

RUSSIA'S FINAL ROAR



Criminal Threats to the Siberian Tiger and Local Communities: An Inside Look at a New Fight For Survival

A Report by the
Investigative Network
for
The Siberian Tiger Support Coalition

Sponsored by
The David Shepherd Conservation Foundation (UK)
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The Humane Society of the United States/Humane Society International



INVESTIGATIVE NETWORK

WORKING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS





Despite Russia's epidemic of commercial poaching, the endangered Siberian tiger has a chance at survival.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the midst of one of history's worst outbreaks of crime and commercial poaching, Russia's Siberian tiger, one of the world's most critically endangered species, is showing signs of a possible recovery. Following four straight years of intensive poaching, which leveled Russia's tiger population and led many observers to predict its extinction in the wild, recent investigations indicate that illegal tiger hunting and trading in the Russian Far East has declined considerably. Observers attribute this reprieve to new anti-poaching efforts, community outreach programs, and habitat protection schemes. Funded largely by foreign money, these efforts may lead to the most successful achievement in the history of endangered species protection. Moreover, they represent a new approach to addressing threats to wildlife and human populations simultaneously through a series of biodiversity and community development programs. These programs are now backed by a new Russian government Tiger Decree, secured by the Global Security Network Investigative Network's umbrella organization) and the International Foundation of Science, Culture and Economics (Russia). Once enacted, the new Tiger Decree will pave the way for the creation of the world's largest wildlife sanctuary.

However, the battle is far from won. The Siberian tiger is still hunted by professional poachers, who make up one segment of an organized, underground trade in rare animal parts that stretches from Russia's forests to its cities. From there, criminal groups collect and smuggle the lucrative remains to a number of foreign destinations. To date, the Investigative Network and Russian authorities have uncovered covert wildlife trading channels that extend from Primorski Territory to northeast China, South Korea, Japan, Europe and the United States.

Logging operations in Russia's Far East assist poachers by creating roads into formerly pristine areas of wilderness, home not only to tigers, but also to Himalayan bears, Amur leopards, musk deer, wild boar, reindeer and a host of other species. Bears are now being harvested for their gall bladders, musk deer for their glands, and leopards for their pelts. But it is the plight of the Siberian tiger that has come to symbolize the critical inter-relationship between wildlife and human welfare in the region. The epidemic of poaching and widespread un-licensed logging, to which the tiger has fallen victim, also threaten the region's overall wildlife population, disrupt the food chain and subsistence hunting, fragment indigenous communities, and strengthen organized crime, which ultimately prospers at the expense of the local population and environment.

This report describes various threats to the Siberian tiger, the forest, and other wildlife of the region. It outlines the future prospects for Russia's coveted cat, and the pressing threats to the cultural integrity and economic future of rural communities in the Russian Far East. As the report describes, this future is largely dependent on the successful implementation of the Tiger Decree, and the work of several small Russian organizations which, with international assistance, can win the battle against the poachers, the loggers and the mafia, and secure a sustainable ecosystem for future generations of people and wildlife alike.

BACKGROUND TO RUSSIA'S TIGER CRISIS

The Siberian tiger is the victim of powerful international and domestic forces. The global underground market for tiger products is immense. In some countries, one tiger skin can sell for \$15,000 as a decoration. One kilogram of tiger bone, ground down to administer as a medicine or aphrodisiac, can fetch \$2,000. The blood, meat, penis, and whiskers of the tiger are also lucrative products when sold as ingredients of traditional Chinese medicine.

The illegal international trade in tiger body parts has threatened the existence of the tiger worldwide. At the start of this century, eight subspecies of tigers, totaling 100,000 animals, were found between the Caspian Sea and Bali. Today, the global population of wild tigers may be as low as 5,000. Three subspecies – the Bali, Caspian and Javan – have gone extinct. Recently, some tiger consuming countries and territories, including China, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and the United States, initiated new enforcement and education programs to reduce the illegal trade. But it will take time before significant results from these efforts are seen in the field. In the meantime, some traders and companies remain willing to break the law to profit from the tiger trade.

As the largest of all tiger subspecies, the street value of the Siberian tiger's body can top \$60,000. It is little wonder, then, that the Siberian tiger has become a major target for the Russian mafia and international traders. Under the Soviet Union, tigers and other wildlife were strictly protected, legally and physically. Moreover, the iron curtain prevented most Soviet citizens from establishing contacts with foreign businessmen. As a result, the Siberian tiger population roaming the Eastern territories of Khabarovsk and Primorski grew from 40 individuals at the beginning of World War II, to approximately 370 tigers in 1989.

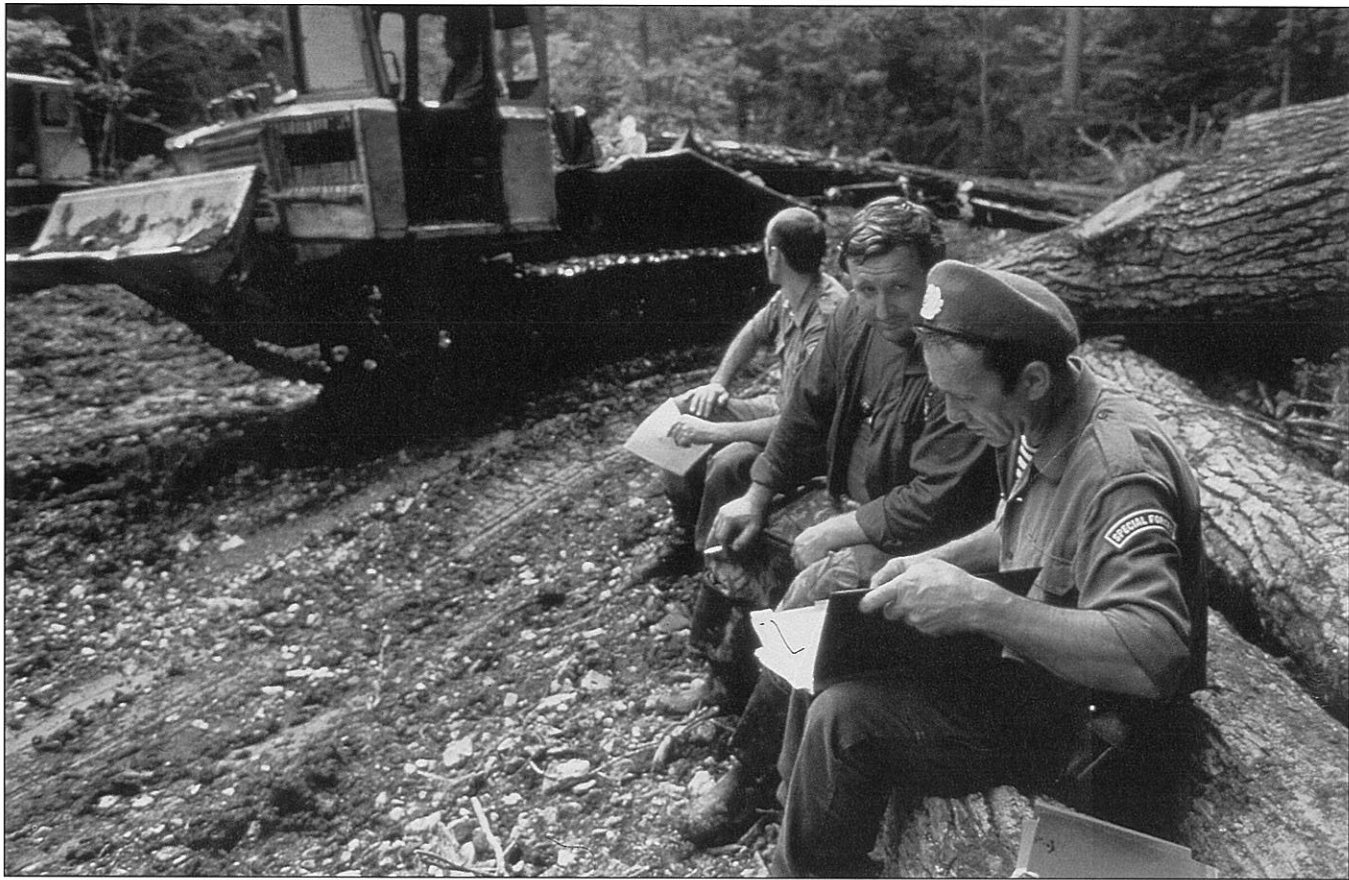
Since 1990, however, when the Soviet Union's borders opened to foreigners and international commerce, traders from China and Korea have flooded into the Russian Far East in search of business opportunities, often buying rare plants and animal parts. Russian poachers responded quickly to the new market, using snowmobiles, land cruisers, helicopters, horses and dogs to hunt down tigers, bears and other wildlife.

