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7. For better Ecoregion
Mongolian antelope is the most affected migratory species to poaching. They are grazing in flocks which makes easy to hunt them. If the situation goes at the same pace, the Mongolian antelope population will be in danger of extinction. Therefore, the protection of antelopes is becoming a priority. With this aim in a mind, in November 2015, WWF-Mongolia initiated a campaign to protect Mongolian antelope in the eastern part of the country. During the campaign, different and important participants attended including the government officials of relevant soums, community organizations, specialists from The Nature Conservancy and Khar Yamaat Natural Reserve Administration. The objectives of the campaign were to determine autumn and winter migration route of the animal; to prevent and intercept possible dangers along predefined migration route; to organize patrolling; to raise awareness among local community on protection of antelope and to change their attitudes.

During the campaign, many workshops were organized in each participating soums specially focusing on the raising awareness of the importance of protection and conservation of animal species. Organizers especially noted that active participation of school children. Besides, children from eco-clubs provided interesting discussions about Mongolian antelope promoting the importance of wildlife conservation.

The campaign was followed by cultural performances. The performances including dancing, reading poems and singing songs about Mongolian antelope facilitated the transfer of information on the value of Mongolian antelope to citizens who also received information board on posters.

During this event some citizens publicly and voluntarily took a solemn oath to stop eating antelope meat. “Such action was an initial step to cut misbehaviour of eating antelope meat and provide good message in a positive way”, noted organizers.
Workshops and discussions is one thing, but it is important to implement suggestions and initiatives raised during them. On what, each soums established a task force for managing campaign. These task forces are responsible for integrating the initiatives resulting from discussions into a work plan and actively implement them within a month in respective soums. Citizens acknowledged a campaign on antelope protection and suggested to continuously implement similar activities in order to reach the goal. Moreover, they emphasized the necessity to find out alternative resources for livelihood, giving that for most of the people, poaching is the main source of income.

A conference approved Mongolian initiative to increase protection of the great bustard

The Eleventh Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS COP11) held in Quito, Ecuador. The Mongolian initiative to increase protection level of the great bustard which listed in Appendix II of the Convention through including it into Appendix I was approved at the conference. Approximately 2000 individuals of this bird species are remaining in the regions of Eastern Asia, particularly in Russia, the Republic of China and Mongolia, whereas 300 individuals live in Central Asia. The reproduction process of this species is quite long. For instance, a female bird will take 10 years to breed. Mongolia was nominated and selected as a member of Standing Committee for the implementation of the Convention; moreover Mongolia was designated as deputy chairman for the next 3 years.

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species was adopted on 1st of November, 1983. Mongolia ratified the convention in 1999. Recently 120 countries have joined the convention.
This year saw a record number of entrants to BBC Wildlife Magazine’s Camera-Trap Photo of the Year competition. In five years it has grown into the world’s most prestigious recognition of the role that new technology plays in our understanding of the natural world. Not less than 877 images made the final cut and among them were an Amur leopard discovered outside its known range in China.

After much deliberation, the judges reached a unanimous decision in awarding the £3,000 prize to BBC Overall Research Winner: the image of an Iranian cheetah. The striking image of a black rhino in Zambia was finally named BBC Overall Photography Winner.

2. United for Conservation effectiveness

For the first time Bastak (Russia) and Hunhe (China) Nature Reserves will work in accordance with the joint work plan that was agreed upon during the seminar conducted in Birobidzhan with the support of WWF and was dedicated to the conservation of freshwater biodiversity of the Amur River basin. Adoption of the joint work plan for 2015 was the main result of the meeting. The seminar participants shared the positive effect of the transboundary cooperation between Russia and Chinese protected areas. They worked out recommendations on conservation of rare flora and fauna species of the Amur River basin for both nature reserves, discussed a prompt information exchange on the status of Oriental stork, Red-crowned and White-napped cranes; and the opportunity on holding joint scientific field expeditions.
3. You said Big Cats?

