### Amur tiger conservation in Russia in 2016

Project plan

**By Phoenix Fund**

Address Office 409, 2 Petra Velikogo St.

 Vladivostok, Russia 690091

Tel +7 (4232) 205048
Fax +7 (4232) 205048
Email office@fundphoenix.org
Website [www.fundphoenix.org](http://www.fundphoenix.org)

The project will be implemented in Primorsky krai, also known as Primorye, a federal subject of Russia, that is home to Amur tigers (*Panthera tigris altaica*) included as endangered species in IUCN Red List. The insatiable demand for tiger parts is the major driving force behind poaching, but the erosion of habitats, increasing human-tiger conflicts and illegal hunting of tiger prey are all having a terrible impact. This project is aimed at conservation of rare and endangered Amur tiger, its habitat and prey through environmental law enforcement efforts and education and outreach activities. The objectives of the project are: 1) to improve law enforcement efforts within five protected areas and 2) to increase awareness of local people about the importance of tiger conservation. Specifically, the Phoenix Fund intends: to implement SMART law-enforcement monitoring program in five protected areas, namely the Land of the Leopard National Park, Sikhote Alin Nature Reserve, Ussuriisky Nature Reserves,and United Directorate of Lazovsky Nature Reserve and Zov Tigra National Park; to support ‘Pervotsvet’eco-centre in Pozharsky district of Primorye; and organize Tiger Day Festival in Luchegorsk town, Pozharsky district.

Conservation need

Russia is a success story in the history of wild tiger conservation. In 1947, with few Amur tigers left, Russia became the first country to ban the hunting of tigers. It succeeded in halting the long-lasting decline in numbers of tigers and stabilizing the population. While numbers plummeted almost everywhere else across Asia, the Russian population showed a defiantly opposite trend. A survey in 2005 showed that the population recovered to 430-500 individuals, up from a mere 20-30 individuals in the 1940s. In 2008, Amur tiger numbers experienced a decline again. In February 2015, the simultaneous count of Amur tigers and Amur leopards was organized by the Russian Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and affiliated agencies. According to the count-2015, about 523-540 Amur tigers roam today in RFE, including 417-425 animals in Primorsky krai,100-109 in Khabarovsky krai, four in Jewish Autonomous Oblast and two in Amurskaya Oblast. Despite sustained conservation efforts over recent years and encouraging preliminary results of the recent count, these big cats still remain at risk due to poaching, logging, forest fires, and prey depletion. Every year the wild populations of Amur tigers and Amur leopards officially loss up to five individuals due to poaching and other human activities. And this year was no exception. In 2015, at least eight Amur tigers have reportedly died, most of them due to illegal hunting.

Russian protected areas contain approximately 70 tigers (2% of the world’s tiger population). However protected areas as source sites deserve disproportionate attention, even in Russia where they represent a small proportion of tiger habitat. If we want to stop the decline in tiger numbers and to double the world’s tiger population, in accordance with the Global Tiger Recovery Program agreed to at the International Tiger Forum in St. Petersburg in 2010, protected areas are the places to start. Protection of these areas is a pragmatic and achievable goal for conservationists because these sites already: have breeding tigers; are of a size that is practical to effectively protect; have existing conservation infrastructure; have a legal mandate for protection; and have the potential to repopulate larger landscapes. Immediate and sustained efforts to reinforce and intensify protection and monitoring of these sites is critical and standards on monitoring need to be adopted range-wide.

Since 2010, Phoenix together with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and Zoological Society of London (ZSL) have been introducing MIST (law enforcement monitoring system) in four protected areas (PAs) of Primorsky krai, namely Kedrovaya Pad-Leopardovy, Zov Tigra, Lazovsky and Sikhote-Alin. The inspectors were taught to work with GPS units, collect and store anti-poaching data in a MIST database in order to let PA managers analyze the patrol efforts and results. After getting good results of work with MIST/SMART in 4 PAs, we decided to introduce MIST/SMART in the Ussuriisky Nature Reserve (NR), and in 2014 we began teaching the staff how SMART can help them improve patrolling techniques and effectiveness of anti-poaching teams. In 2014, Lazovsky Nature Reserve and Zov Tigra National Park were amalgamated to become one institution renamed United Directorate of Federal Nature Reserves and National Parks. Luckily, the unification had no negative impact on work with SMART on both territories. In 2015, there was a trial period of work with SMART in Protected Priamurye (Khabarovsky krai). Implementation of SMART in 5PAs has resulted in a substantial improvement of the protection. We would like to continue SMART project in 2016 in five PAs, namely Land of the Leopard National Park, United direction of Zov Tigra NP and Lazovsky NR, Ussuriisky NR, Sikhote-Alin NR, and Protected Priamurye. During All-Russian meeting of federal PA directors that took place in Vladivostok on October 4-9, 2015, the participants saw visible and stable results in improving of anti-poaching efforts and adopted a resolution recommending broader application of SMART at federal-level protected areas.