Between 1990 and 1994, an estimated 60 Siberian tigers a year were poached to feed the international underground market for tiger parts. Many observers predicted that Russia's famous cat would become extinct in the wild by the year 2,000.



S. Galster

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An anti-poaching officer issues a fine to illegal loggers in Primorski Territory.

Unregulated Logging: Destroying Tiger Habitat and Rural Communities

The removal of trees by logging exposes tigers to poachers, and loggers from all corners of the globe are heading to Russia's final frontier.

Nearly every tropical forest in the world could fit inside the Siberian taiga forest. The taiga contains 54% of earth's coniferous forests and 21% of all remaining standing forests on the planet. Consequently, legal and illegal timber companies have targeted the former Soviet Union as the newest source of wood for the global market.

Profits from Russia's new timber trade can be enormous. Local timber companies and some forestry officials have actively solicited international partners, and have conducted illegal logging operations throughout Primorski and Khabarovsk Territories. The results of this business have been disastrous for both wildlife and local communities, causing changes in animal migration and seriously disrupting the forest food chain. Biologist Yevgeny Smirnov, who has lived in Primorski

Territory's Bikin Valley for 19 years, reports changes in animal migration as a result of deforestation. For example, the logging of oak trees and Korean pine in the Bikin has caused a decrease in ground food for boar. Since tigers feed on boar, they are now eating more elk in the middle of the valley, or migrating to the headwaters of the river to seek boar which have moved there to eat horsetail. Meanwhile, deer have migrated to deforested areas to eat secondary small plant food. Smirnov reports that these changes have made hunting by locals more difficult, as many animals have dispersed from their traditional habitats.

A Russian-Korean joint venture, headed by the Hyundai Corporation, tore down an area of forest in the Bikin Valley so large that it can be seen from outer space. With help from Russian and international environmental groups, the indigenous Udege people of the area successfully pressured Hyundai to halt the cut because it was causing erosion in the headwaters of the Bikin River, and destroying the habitat of the wildlife which the Udege hunt for their survival. Today, however, Hyundai officials are back in the Bikin, prospecting for future cutting.



Russian logs at Pogradichniye bound for China.

Corruption facilitates illegal logging. In both Primorski and Khabarovsk Territories, it is not uncommon for forestry officials to purchase logging concessions from their own office with money from timber companies, or to strike under-the-table deals with timber companies permitting illegal cuts in the taiga. In the Khor River watershed, which stretches over 11,000 square miles and is home to some of the Udege population, nearly 100 forest enterprises are operating with no official oversight. About 30 illegal logging operations were exposed in Primorski Territory last year, but no one was prosecuted.

U.S. timber companies are exploring substantial log export plans from Primorski and Khabarovsk to the Pacific Northwest, and are ready to begin trade once irradiation facilities are established in the Far East. In the meantime, most Russian logs are being sold to Japan and Korea, and the U.S. market is being prepared. The U.S. Department of Commerce has issued a new report, "The Burgeoning Russian Forest Products Market: Background and Opportunities for Traders and Investors." China, which has depleted most of its own forests, is also importing Russian logs.

The Indigenous Udege People: Under Siege by Loggers and Poachers

More than 800 years ago, groups of Udege people migrated from China to their current home in Russia's Bikin Valley. The Bikin is a unique mix of northern and temperate forests which stretch hundreds of miles across Primorski Territory. This fertile, expansive valley is also home to Siberian tigers, reindeer, moose, bear and salmon. Today, only about 2000 Udege remain as part of a consolidated community, which also includes some ethnic Russians. Before perestroika, the Udege were fur hunters, targeting mink, sable, squirrel and other animals. After the collapse of the state fur industry (due to decreased foreign demand and domestic economic decline) the Bikin Valley began to attract Russian, Chinese, and Korean traders in search of tiger bones, bear gall bladders, and wild ginseng. Although traditionally the Udege have not poached for these products, some have been lured by the lucrative offers of outsiders. Moreover, poaching in the Bikin has been facilitated by an almost total absence of rangers in the valley.

The Udege people practice subsistence hunting and logging. About 50 village hunters rotate plots so as not to diminish wildlife populations. Following hunting in an area, it is left alone as a "quiet zone" for a period. Although tigers and humans hunt some of the same animals, Udege hunters told Investigative Network



researchers that they do not view the tiger as their competitor. They believe that deforestation, and the resulting loss of tree food for boar and other animals, is a much greater threat to their hunting. Many Udege have allied to launch a community struggle against poachers, loggers, and the lure of foreign money, in an effort to maintain their cultural integrity and subsistence livelihood. The Udege have also formed a "Druzhina" (community defense force) to fend off poachers. Money ran out for the Druzhina in the early summer of 1995, but the Siberian Tiger Support Coalition has raised money to help put them back to work.

FIGHTING BACK Anti-Poaching

In January of 1994, with the help of foreign environmental organizations, Russia's Ministry of Environment (MOE) responded to the nation's tiger crisis by launching "Operation Amba". Operation Amba is a specialized anti-poaching brigade based in Primorski Territory, which is home to 85% of the remaining Siberian tiger population. Amba has deployed four mobile anti-poaching teams throughout Primorski Territory. Before Amba began its work, an

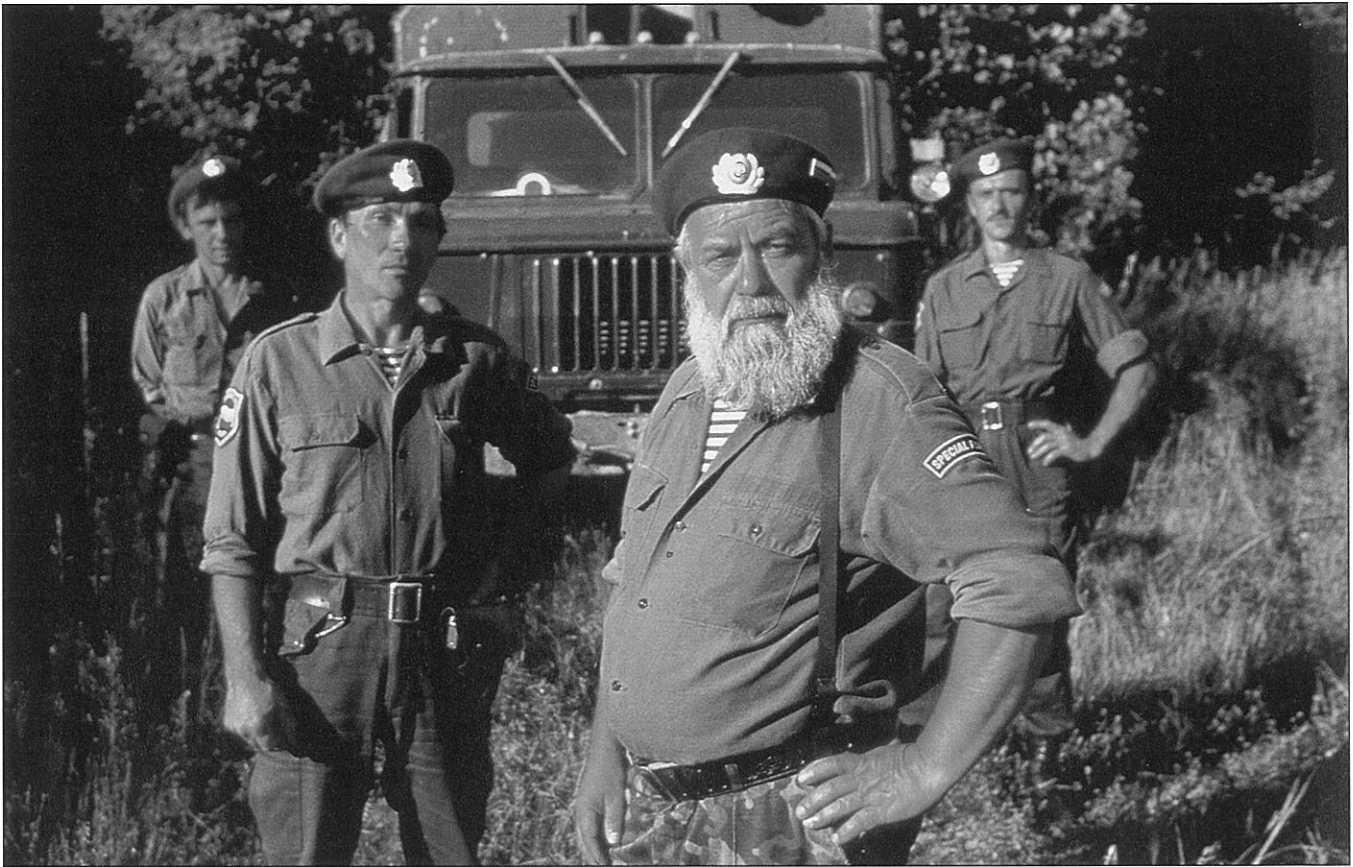
average of 60 tigers a year were being poached. Amba has cut the rate of poaching to an estimated 10-15 tigers a year.