The Tigers Alive Initiative (TAI) launches a pilot project in Russia

The Tigers Alive Initiative (TAI) is WWF’s global tiger program, established to drive forward the global goal to double wild tigers by 2022 - Tx2. The Tx2 goal was agreed by all tiger governments in 2010, at the Tiger Summit in St Petersburg, and is the most ambitious and visionary species conservation goal ever set. In 2013 TAI launched certification of tiger habitats. Since 21 to 31 October the experts of TAI from India and Malaysia came to Primorye to discuss the possibility of launching CA|TS in Russia.

Sikhote-Alin Nature Reserve was selected a first protected area in Russia to carry out CA|TS (Conservation Assured Tiger Standards) pilot of WWF Tigers Alive Initiative. “The Reserve is one of the largest tiger reserves in Russia. For almost 80 years, tiger conservation activities and science projects are carried out here. About 20-22 tigers are recorded on the protected area, and it is one of the largest tiger groups found in protected areas of the Russian Far East. Therefore it’s logical that our reserve was selected by the experts of Tiger Alive Initiative for a pilot project in Russia. It is assumed that during the certification all the strengths and weaknesses of tiger conservation in the reserve will be identified. In the future, we will try to eliminate all week points”- said Dmitry Gorshkov, director of the Sikhote-Alin Nature Reserve. According to Khalid Pasha, CA|TS coordinator of WWF Tigers Alive Initiative, a visitor to the RFE, “Sikhote-Alin Nature Reserve is an ideal site to carry out CA|TS pilot, as this has all the prospective elements that would be needed for a CA|TS model site”.

Big Cats and their prey gained more square Km

Thanks to the cooperation between WWF and NR administration, another natural reserve has joined the circle of secure zones for tigers and leopards. Dongfanghong NR has not only been expanded (from 46k ha to 200k ha) but it has also been upgraded to the national level. This is a great achievement for our conservation goal knowing that this NR is a transboundary corridor between China and Russia.

In partnership with Huanan Forestry Bureau of Heilongjiang Province, Qixinglazi NR (55,740 ha), which is a key corridor between Wandashan and Changbaishan landscapes, also received the status of a National Amur Tiger Nature Reserve which will result in more governmental support and protection.

Simultaneous full range Amur tiger survey launched in Russia

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology of the Russian Federation held a meeting in Vladivostok to officially announce the start of the simultaneous full range Amur tiger survey. The simultaneous tiger census spanning on 2 weeks (1-15 February 2015) will cover over 150 000 square kilometers of tiger habitats in the Russian Far East and will be organized by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology of the Russian Federation with the support of ANO “Amur Tiger Center”, WWF Russia and the Russian Academy of Sciences. Around 1500 transects were laid to survey this territory and measure tiger tracks. About 2000 field workers will participate in the census, among which are representatives of federal and regional protected areas, governmental supervision structures, professional game biologists and experienced hunters. Overall supervision of the procedure will be carried out by the Pacific Institute of Geography of the Russian Academy of Sciences.
Training of rangers is one of the key for successful tiger/leopard survey and protection.

Primorsky and Khabarovsky provinces are preparing for the Amur tiger full range survey, which will take place in winter 2014/2015. The survey is organized and conducted by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology of the Russian Federation, its subordinate bodies – nature reserves and national parks, the Administration of Primorsky and Khabarovsky provinces with the support of ANO “Amur Tiger”, WWF Russia and the Russian Academy of Sciences. Therefore, the survey coordinators of WWF Russia and the Land of the Leopard National Park conducted training for rangers of the national park who will participate in the Amur tiger and Amur leopard census. “The census quality and results depend on the people who carry out the survey. Therefore, one of the tasks at this stage is the training of qualified rangers.” Pavel Fomenko, Species program coordinator of WWF Russia Amur Branch

