and habitat conservation. This project is the result of joint efforts of many people and organizations such as Rosprirodnadzor and Rosselkhoznadzor. We show our appreciation to Ms. Sarah Christie and Ms. Sophie Darlington for all patience and assistance and hope for our fruitful co-operation in the future.



ATTACHMENT

Activities	September-August 2006
I. Violations documented:	
1.1. Hunting	8
1.2. Fishing	15
1.3. Forest resources	35
2. Illegal weapons confiscated and handed over to the police	8
3. Checkouts:	
3.1. Vehicles	200
3.2. Logging sites	33
3.3. Bases	15
4. Wildlife confiscated:	
4.1. Roe deer	1
4.2. Goldilocks	30
4.3. Siberian salmon	1
4.4. Graylings	8
4.5. Taimen	2
5. Meetings with schoolchildren	5
6. Participation in round tables, conferences, trainings, meetings with local authorities, etc	26