Every Amba team consists of at least four rangers, each specially trained in criminal inspection, weapons use, environmental law, and forest survival. Some Amba rangers were recruited straight out of nature reserves where they worked as park rangers, while others formerly served in the military. Each team is equipped with at least one military style truck, a jeep, hand-held radios, uniforms, outdoor sleeping gear, cooking equipment, arms, and a monthly allowance for gasoline, food, and informant incentive money. Average salaries for the rangers are \$300/month. Amba's entire operations currently cost \$150,000 a year, which is paid almost entirely by foreign donors. The Investigative Network estimates that the annual retail value of illegal wildlife exports from Primorski Territory alone exceeds \$10,000,000 (not including illegal log exports).

The Russian mafia, drug dealers, Chinese smugglers, and professional poachers make up the assorted cast of characters confronting Amba rangers on any given day of their work. Working with other government agencies and informants, Amba has uncovered networks of wildlife poachers and dealers, some with connections to organized crime.



An Udege community defense team (Druzhina) patrolling the Bikin River for commercial poachers.



Commander Vladimir Shetinin and Operation Amba, Russia's specialized Tiger protection team, in the taiga forest.

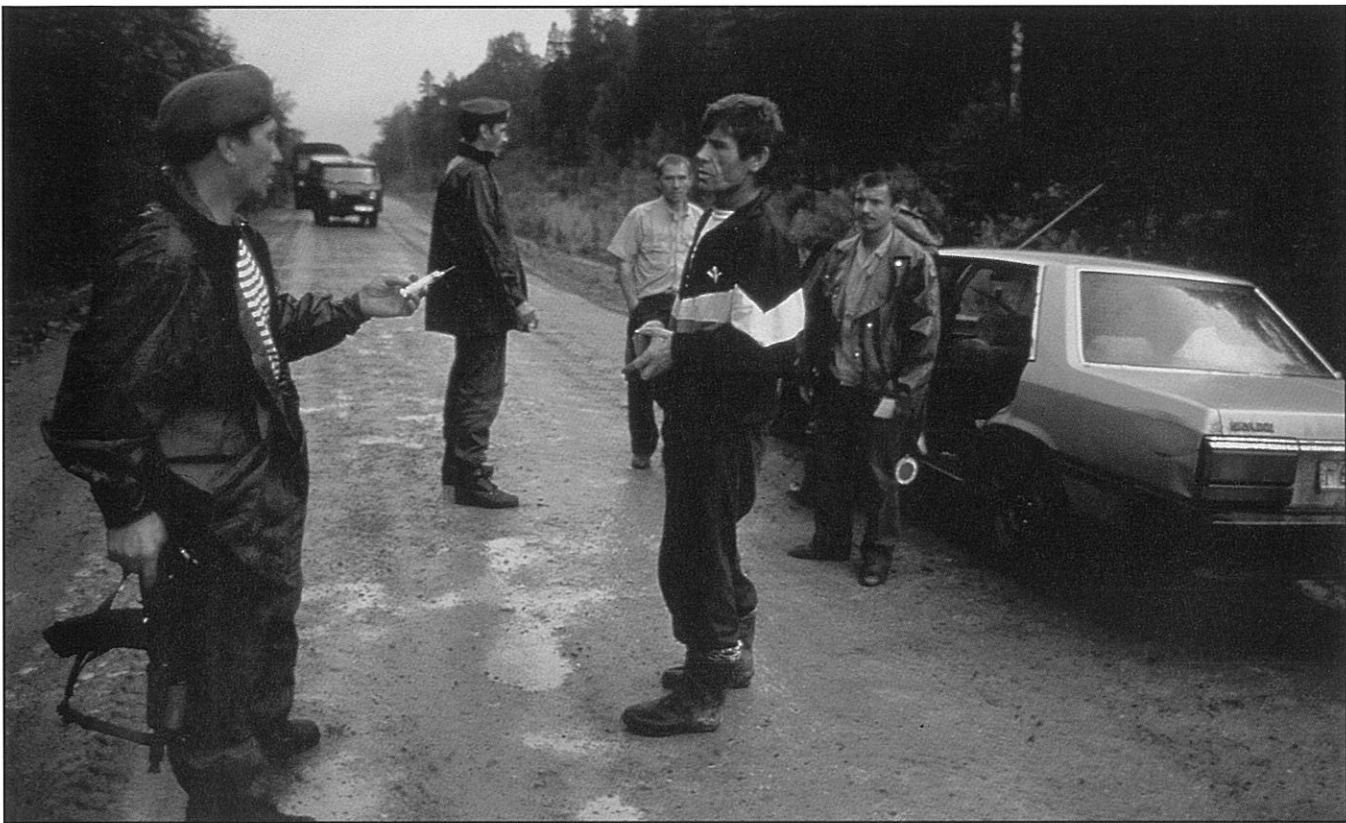
In addition to Operation Amba, two nature reserves also host specialized tiger anti-poaching teams. An anti-poaching team in Sikhote-Alinsky Nature Reserve is technically employed by the MOE, but receives its financial support from foreign organizations. In Lazovsky Nature Reserve, a non-governmental organization receives its funding from abroad and coordinates its work with Amba and reserve authorities (see page 13). There are plans to initiate another anti-poaching team in southwest Primorski Territory, home to most of the remaining 24 Amur leopards.

Some coordination of anti-poaching and investigative work exists between Operation Amba and these other teams, but it is haphazard and not without problems. Lacking compatible equipment, for example, each team still operates on a different radio frequency. As a result, communication is impaired and critical information about poaching and trading activity is traded over the telephone and in personal meetings.

Battling Russia's Wildlife Mafia

Operation Amba is the only federal, mobile anti-poaching operation focusing on tigers both in and outside nature reserves. Their federal status allow Amba teams to pursue poachers and to investigate organized trading gangs throughout Primorski Territory and southern Khabarovsk Territory, which is home to the other 15% of the remaining Siberian tigers.

Based on Amba investigations, Commander Vladimir Shetinin reports that wildlife smugglers operate in one of two ways: either they cooperate with the mafia to gain protection, which means sharing the profits; or they go it alone to maximize profits at the risk of being discovered or killed by the mafia. Shetinin described one incident where a tiger skin trader from Dalnarechensk tried to smuggle his contraband out of Vladivostok port without informing anyone but the sailor with whom he was collaborating. A mafia group working the port found out what the trader had in his suitcase, beat him, took the skin, and threatened his life if he did not leave town.



Amba rangers, on a routine patrol, discover illegal drug runners.

Customs road officers normally conduct thorough searches. As a result, Amba ranger Valodia Diukov claims that it is very difficult for a smuggler to get a tiger carcass out of the country by road unless he has a lot of money to bribe customs officers, or, in return for 50% of the profits, he enlists mafia support and utilizes their connections to border officials.