15 rangers of the national park took part in the field training. Southwestern Primorye is the only part of Russia, which is home to the two rare cat subspecies - the Amur tiger and the Amur leopard. Therefore, during the survey-2015 both tiger and leopard will be counted in the Land of the Leopard National Park. The field workers will be couched to recognize the prints of different forest animal species with the help of plaster molds modeled after tiger, lynx, leopard, and wolf tracks. These new demonstration tools will be first tested during this training.
In November 2014, WWF (in partnership with Feline Research Center) organized a SMART’s rangers training in Dongning. 33 rangers from 15 forestry bureaus were trained for 3 days (2 days theoretical and 1 day practical) in prey reintroduction, feeding, survey techniques, anti-poaching and SMART patrol, footprint tracking and monitoring, etc

EXNESS has joined the ranks of WWF’s partners. The group of companies decided to support WWF’s projects on restoration of rare species including the Amur tiger. EXNESS has invested in the perfection of the Sikhote-Alin Nature Reserve infrastructure. The Reserve’s territory is home for the Amur tiger. With allocated funds WWF will clear forest trails to make patrolling easier and will construct four winter huts where the Reserve inspectors and scientists can stay during their field work.

With the winter coming along its harsh, WWF and forestry bureaus carried out tiger/leopard prey feeding activity in Wangqing and Suiyang. In order to ensure the survival of the ungulates throughout winter this activity will be sustain till spring.
A new tiger, nicknamed Stubborn, has been given a home in the “Utyos” Wildlife Rehabilitation Center. WWF Russia provided financial support for the recovery and rehabilitation of the conflict tiger brought to Utyos Rehabilitation Center in Khabarovsky Province on November 14. The animal live captured near the town of Vyazemskoye was exhausted and needed help.

WWF has provided funds for the treatment and temporary maintenance of the wild cat. To monitor his condition a special enclosure is already equipped with video surveillance system donated by Bosch. With the help of the rehabilitation centre, the tiger has recovered and is getting ready to be radio-collared and released in the neighborhood of the Botchinsky Nature Reserve.

Tigers released in the wild

WWF RFE together with WWF NEC monitors the movements of tigers released by Putin last spring. Tiger Kuzya swam over Amur River in Khingan Gorge on October 8 and came back to Russia on December 6. He visited Taipingou NR in Heilongjiang province and now lives in Dichun forest refuge, confirming the importance of WWF work in establishment of Pompeevsky NP and Sino-Russian transboundary reserve there. Tiger Ustin was caught by Conflict group in January. The tigress Ilona moved along the border with China but preferred not to cross the Amur River and stayed in Khingansky NR.
Suspects in the illegal trafficking of tiger parts were detained (with three bags of bones of different shapes and sizes) by the special security services of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs that answer for combating the illegal exploitation of animals listed in the Red Data Book of the Russian Federation. After a special examination carried out by WWF-Russia Amur branch and the “Amur Tiger” Center experts, it was confirmed that a big volume of bones uncovered by the Primorsky Province police belonged to the Amur tigers. In late December the court announced its verdict – 180 hours of compulsory labour.

Another criminal was sentenced in December to 160 hours of compulsory labour for purchasing and storage of the Amur tiger bones.

Another criminal case is being processed by the court in Khabarovsk against a criminal who stored and sold a tiger skin. In 2013, the Government of the Russian Federation significantly toughened the punishment for illegal hunting and, even more importantly, for trade in rare species, as WWF insisted upon. Article 258.1 was appended to the Criminal Code of Russian Federation and criminalizes not only illegal taking of but also the purchase, storage, transport, transfer and sale of highly valuable wild animals and marine living resources, as well as their parts and products, protected by the Russian Federation and/or by international agreements with Russian Federation. These acts are punished by up to 7 years of imprisonment and up to 2 million rubles fine.
Protection regime and management plan for Khar Yamaat Natura Reserve is approved