Besides anti-poaching efforts, we also would support educational activities in Primorye. The Phoenix Fund recognizes that it is the education of the community that may ensure the survival of the tiger in the long-term. Consequently, the Phoenix Fund plans an intensive tiger education and outreach program comprising in-school and outdoor activities, support for educators and eco-centres, Tiger Day Festivals, etc.

We strongly believe that combined efforts of anti-poaching work and continuous education and outreach activities will ensure protection of the Amur tiger population, its prey and habitat.

**Objectives**

The objectives of the project are:

1. to improve law enforcement efforts within five protected areas;
2. to increase awareness of local people about the importance of tiger conservation.

**Methodology**

Phoenix offers a conservation program, which combines anti-poaching efforts and environmental education and outreach activities.

In the course of the project, Phoenix will support regular anti-poaching and habitat protection patrols with SMART. Many inspectors in PAs lack motivation due to extremely low salaries and will not work with SMART without incentives. However, some of them are interested in improving protection, but hesitant to use new procedures that substantially increase the workload of inspectors. We agreed with the protected area management to finance an incentive system that will be based on quality of SMART work, patrol efforts and patrol results. The payment of incentives will be a payment of gratitude by the employer to the employee in recognition of a job well done.

The main anti-poaching methods will be as follows:

• foot, vehicle, and snowmobile patrols;

• tracking hunters following their tracks left in the snow;

• gathering all tips and observations concerning poaching cases or other violations within the protected areas.

To improve quality of biodiversity conservation and reduce poaching a number of anti-poaching patrols and patrol days will be increased. It will be possible thanks to joint patrols by anti-poaching teams and police and traffic officers who are empowered to stop and check vehicles on roads running through or near the boundaries of the PAs. These activities closely relate to a Strategy for Conservation of the Amur Tiger in Russia (III.8. Prevention and Stopping of Poaching; III.9 Suppression of Sales of Poached Products).

The patrols will directly contribute to conservation of the Amur tiger population and its habitat. During regular patrols the inspectors will prevent or reveal any wildlife crimes in the protected area and adjacent territories, take fire preventive measures and extinguish forest fires, etc. The inspectors will collect wildlife and poaching data (remnants of killed animals, bloodstains etc), as well as anti-poaching data (as citations filed, poachers arrested, and shotguns confiscated, etc). Such activity will let the protected areas’ management analyze their protection efforts and improve them if necessary. Up to date, due to inadequacy of collecting anti-poaching data poachers get away with fines, without being prosecuted. The more data collection of anti-poaching activities is improved, the more violators will end up behind bars. During the project there will be a series of feedback meetings organized in order to analyse and discuss the results of work with SMART.

Our team of three experienced educators will deliver interactive lessons in local schools and kindergartens of Northern Primorye, namely Pozharsky district to educate children about sustainable livelihood, pollution prevention, climate change, etc., and will conduct outreach activities aimed at raising awareness and knowledge about environment, forest and wildlife conservation. The classes will be mostly devoted to the Amur tiger and include videos, slide presentations, lectures, games, quizzes and contests. Our target audience will be mostly made up of children ranging in age between 5 and 17 and their parents.

**Evaluation**

Phoenix will evaluate the success of the project by examining the following:

* Number of anti-poaching patrols and revealed violations in five PAs;
* Number of Amur tigers and other wildlife in five PAs;
* Number of revealed violations;

The success of anti-poaching activities will be evaluated by efforts of patrolling teams (hours on patrol/month, # kilometres on foot patrols, and #kilometres covered during vehicle patrols) and anti-poaching results (number of citations, number of revealed violations, and rates of citations as an indicator of poaching pressure). These all ultimately contribute to increase in tiger population. Use of SMART software will allow us to compare the both efforts and results at the beginning of the project and the end to determine if there have been improvements.

• Number of eco-classes held at schools in Pozharsky district of Primorye;

• Number of eco-classes carried out at the eco-centre in Luchegorsk town;

• Level of children’s knowledge and awareness of tiger conservation issue.

In order to assess the impact of educational activities, two opinion polls will be carried out before the start of and in the end of the project. In January and December 2016 we will hold a survey to evaluate the change in children’s knowledge, attitude and skills on Amur tiger issue.

**Anticipated Benefits and Outputs**

* Stable or increased number of tigers and their prey species in five PAs;
* Increased capacity and anti-poaching efficiency of anti-poaching units in five PAs;
* Increased level of children’s knowledge on the Amur tiger and awareness of the plight of endangered species.
* About 3,200-3,500 people reached by the educators;
* About 10 000 people participated in Tiger Day celebration.