Illegal exports of tiger parts have been tracked by Amba and other agencies to China and several other countries. However, legal loopholes, government apathy, and corruption have plagued efforts to prosecute poachers and traders. Several examples from Amba's 1995 case load illustrate the complexity of the crisis:

May 1995: An Amba operation was seriously compromised by apathetic or corrupt government officials, nearly causing one ranger to lose his life. Four Amba rangers discovered a tiger smuggling channel between the city of Arseniev and Vladivostok, Primorski Territory's capitol and major sea port. They learned that hunters near Arseniev were paid to kill tigers by a mafia group, which then smuggled the remains to Vladivostok. Further examination by Amba revealed that this channel was also used to trade drugs and arms.

Amba rangers took the information they had gathered to police and prosecutors in Vladivostok District. The police told Amba that they already knew about this channel, and that they should "leave it alone" because the police "were on top of it." Several days later, on May 12, the lead Amba ranger who discovered this smuggling route was attacked by a group of young men outside his home and badly beaten. An investigation by OMON forces (special police) confirmed that the beating incident was linked to the discovery of the smugglers.

June 1995: Bad interagency coordination compromised another Amba operation. Amba rangers were approached by a Chinese man who offered information about wildlife smuggling between Russia and China. Amba rangers met the anonymous Chinese informant, referred to as "Mr Chang" for this report, in the city of Ussurisk, north of Vladivostok and east of the Chinese border, to discuss his information. Ussurisk has many visiting Chinese workers and a number of Russian-Chinese joint ventures. It has also become a major transit point for wildlife parts.

Chang wanted a contract with Amba to act as a covert agent, providing information about goods being smuggled to China. But he placed a condition on his help:



Amba rangers examine a confiscated tiger skin.

he wanted Amba to arrest one particular smuggler, confiscate his goods (in this case three tons of sea cucumbers), and sell the contraband to Chang. Although the rangers quickly deduced that Chang wanted to use Amba to undermine a competitor, they verbally agreed to cooperate in order to see what would turn up.

One week later, Chang telephoned Amba to report that a shipment was about to take place from Ussurisk to China, through the border crossing at Poltovka. Amba patrols conducted spot checks along the relevant road, but found nothing. This went on for three days. On the fourth day, Amba received a telephone call, informing them that a vehicle had been stopped at Poltovka carrying the sea cucumbers which Chang had told them about, in addition to a full carcass of a tiger. The caller was a KGB officer.

Customs officials at the Poltovka border post refused to work with the KGB, providing all the information about the contraband and its smugglers to the Department of Transportation instead. Frustrated by this lack of cooperation, Amba and the KGB decided to investigate the matter themselves. They learned that Chang was a Chinese police officer living in

Russia, probably temporarily. They never saw him again, and his connection to wildlife smuggling is still unclear. To date, no one has been prosecuted for this smuggling incident.

A newcomer to the wildlife scene, the KGB (now named the FSB but referred to commonly by their old name) has a new sub-unit on endangered species. In late 1994, KGB officers discovered 14 kilograms of tiger bones being smuggled to China and turned this information over to the Ministry of Environment, and has been cooperating with Amba. This instance, however, demonstrated that KGB relations with Customs are not always good.

July 1995: Some illegal wildlife traders avoid detection by hiding inside forest villages, as evidenced by Amba's discovery of a wildlife smuggling channel emanating from the middle of the Bikin Valley. A field trip by the Investigative Network and Amba to the Bikin in July of 1995 turned up evidence of both tiger and bear trading. In the village of Krasny Yar (Red Bank), one Udege man tried to sell investigators the full carcass of a young tiger which had been shot by professional poachers the previous winter. He showed undercover investigators the bones and skin, and asked \$11,000 for the entire body. He also offered bear gall bladders, which he said he could collect from nearby villages.





A PROFILE OF TWO COMBATANTS IN THE TIGER WAR

Russian citizens have followed different personal paths in the post-Soviet, capitalist Russian Federation. Here are two sample, anonymous profiles. One is of a man who has chosen to exploit the environment illegally to increase his personal wealth. The other describes a man who, despite economic hardships, has decided to protect the environment.

A Tiger Trader

Alexei (pseudonym) holds a PhD and has a well-paid professional job. He owns an apartment in the city, a dacha (cottage) in the countryside, and he drives a Japanese car. His friends are poachers and mafia businessmen. He considers himself economically comfortable, but like many nouveau riche Russians, he is always looking for new ways to make money.

Alexei organizes hunts of tigers, leopards, musk deer, and other wildlife. One of his friends does professional taxidermy jobs on leopard skins, which he sells for \$10,000 a piece. Alexei is aware of new anti-poaching/investigative teams and says that he must now be extra careful in his dealings with buyers.

A Tiger Ranger

Sergei (pseudonym) is about 50 years old and works as an anti-poaching ranger. Before the break-up of the USSR, Sergei was a sailor, traveling around the world's oceans as a Cold War naval officer. Currently he leads a team of rangers who spend more than half their time in and around the taiga forest looking for poachers.

Last summer, Sergei uncovered a major smuggling operation, which involved tigers, drugs, and arms. In May, he was attacked by 3 men in front of his home. They beat him with brass knuckles. A follow-up investigation linked the attackers to the smugglers. Sergei was back on the job within a week. He earns about \$300 a month, and has minimal life insurance.



Amba Commander Vladimir Shetinin and a colleague examine a haul of firearms confiscated from commercial poachers.

The trader, "Leonid", had previously lived in Vladivostok and had arranged for animal parts to be smuggled there from the Bikin. He suggested that the undercover investigators smuggle the poached tiger out of Russia through diplomatic channels. Information about Leonid, who was not a first-time offender, was turned over to Krasny Yar authorities in September, and the outcome is awaited.

Further research has shown that Russian, Chinese and Korean wildlife buyers frequently show up opposite Krasny Yar, waiting next to the Bikin River for suppliers. These traders move the goods north to Khabarovsk by military road, or west to Luchegorsk before smuggling the goods out of the country. Non-Bikin residents also invade the valley by helicopter to conduct commercial poaching: some hunting groups are dropped in the woods to hunt for several days, while other sharpshooters have been known to track and shoot tigers and bears from the air.

European and U.S. Links to Russian Tiger and Bear Poaching

September, 1994: Customs authorities in Los Angeles discovered the full skeleton of a Siberian tiger, smuggled from China. The smuggler, who was a Chinese national with business and family connections in South Korea and Los Angeles, had obtained the dead tiger from a trader in Kazakhstan and transported it to Beijing before flying it to the United States. He was arrested by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

September, 1995: A routine inspection at the Anchorage International Airport in Alaska revealed 60 gall bladders secretly stashed in a box with reindeer antlers bound for Los Angeles. According to U.S. Customs, the galls were thought to be from Russian brown bears, and were mixed in with 2,575 pounds of reindeer antlers. The antlers alone were valued at \$169,000. The investigation of this smuggling operation continues. Convictions of felony violations for the smugglers could result in up to five years imprisonment and \$250,000 in fines.



An infant Himalayan bear in the Bikin Valley.

Plans of illegal safari hunts of Siberian tigers, organized in Europe, have been discovered by the Investigative Network. Details of these hunts have been transferred to Russian authorities. Recently, an unconfirmed smuggling channel for tiger parts has been reported: Primorski Territory to Latvia to Western Europe. Surveys in Europe by the Investigative Network and other organizations revealed that tiger parts are widely available in several European countries including England, Holland and Belgium. In November of 1995, British and Interpol authorities uncovered a tiger bone trading operation between Hong Kong and England. It is still unclear if Siberian tiger bone is being smuggled into Europe. Russian authorities tracked tiger skins smuggled from Khabarovsk to Turkey last year.

The Poaching of Other Russian Wildlife

Tiger poaching is part and parcel of a broader illegal, organized commercial trade in wildlife in Russia. Bear gall bladder, musk deer, and wild ginseng are in as much demand.