WWF-Mongolia is now in charge of managing Khar Yamaat Natural Reserve (NR) in its conservation and protection administration, according to the agreement signed between the Ministry of Environment and Green Development (MEGD), Khentii and Sukhbaatar aimag government. The results of nature conservation highly depend on long and short term goals defined by the protected areas’ administration. The first management plan for Khar Yamaat NR developed in 2005 during the project implementation; however it was never approved and the implementation was insufficient. Therefore, the management plan was newly elaborated and discussed by citizen and citizens’ representative khural of Bayan ovoo soum, Khentii aimag and Tumentsogt soum, Sukhbaatar aimag. Consequently, in November 2014 Citizens’ representative Khurals of Khentii and Sukhbaatar aimags approved the management plan and adopted its protection regime.

The management plan which will be implemented during 2014-2018 aims to protect and conserve ecosystems, rare and endangered species of flora and fauna, and cultural heritages of Khar Yamaat Natural reserve through implementing 75 activities under the 12 objectives included into the 6 strategies. The aim of the protection regime is to manage activities on sustainable natural resource use and the restoration of natural resource through participatory approach involving protected area administration, central and local governments, administrative organizations, communities and general public.

WWF and Unified Energetic System will cooperatively protect Oriental stork

The Federal Networking Company of the Unified Energetic System (UES) and WWF Russia summarized results of the first year cooperation and shape plans for the nearest future at the meeting held on December 23. Programs on Oriental stork conservation and development of protected areas in the Russian Far East are among the priorities of the partnership.

Over the recent years the eastern branch of UES erected protective constructions that avert bird death on power lines, and fixed over 1000 artificial platforms for nesting on power line poles in the Amur and Zeya Rivers basins. As a result, no cases of the Oriental stork death on power lines were registered in Amurskaya, Primorsky and Khabarovsky Provinces.
A community organization established in Khar Yamaat natural reserve

Local community’s cooperative activities are important factors to effectively manage nature protection functioning. For this purpose, a meeting to set up a local community organization was held in Khar Yamaat Natural Reserve (NR) on October 22-31, 2014. A total of 73 participants attended the meeting and discussed to set up a community organization. During the meeting, the officers of the Khar Yamaat NR gave presentations to provide a basic understanding on the benefits and consequences of the Natural Reserve Management based on the local community involvement. As a result, four community organizations were established; three of them consists of individuals living in the Khar Yamaat NR, and one consisting of households settling in frontiers of the NR. After the meeting, the founders discussed their work plan which was approved immediately. After the meeting, the founders discussed their work plan and approved it immediately. They stated their priorities as to protect streams and springs cooperatively, do remediation and set up a shared fund. In addition, they submitted an official request to support establishment of the community organization with official decision to the Bag’s citizens khural (meeting).

The Year of Amur ends but the work goes on

The Year of Amur that united governmental structures, scientific bodies and public organizations working in five regions of the Amur River basin was full of different actions and activities attracting people’s attention towards the wise use of the great river resources and understanding the role of humans in Amur conservation. Among the most significant events were the public environmental impact assessment of the Scheme for Integrated Use and Protection of Water Objects that prescribes the main rules of use of the Amur River water resources received a positive conclusion of the state environmental impact assessment. The Action Plan for conservation of freshwater and floodplain ecosystem of the Amur Ecoregion envisioning activities till 2020 was adopted by 25 local environmental NGOs.
Results of taimen survey will be available in the first quarter of 2015

An optimal conservation method for a wildlife species is defined based on good surveys. In this line, a survey of Taimen and its movement, migration, population, and distribution was started in 2013. Exactly a year ago from now, 16 taimen individuals were put with satellite image transmitters and 24 stations to receive signals were placed on Onon and Balj Rivers. The survey was done in Onon and Balj Rivers jointly by specialists and researchers of WWF Mongolia, Onon-Balj National Park Administration, Nature Conservation-Helmholtz and Environmental Research Institute in Germany, and members of Fishers’ Club (Onon River).

