

Amur Tigers



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Amur tigers were once found throughout the Russian Far East, northern China and the Korean peninsula. By the 1940s, hunting had driven the Amur tiger to the brink of extinction—with no more than 40 individuals remaining in the wild. The subspecies was saved when Russia became the first country in the world to grant the tiger full protection.

By the 1980s, the Amur tiger population had increased to around 500. Although poaching increased after the collapse of the Soviet Union, continued conservation and antipoaching efforts by many partners—including WWF—have helped keep the population stable at around 540 individuals.

The Amur tiger's habitat is now restricted to the Sikhote-Alin range in the Primorski and Khabarovsk provinces of the Russian Far East, small pockets in the border areas of China and possibly in North Korea. The high latitude means long winters and that the sun does not rise far above the horizon. Amur tigers have the largest home range of any tiger subspecies because they have to search over large areas to find food due to low prey densities. They represent the largest unfragmented tiger population in the world.

For the first time in 100 years, tiger numbers are growing

After a century of constant decline, the number of wild tigers is on the rise! According to the most recent data, at least 3,890 tigers now exist in the wild—up from an estimated 3,200 in 2010.

The vast tracts of tiger forests in the Amur-Heilong landscape are unique. This region comprises Korean pine and Mongolian oak, which provide an important habitat for the Amur tiger and its prey—as well as important economic resources for local communities.



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Amur tigers share their home with critically endangered Amur leopards. They also live among musk deer, Himalayan bears, Siberian brown bears, wolverines and Siberian jays.

Illegal logging operation, Russian Far East.



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ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE

The most immediate threat to the survival of Amur tigers is poaching to supply demand for tiger parts on the black market. Experts say a new breed of poacher stalks the tigers of the Russian Far East. Often having international ties, these modern poachers are better-armed, more organized and faster than their predecessors.

In 2010, suspected members of a Chinese poaching gang were captured by the Russian authorities after sneaking into a tiger sanctuary near the border. One of the suspects was dragging two big bags behind him as he stumbled through the snow. Inside the bags, said police, were two adult tiger skins and the bones of a tiger cub.

HABITAT LOSS

Tiger forests are at risk from logging, conversion to agriculture, urban expansion, road construction, mining, fires and inadequate law enforcement. Illegal logging is widespread throughout the Russian Far East and has a major impact on tiger populations because Korean pine and Mongolian oak provide critical food for the tigers' prey during the snow season.

At least 30% of all Russian forest exports are tainted by illegal logging. The United States is the top importer of hardwoods harvested in the Russian Far East and manufactured as furniture in China. In 2010, the Russian government listed Korean pine in Appendix III of CITES—requiring CITES permits for Korean pine timber exported from Russia and making it harder for the illegal timber trade to continue.

Dark Forest, an undercover Russian documentary investigating the timber mafia in Russia, puts a spotlight on the high-level corruption prevalent in the system. The film highlights the prevalence of illegal deforestation in protected areas and fake auctions in the Russian Far East. The documentary confirms several WWF reports that revealed that much of the logging in the region is illegal.

“Amur tigers are a success story in the making only if we can protect them from poaching and ensure their forest homes remain.”

Dr. Sybille Klenzendorf Senior Species Expert



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This native Udege antipoaching patrol member monitors the Bikin River basin forests that shelter tigers and Amur leopards in the Russian Far East. WWF’s Amur tiger conservation work focuses on the Amur-Heilong landscape, which straddles the border between northeastern China and the Russian Far East.

STRENGTHENING TRANSBOUNDARY PROTECTED AREAS

WWF helped develop a tiger econet, which is a network of protected areas that will become a connected habitat for tigers. We worked to help create a training and education center on the Russia-China border, where customs officials learn how to effectively control the movement of natural resources across the border.

MONITORING POPULATIONS

WWF supports monitoring efforts across the Amur-Heilong landscape in both Russia and China. In November 2011, a wild Amur tiger was captured on camera for the first time in an area of north eastern China—a key finding for the breeding and resettlement of the tiger population in the region.

PROTECTING HABITATS

WWF has been instrumental in securing tiger habitat in China and the Russian Far East. The protected habitat includes officially protected areas and conservation leases that secure a continuous landscape for tigers. We also help attain sustainable certification for millions of acres of the region's forests, especially to sustainably manage Korean pine and Mongolian oak trees.

INCREASING TIGER PREY

WWF works with hunting communities to protect tiger prey species such as deer and wild boar. Hunting quotas, vaccinations against disease and supplementary feeding during the harshest weeks of winter help ensure adequate prey populations so tigers do not go hungry. Model hunting estates have been created to increase the number of wild ungulates such as boar and deer. In China, we are piloting a program of deer release to restock prey populations. As a result, the number of tigers has increased substantially in these areas. The practice is now being widely replicated in other areas.

ADVOCATING FOR IMPROVED LEGISLATION

WWF advocates for stronger logging and hunting laws as well as their enforcement. To reduce illegal trade, we help train and equip staff in the protected areas, support antipoaching brigades and train customs agents across the region.

RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS

WWF strives to spread the word about the importance of a healthy Amur tiger population. We educate deer hunters on how to hunt responsibly and on how to behave if they encounter tigers in the wild. WWF also co-organizes annual Tiger Day celebrations in Vladivostok and in villages all across Primorski Province to get communities involved in tiger conservation.