Bears

Russian poachers receive about \$200 per gall bladder from traders who sell them in Asian countries, like Korea, for up to \$5,000 apiece. (See Investigative

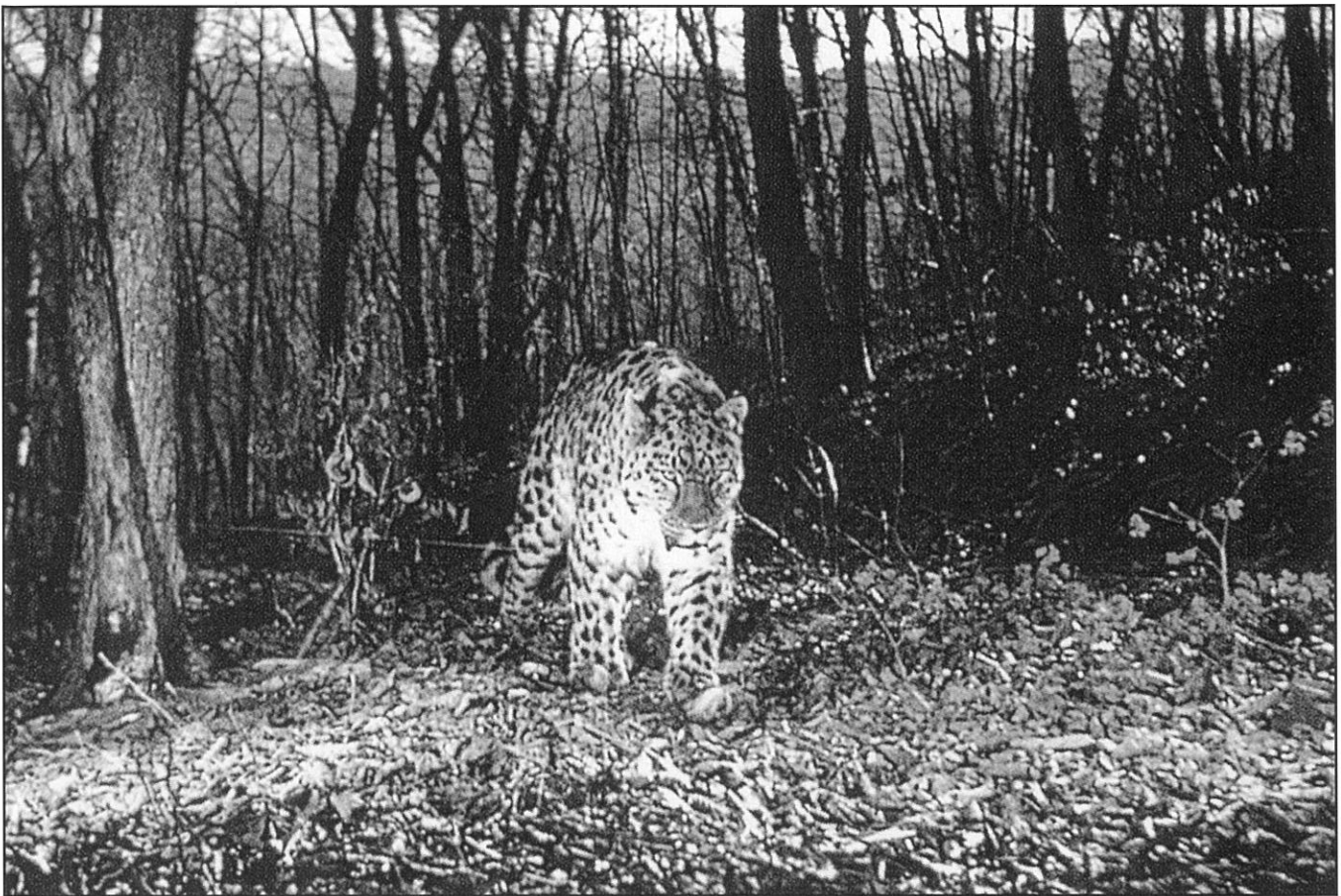
Network report, "From Forest to Pharmacy," November of 1995, for details of the international bear gall trade). In August 1995, hunters in the Bikin Valley reported that, while tiger poaching had stabilized, bear poaching was on the rise.

According to local Bikin Valley hunters, the main buyers of galls are Russians and Russian-Koreans. The Investigative Network discovered two bear poachers in Krasny Yar over a three day period. Amba Commander Vladimir Shetinin reports an increase in the number of illegal bear kills in Primorski Territory since 1994, and increasing numbers of orphaned bears are being discovered by Amba rangers.

As a result of a flood in China in mid-1995, dozens of bears crossed the Amur River into Primorski Territory, in search of higher ground. According to Shetinin, it was not long before hunters in the area (near Luchegorsk) shot an estimated 60 of them. Some were killed as nuisances by farmers who were protecting their bee hives, but most were pursued into the forest by four-wheel drive vehicles and shot for their meat and galls. Amba rangers can do little about bear poaching and trading since, unlike the tiger trade, the sale of some bear parts is still legal in Russia. The rangers explain that it is too difficult to distinguish between galls taken from legally hunted bears and those taken illegally from poached animals, such as protected Himalayan bears.



Russian mother brown bear and infant poached for their gall-bladders.



Killed primarily for their beautiful fur, the world's last 24 Amur leopards remain in the southwestern corner of Primorski Territory.

Wild ginseng


Ginseng, particularly wild ginseng, is widely marketed as a natural energizer. The effects of high demand in Asian countries, particularly China and Korea, for rare, wild ginseng is seen in the Russian Far East. In the summer of 1995, following reports of bumper crops, traders flooded into Primorski Territory in search of ginseng. Chinese merchants pay up to \$5,000/kg for wild ginseng. Amba rangers frequently find Chinese workers camping in the taiga poaching ginseng. Some Chinese dig deep holes in the forest where they live for days at a time while collecting the rare plant.

Musk deer

The gland of this animal is used for a variety of medicinal purposes. Between 1990 and 1994, Russia lost half of its musk deer population to poaching. According to Amba rangers based in Ussurisk, most musk gland smuggled through their territory is headed for northeast China. Researchers for the Investigative Network have also been offered Russian musk gland in South Korea.

Amur leopard

This is the most endangered of all species in the Russian Far East. It is still pursued for its pelt and bones, although no more than 24 remain in southwest Primorski Territory. Recently, six Amur leopards have grouped together near one deer farm, demonstrating a rare siege-like behavior. In September of 1995, the Investigative Network discovered a businessman in Vladivostok who secretly showcased an Amur leopard pelt and offered to supply "anything given ample time," including musk deer and tigers.


 ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫЙ ТАМОЖЕННЫЙ КОМИТЕТ
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 от _____

« II » июля 1995 г.

Краевой комитет охраны
 окружающей среды и природных
 ресурсов
 Председателю комитета
 Ешибову М.Н.

На Ваш запрос высылаем список сотрудников т/п "Полтавский", непосредственно участвовавших в обнаружении и задержании 2 июля 1995 года сокрытого груза: сушеного трепанга, корней женьшеня и шкуры амурского тигра.

1. Ст. инспектор Наливалко Алексей Модестович
2. Вед. инспектор Бучик Николай Константинович
3. Инспектор Степаненко Евгений Михайлович
4. Инспектор Мельников Виктор Иванович

Лица других организаций к данному факту отношения не имеют.

И.О. Начальника Гродековской таможни *С.Г. Дмитрук*
 СТС 2 ранга

A Russian Government Protocol details a tiger smuggling operation to China.

THE ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

A number of environmental groups have formed in the Russian Far East in the last several years in response to the critical plight of the tiger and other environmental crises. Despite having to operate with little access to regional offices, foreign media or aid, some of these groups are having a significant, positive impact on tiger and wildlife protection. For example:

The Khabarovsk Wildlife Foundation (KWF), which started out as a handful of scientists with no office phone, is now a major advisory body on environmental matters to the Khabarovsk Territory administration. KWF is working to keep foreign governments and timber companies ecologically honest by conducting environmental impact assessments on commercial, "sustainable forestry" operations.

The Tiger Protection Society (TPS) operates in Lazovsky Nature Reserve, home to the highest remaining concentration of Siberian tigers. Headed by Galina Salkina and her husband, Valodya, TPS has 16

members, five of whom conduct anti-poaching patrols on an almost daily basis. TPS has been extremely active. Since 1992, TPS investigations have uncovered about 50 sets of tiger skeletons and skins, but they report that not all of these carcasses originated in Lazovsky. The area, which abuts the Sea of Japan, is also a transit point for tiger traders. From April to June, 1995, TPS rangers conducted 63 anti-poaching raids, issued eight protocols for illegal hunting, confiscated four firearms, and uncovered numerous tiger snares.