In September, 2014, the stations were put down. For now, the processing and the analysis of the collected data are ongoing. The researchers and specialists report that the survey results will be available in the first quarter of 2015.

Conservation action plan finalized

With the support of WWF Amur branch the Amur NGOs Coalition finalized the detailed Conservation Action Plan for the freshwater ecosystem of the Amur River basin covering 2014-2020. The report was presented at the Donor’s meeting in New York where PERC and Trust for Mutual Understanding collected 16 leading USA charity foundations. Margaret A. Cargill Foundation indicated their preliminary interest for a possible cooperation.
When the belt is green

Fisher’s club members are happy with what they have done

Support and input of fishers’ club members is vital for combating with illegal fishing and hunting. A retreat to discuss about annual performances was organized in Dadal soum on October 13-14, 2014. This event was one of the capacity building activities for the locals.

The retreat was successfully organized with supports of the WWF Mongolia, Onon Balj National Park Administration, and “Nomads Journeys” LLC.

During this event, the participants-fishers’ club members reported their annual work performances and shared their achievements and weaknesses. They reported “public awareness activities (six) on Taimen and its value, role, and conservation were organized for local communities with support of WWF Mongolia specialists. They see that this type of work is useful. Local school children have known a lot about taimen and its conservation. The most important thing is that local residents have become supportive to us. We think this is a big success. WWF Mongolia annually supports us with funding for patrolling. As a result, illegal fishing has declined. It is also a result of improved patrolling”. Following their presentations, the fisher’s club members discussed and agreed on their work plans for 2015 as proposed to do more in the coming year.
5. Walking through evergreen Forest

Track of a snowmobile helped to reveal illegal logging in Khabarovsky Province

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Khabarovsky Province has formed a working group on fighting the illegal forestry activities. Three WWF forest officers were invited to be a part of it. The group conducted several raids as part of the LES-2014 operation (Forest-2014). 12 illegal logging cases were identified, 14 persons detained, 6 units of machinery confiscated with the total financial loss estimated at 750K Euro.

December raids in the southern Khabarovsky Province jointly organized by the Regional office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Provincial Forest Department, and WWF Russia also bring “good” results. Two tractors, timber of oak and ash were confiscated. 45 cubic meters of illegal timber caused about 152K Euro in damages. Also, 517 illegally harvested firs were found waiting to be transported. The damage was estimated at about 30K Euro. Investigation is being carried out.

Webinar for responsible forest business

On November 14 WWF experts Brian Milakovsky and Linda Walker (GFTN North America) gave a webinar “Wood Sourcing and the Russian Far East: Recommendations for Responsible Businesses”, co-hosted with the National Wood Flooring Association (USA, Canada). The webinar was attended by representatives of 30 US companies that import hardwood flooring from China. Milakovsky and Walker explained the illegality risks associated with valuable hardwoods from the Russian Far East, and steps importers can take to ensure that their supply chains do not contain illegal materials. Emphasis was placed on the availability of legally sourced Russian hardwoods, which can be sourced with limited risk via concrete and diligence practices.
6. Let Economy talks Environment!

On 23-24 October, VIII International Forum “Nature without borders” took place in Vladivostok. This year the Forum focuses on the interaction between business and environmentalists when implementing infrastructure projects. The high level meeting gave a chance to discuss the ways for the possible integration of sustainable forestry issues into the economic and infrastructure development agenda. At the Forum WWF Russia promoted the concept of sustainable use of protective forests and Korean pine stands. Most important WWF requirements towards sustainable use of tiger habitats were incorporated into the Forum Resolution.

7. For better Ecoregion

My hope for the next two months is to witness an effective decrease in poaching cases. Chinese New Year is coming and from previous records it has been noticed that there is poaching boom during this period. I wish that wildlife can happily and safely spend the New Year in their habitats.

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Key species: Tiger, Leopard and Oriental Stork

Migratory species: Mongolian gazelle, Taimen

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