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## *To catch a poacher*

### **Building Capacity in Protected Area Wildlife Law Enforcement**

**29<sup>th</sup> November, Terney, Russian Far East**

At the end of last month, a one day training workshop took place at Sikhote-Alin State Nature Biosphere Reserve in Primorski Krai (Russian Far East), to train inspectors in judicial procedure. The training will hopefully increase the rate of successful prosecutions that can be made against poachers who are apprehended/arrested inside the protected area. The training forms part of a collaboration between four State Nature Reserves/National Parks containing important tiger habitat - Lazovsky, Kedrovaya Pad, Sikhote-Alin and Zov Tigra - the Wildlife Conservation Society, United States Agency for International Development, Phoenix Fund and Zoological Society of London. The goal of this multi-national collaboration is to build capacity with protected area officials to combat poaching of the Amur tiger and to restore the population of this endangered species. Over the course of the year, similar trainings have been held for staff at the protected areas in the implementation of a MIST (Management Information System) based approach to anti-poaching patrols. This is based on GIS technology and provides technical and strategic input to enhance patrol effectiveness.

Being a wildlife inspector at Sikhote-Alin Zapovednik, the largest protected area in the Russian Far East, is no easy task. His primary role is to protect the reserve from illegal intrusions and illegal harvest of wildlife, timber, and non-timber products. The work is physically very demanding. Regular patrols on foot must be made across hilly, forested terrain in all weathers. In winter, temperatures fall as low as -30 C and snow can be over a meter deep.

It can also be dangerous work. Sikhote-Alin is home to the brown bear, Asiatic black bear and Amur Tiger. If they feel threatened, these animals may attack and seriously injure or

even kill a human. However, when asked, the inspectors will tell you that it is the poachers that they worry about the most. Despite the fact that Sikhote Alin is a category 1 protected area, poachers still enter the reserve to illegally hunt deer and boar and if the opportunity presents, even a big cat. The poachers also set numerous traps for weasel and sable, highly prized for their luxurious pelts. And the poachers are almost always armed with rifles or shotguns.

So tracking, intercepting and arresting poachers is a risky business in itself, particularly as the Inspectors themselves may not always carry arms. More frustrating is the fact that many cases fail to reach court for prosecution due to administrative or procedural errors on the part of the protected area staff. This is usually some very minor detail, but significant enough to contravene the strict and complex regulations governing judicial process.

Igor Kolodin, WCS Field Coordinator for the USAID funded program 'Countering Poaching of Russia's Amur Tiger' explained: "We realized that we needed to address this gap in procedural knowledge in order for law enforcement to actually be more effective. There is no point in training up inspectors to do better patrolling and apprehend more poachers, if the Protected Area is unable to bring these cases to court. It becomes an issue of credibility".

After discussions with Director of Sikhote Alin, Anatoly Aleksavich Astafiev, WCS in collaboration with partner Phoenix Fund, organized a one-day training on Judicial Process which took place at the reserve on 29<sup>th</sup> November. The training was facilitated by a specialist in Environmental Law, who kindly gave his time pro-bono to travel to the reserve and to instruct the inspectors on the finer detail of judicial process and correct procedures.

Head of the Inspectors at Sikhote Alin, Ivan Vladimirovich Stupin was clear on his verdict: "This training was the first that we have conducted with an outside specialist and his expertise in environmental law and judicial process was of immense value. Made all the more interesting and relevant in that we discussed real life cases – prosecutions that had failed due to errors that had been made in processing the case – and from this, we now understand how we went wrong. I'm sure that the same mistakes will not be made again and we look forward to a much higher rate of successful prosecutions! "



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***Photo: Amur Tiger in his natural habitat in the Russian Far East***