In 1995, TPS also uncovered a significant Russian-Chinese tiger smuggling route. Tiger skins and bones were being traded by locals in Lazovsky to a Chinese businessman living in a hotel in Ussurisk. This information, combined with Amba's intelligence on Ussurisk tiger trading, points to a major underground wildlife trading channel between Ussurisk and China, via Poltovka.

As Salkina, her husband, and their colleagues in TPS risk their lives to expose poachers and traders, they are frequently frustrated by the lack of action on the part of some government agencies. Salkina points out that,



D. Higgs

Galina and Valodya Salkina, of the Tiger Protection Society, holding an illegal tiger trap



Abandoned by poachers and buried by snow, this Siberian tiger skeleton was found in a trap in Lazovsky Nature Reserve.

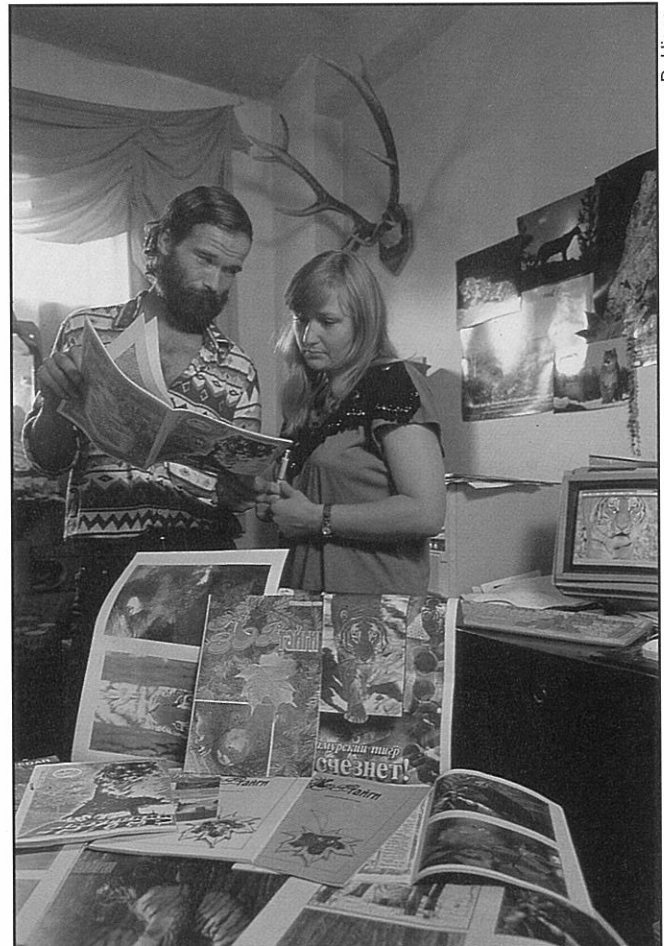
when presented with clear evidence, court authorities and police can take an inordinate amount of time to respond, often allowing the perpetrators to escape justice. TPS needs legal assistance to wade more quickly and effectively through the Russian bureaucracy.

Zov Taigi

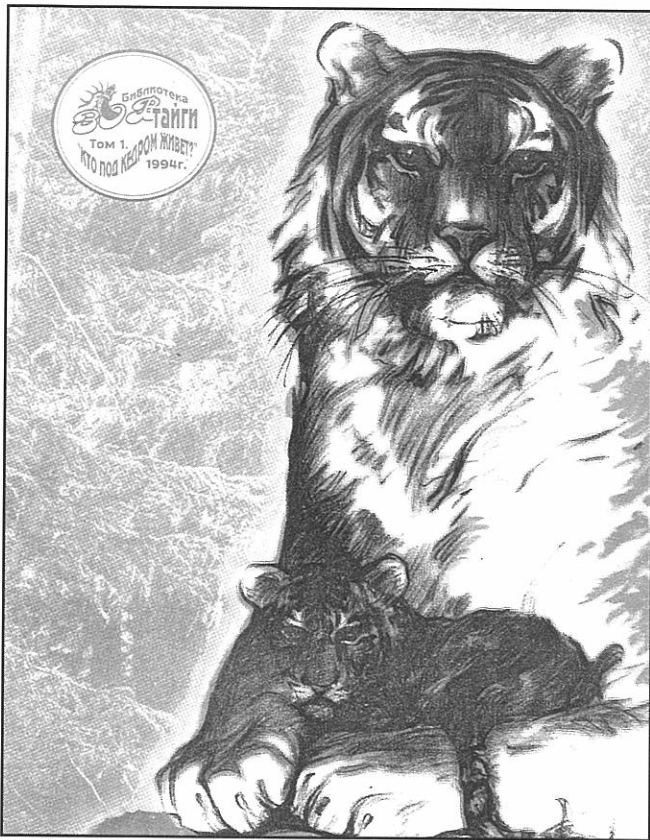
Tiger protection efforts are doomed to fail without the interest, support, and participation of the local population. The most successful public outreach program in Primorski Territory has been crafted and carried out by Vladivostok-based Zov Taigi (Russian for "Roar of the Taiga"). Zov Taigi is another husband and wife team, run by Vasily and Larisa Solkin, along with several professional journalistic colleagues. "Zov" has successfully engaged a wide audience in Primorski Territory, and has heightened the public's awareness of local environmental problems.

Since its inception in 1992, Zov Taigi has improved its media outreach capabilities, its graphic design, and its film techniques. It has also learned how to pique the public's interest in what is happening to their homeland's "natura." Zov Taigi focuses on the plight of the Siberian tiger as the symbol of the decline of Primorski Territory's natural resources, and also writes about and films wildlife and forest exploitation in general.

Now that they are equipped with basic desk-top publishing equipment and rudimentary video editing facilities, Zov Taigi's message reaches the general public, including businessmen in the city, hunters in the forest, and school children throughout the region. They produce a quarterly magazine, radio shows, television programs, posters, pamphlets, and children's books. Zov Taigi has become so popular that it cannot fulfill all the requests for magazines and films. Pending more financial support, Zov Taigi hopes to expand its audience in the coming years.



Vasily and Larisa Solkin of Zov Taigi review one of their new conservation magazines.



Zov Taigi produced this magazine for Russian school children.

Tiger Fund

Tiger experts, led by Dr. Dimitry Pikhunov, have set up a Tiger Fund, which has been established in part to lease protected areas for tigers and leopards. Pikhunov and other scientists have cooperated with local NGO's, Amba authorities, and others to construct the **Amur Tiger Program (ATP)**, which serves as the basis for all tiger protection programs in the region.

Assisting Russian NGO's is a U.S.-based organization, **ISAR**, which has a very active office in Vladivostok. ISAR identifies and assists groups and individuals with promising environmental and public service programs.

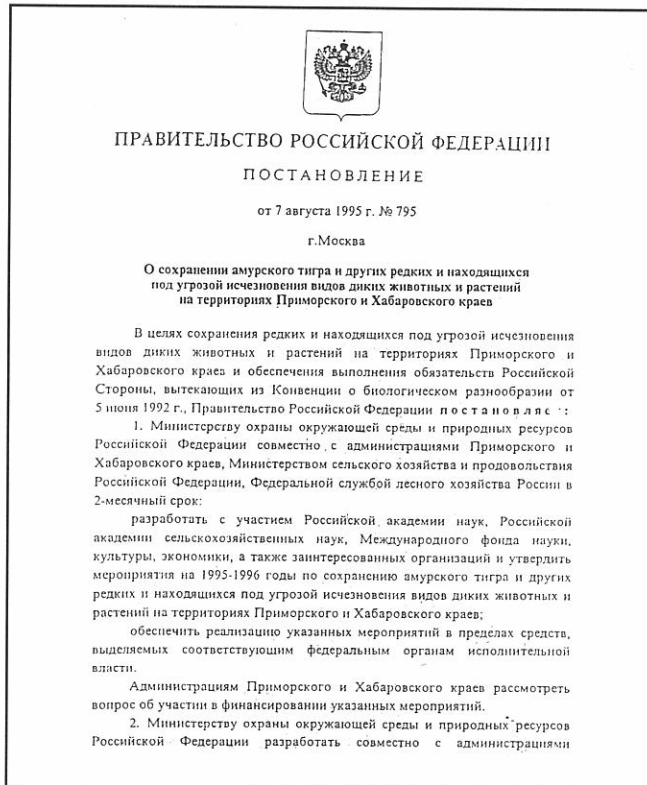
THE AMUR TIGER PROGRAM: Developing a Comprehensive Protection Plan for the Tiger

In June of 1994, Zov Taigi, members of Operation Amba and other Russian tiger experts, biologists, rangers, and environmental educators convened a special meeting to coordinate tiger protection efforts. They came up with the "**Amur Tiger Program**" (ATP). The top three priorities of the ATP are

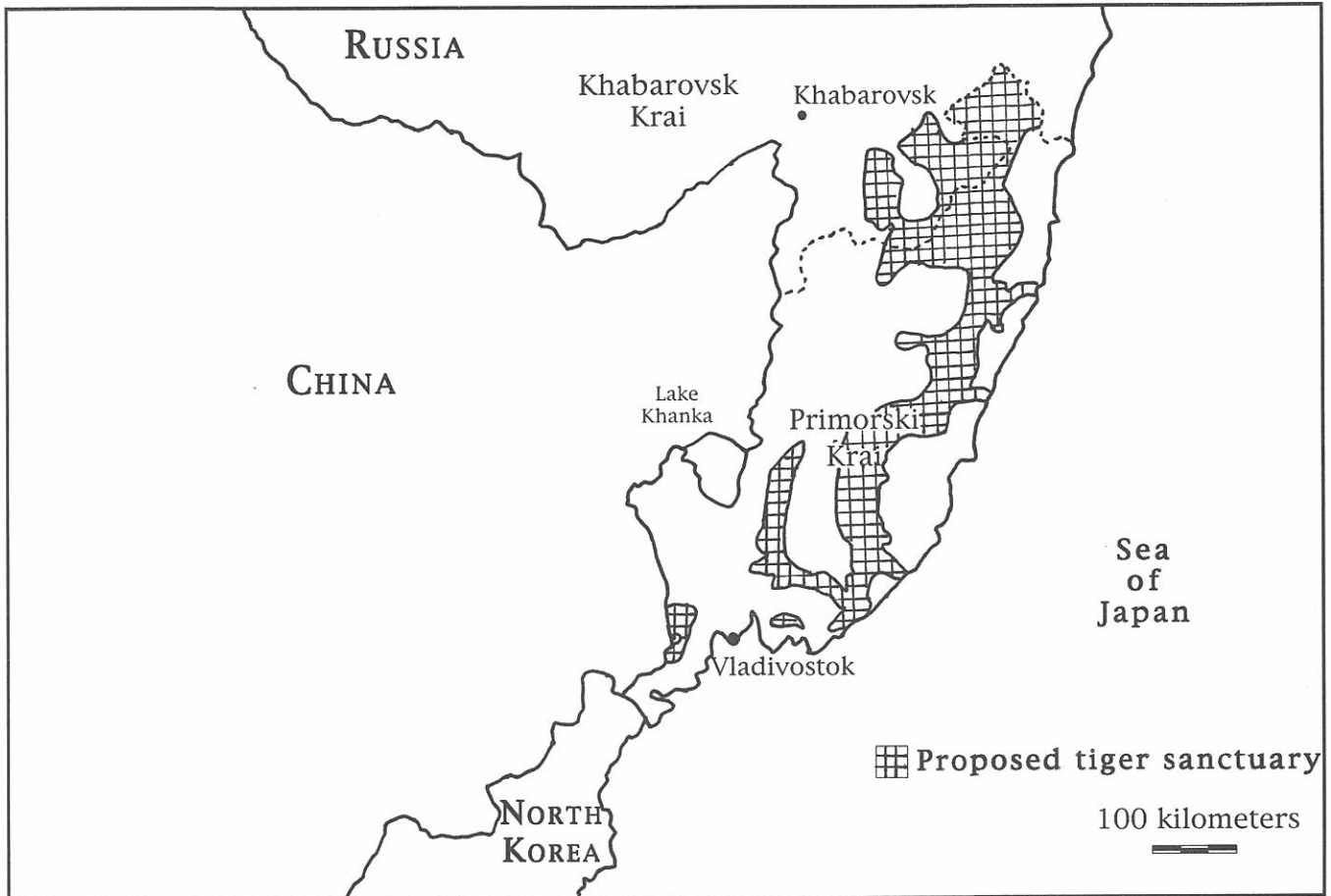
anti-poaching, habitat protection, and education. The participants agreed that these efforts needed more integration, and that financial support should be coordinated to maximize their impact. However, the ATP failed to get off the ground because Russian politicians were not interested in supporting it, and because foreign donors were unaware of its existence. Potential contributors who did know about the ATP could see that the two most critical aspects of the program would be difficult to fulfill without high-level Russian government endorsement: state inspector status for specialized anti-poaching patrols, and the establishment of new protected areas for the tiger.

In order to bring focus to these diffused efforts to save the tiger, and to gain the full weight of the Russian Government behind the ATP, the Global Security Network began a year-long negotiation in 1994 to secure a Russian Government decree. Together with GSN's Russian partner, the International Foundation for Science, Culture and Economics (IFSCE), National Decree number 795 "On Saving the Amur Tiger" was secured from the office of the Prime Minister on August 7, 1995.

The decree called on ATP members to develop a specific plan and schedule to implement a series of tiger protection efforts, including anti-poaching, prey base management, habitat protection, and education.



Russia's Prime Minister, in a new tiger decree, calls on the IFSCE, and the Ministry of Environment to save the Siberian tiger.



The most promising plan developed in response to the new federal decree was developed by a Russian–American scientific team. Authored by the U.S.–based Hornocker Wildlife Research Institute and Russian scientists from Primorski Territory, this proposal is based on four years of tiger radio–collar surveys inside the range of the Siberian tiger.

The goal of the Russian–Hornocker plan is to protect all existing tiger habitat. The plan calls for the establishment of four levels of protected areas to supplement existing nature reserves: new national parks, zones of indigenous traditional use, and multiple use planning zones, all of which will be linked together by protected “ecological corridors”. Altogether, the proposed sanctuary spans the length of Primorski Territory into southern Khabarovsk Territory.

This habitat conservation plan also seeks to reduce the number of roads in the proposed protected area, and to preserve other wildlife. Studies by Russian field scientists have shown that throughout most of their range, tigers depend primarily on elk and wild boar for their diet. Habitat preservation guarantees tree cover and ground food for these species to keep their numbers abundant. Old–growth Korean pine forests must be



The Russian–Hornocker habitat protection plan.

maintained because they provide food for boar. Although Korean pine is protected in Primorski Territory, loggers are still exporting it illegally. The plan also calls for anti-poaching patrols to keep illegal hunting of elk and boar to a minimum, and to police the forests for illegal loggers.

If fully implemented, the Russian-Hornocker plan would create the largest connected system of protected territories in the world. The Decree's executors, the GSN and IFSCE, wish to combine this scheme with an anti-poaching plan, to create the **International-Russian Siberian Tiger Sanctuary**. Two inextricably linked obstacles stand in the way: the powerful timber industry, which wants to harvest trees in the proposed protected area, and the lack of Russian Government funds to lease sufficient amounts of land to create the Sanctuary.

In September of 1995, one month after the national Tiger Decree was issued, Russia's tiger experts convened the National Tiger Strategy Forum in Moscow to examine the Hornocker habitat protection plan and other potential components of the decree. On November 2, 1995, the experts issued their final plan to save the tiger, which consists of:

- a new national tiger census (to be carried out in February 1996);
- a management plan for hoofed animals (tiger prey) inside tiger habitat;
- an expansion of protected habitat for tigers, leopards, and other endangered animals and plants;
- State Inspector status for specialized anti-poaching patrols;
- increased enforcement to combat illegal trading of endangered species;
- new ecological education programs;
- a review of court cases dealing with tiger/endangered species trading.

Budgets and schedules are being drawn up to implement these recommendations, and are being coordinated by the Tiger Sanctuary Commission, under the direction of the Ministry of Environment and the International Foundation of Science, Culture and Economics. Part of the proposed Sanctuary will include the Bikin Valley, ensuring traditional nature use for the Udege people and protection from commercial loggers. Pending funds, the Russians are ready to develop this comprehensive tiger and local community protection program, thereby creating the world's largest wildlife sanctuary.

D. Higgs



Conclusions and Recommendations

Contrary to conventional wisdom, the Siberian tiger can be revitalized as a secure, viable population if existing wildlife protection efforts in Primorski and Khabarovsk Territories are supported. Furthermore, the taiga forest, on which the tiger, other endangered wildlife, and local indigenous groups of Russia depend for their survival, can be preserved as a large, intact, integrated ecosystem. However, a sustainable future for the people and wildlife of the Russian Far East can only be secured if the Russian government, at the central and local levels, provides strong political support for the recent Tiger Decree, and if the international community commits to the necessary financial and technological aid to properly implement the decree's provisions. In order to achieve maximum, positive impact in the field, and to avoid redundant efforts, foreign assistance should be coordinated with the Siberian Tiger Sanctuary Commission, which is directed by the International Foundation of Science, Culture and Economics of Moscow and the Russian Ministry of Environment.

Specifically, the Russian government must:

- Provide political guarantees that logging will cease inside prime tiger habitat, as defined by the Russian National Tiger Strategy Forum in September, 1995;
- Provide State Inspector status to Operation Amba and other key anti-poaching patrols in the Far East;
- Investigate and improve the application of existing legal mechanisms designed to address violators of endangered species laws;
- Convene an official regional forum in the Far East to improve inter-agency coordination of the enforcement of endangered species laws, and to determine enforcement training assistance that could be provided by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) and foreign governments.

The international community must:

- Provide financial assistance to help fully implement the Tiger Decree as quickly as possible, especially the habitat protection and anti-poaching components;
- Provide radio equipment that will enable tiger protection patrols to communicate on the same frequency over vast distances in order to facilitate tiger/wildlife protection efforts;
- Provide wildlife enforcement training assistance in the Russian Far East which is tailored to the needs of anti-poaching patrols, customs officers, and other relevant personnel. Training assistance programs should be coordinated with the Siberian Tiger Sanctuary Commission (including the Ministry of Environment) and/or the Ministry of Environment branch offices in Vladivostok and Khabarovsk.

HOW TO HELP

Those who wish to support habitat protection, education, community development, and anti-poaching efforts in the Russian Far East can funnel financial or technological assistance to the field through the Siberian Tiger Support Coalition. They may also provide information on tiger trading to Interpol's Wildlife Crimes Division.

Siberian Tiger Support Coalition Members and other organizations which funnel support directly into the field:

Investigative Network, a division of the Global Security Network – P.O. Box 73214, T Street Station, Washington, D.C. 20009

David Shepherd Conservation Foundation – P.O. Box 123, Godalming, Surrey GU8 4IS, United Kingdom

Humane Society International – 2100 L Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20037

Tusk Force – 4 Spencer Court, 140-142 Wandsworth High Street, London SW18 4JJ, United Kingdom

I-Mei Foundation (California Chapter) – Tel: 909-883-7180/Fax: 909-883-7380

Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty Against Animals – Tel: (617) 541-5000

The Hornocker Wildlife Institute – P.O. Box 3246, Moscow, Idaho 83843 – 1908

Pacific Eastern Resources Center (David Gordon)– Tel: (415) 332-8200

ISAR – 1601 Connecticut Avenue, NW. Washington D.C. 20009

Direct contacts for Russian tiger protection programs:

International Foundation of Science, Culture and Economics – Tel/Fax: 7-095-230-2907

Ministry of Environment Office of Management Authority – Tel: 7-095-124-5301

Operation Amba – Tel: 7-4232-228-065/Fax: 7-4232-268-574

Zov Taigi – Tel: 7-4232-320-666

Information about the sale of tigers and their parts should be forwarded to Interpol's main Wildlife Crimes Division office or local Interpol and Wildlife Enforcement offices:

Hong Kong

Chi Sun Cheung
Agriculture and Fisheries
Canton Road
Government Offices
12 Floor
Kowloon
Hong Kong
Tel: 852-2733-2521
Fax: 852-2317-0482

China

Lu Xiaoping
Ministry of Forestry
18, Hepingli East St.
Beijing 100714
Peoples Republic of China
Tel \ fax: 86-1-421-4180

USA

Carl Mainen
US Fish and Wildlife Service
Washington Office
PO Box 3247
Arlington Virginia 22203 – 3247
Tel: (703) 358-1949
Fax: (703) 358-2271

Russia

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Ministry of Environment
8 Kedrovaya Street
Metro Akademichkaya
Tel: 7-095-124-5301

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Forestry Research Inst.
207 Cheongryangri 2 – dong
Dongdaemun-Ku, Seoul
Republic of Korea
Tel: 82-2-961-2593
Fax: 82-2-961-5101

Japan

Miwako Aihara
Office of Ecosystem Conservation
Fisheries Agency
1-2-1 Kasumigaseki/100
Chiyoda-Ku, Tokyo
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Tel: 03-3502-0736
Fax: 03-3595-1426

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The Siberian Tiger Support Coalition is led by:

Investigative Network
David Shepherd Conservation Foundation (UK)
I-Mei Foundation (Taiwan)

Humane Society International
Tusk Force (UK)
Massachusetts Society For the Prevention of Cruelty
Against Animals

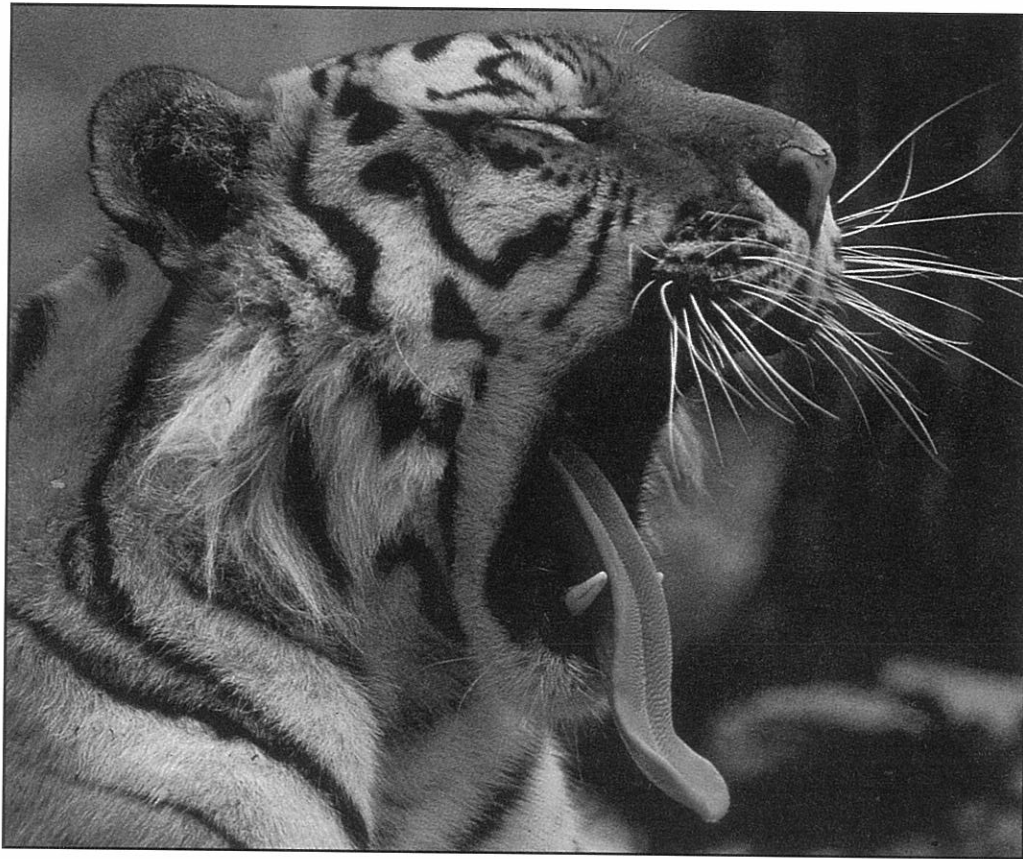
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**The Investigative Network is a division of the Global Security Network, Inc.,
a non-profit, environmental security and human rights research organization.**



A sampling of Asian-manufactured tiger bone products—the number one cause of the tiger's decline.



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