



Tigris Foundation

Amur leopard conservation update

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For more information: www.tigrisfoundation.nl

Amur leopards face extinction as construction begins on Russian pipeline !

On 31 December 2005 Russia's Prime Minister announced that Russia will build the world's longest oil pipeline (4100 kilometres) to transport oil from central Siberian fields to the Sea of Japan. The pipeline will be Russia's largest project up-to-date with total investments estimated at between 11 and 17 billion \$US. Environmentalists were shocked by the location chosen for the pipeline terminal: the Amur Bay in Russia's biodiversity "hotspot", Southwest Primorye, home to the remaining population of 30 Amur leopards. Selection of this route will almost certainly result in the extinction of the Amur leopard.



Building activities at sea and on land near designated oil terminal. The hills on the right are part of the leopard reserve Kedrovaya Pad.



The majority of environmentalists are not against the pipeline itself, but citizens, environmentalists and scientists strongly oppose the last 4% of its route and the planned terminal location at Perevoznaya on the Amur Bay in SW Primorye. From Perevoznaya the oil will be shipped in tankers to Japan and other oil importing nations such as the USA, South Korea and China.

SW Primorye is a small sliver of land bordering on China and North Korea. It is probably Russia's most biodiverse area and home to 30% of its endangered species. The proposed terminal location on the Amur Bay is the worst possible spot that could have been chosen in this region; as a result of this choice the pipeline will needlessly threaten three protected areas. One of these protected areas is Russia's only marine reserve, situated in the Amur Bay not far from the designated terminal location. Another protected area under threat is Kedrovaya Pad nature reserve, which was recently awarded the status of a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Founded in 1916 to protect Amur leopards and other rare fauna and flora species, it is Russia's oldest reserve. In addition to the pipeline and terminal other infrastructure will be built, including new railroads and roads, 18 enormous oil storage tanks and an oil refinery plant. This increases the negative environmental impact of the pipeline project through disturbance, pollution and land clearance.

The local Russian citizens have clearly spoken out against a terminal location on the Amur Bay during public hearings. However Transneft (the company building the pipeline) and the Russian authorities have ignored their opinions, despite the fact that other preferable locations are available, such as ports near Nakhodka. Near Nakhodka oil storage and transfer facilities already exist, whereas Perevoznaya on the Amur Bay is still pristine coastline without facilities. Nakhodka featured as an option for a terminal location in earlier plans, but after a strong lobby by the local governor and his administration the Amur Bay location was selected.

A terminal on the Amur Bay is not only undesirable from an environmental viewpoint, but also from social and economic perspectives. Oil spills will threaten the region's only commercial marine cultures as well as the most popular beaches where tens of thousands of tourists spend their summer holidays.

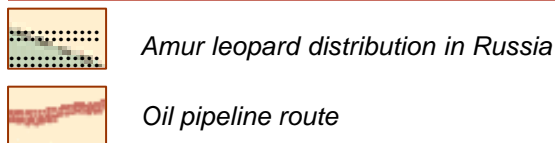
In spite of growing opposition, building of the terminal and other infrastructure on the Amur Bay has already started! Noisy drilling machines are collecting soil samples near Kedrovaya Pad along the designated pipeline and railroad tracks. Mud dredging along the coast at Perevoznaya in preparation for building the terminal has commenced.

The Amur Leopard and Tiger Alliance (ALTA) has initiated a campaign to convince the Russian government and oil transport company Transneft to change the pipeline's route. Participating ALTA partners include ALERTIS and Tigris Foundation from Holland, the Zoological Society of London, AMUR and the David Shepherd Wildlife Fund from the UK, and Moscow Zoo and Phoenix Fund from Russia. ALTA provides information to the media. Articles have appeared in Le Monde and the New York Times and radio broadcasts were aired in at least 5 countries. ALTA has contacted international organisations such as UNESCO and IUCN asking for their support. Phoenix Fund has initiated a petition to the Prime Minister of Japan and his cabinet requesting them to urge Russia to change the route (Japan has pledged to provide most of the investments needed to build the pipeline). The petition was co-signed by approximately 40 NGOs, including Greenpeace, WWF and IFAW and copies were sent to president Putin, Transneft and other Russian decision-makers.

Our campaign has only just started and we expect our efforts to be successful eventually. One reason for optimism is the fact that several high-ranked Russian officials recently indicated that other terminal locations are still being considered. We are also confident that foreign investors will only make funds available if a terminal location is selected that will do less damage to the environment.

PLEASE SUPPORT OUR CAMPAIGN TO STOP THE PIPELINE ROUTE !!!

We hope you will support our efforts to convince the Russian and Japanese decision-makers to change the pipeline's route. You can find their contact data and examples of protest letters on the Tigris Foundation website: www.tigrisfoundation.nl and also on www.amur-leopard.org. The second site, www.amur-leopard.org, is currently being developed into a resource for the zoo-linked Amur Leopard Conservation Support Programme and will have a password protected download area for these and other documents and pictures in the near future.



Leopard communication plan

Apart from the oil pipeline, the main threats to the survival of the Amur leopard continue to be poaching and forest fires. In 2002 and 2003 of a total of six leopard skins were confiscated and in 2004 the remains of two leopards that had been shot were found. This proves that poaching is still a major problem. An analysis of forest fires showed that on average 16% of SW Primorye burns annually, causing a slow but ongoing degradation of leopard habitat. Most fires are deliberately set by humans, so combatting both of these threats requires changes in human attitudes and behaviour.

Phoenix Fund currently implements a large number of education activities in SW Primorye that target school children. However, it will take many years before these efforts can contribute to a decline in poaching and fires, because the problems are mainly caused by adults. We therefore decided to initiate a number of additional activities aimed at adults living in small forest settlements in the leopard's range. Additional activities that we plan to implement in 2005 include:

- A media campaign in local newspapers and on local television
- An "Amur leopard media award" to stimulate the coverage of leopard conservation topics in local media
- Distribution of a brochure about Amur leopards, poaching and forest fires

We hope to include further activities such as placing a large road banner along the main road and setting up information boxes with flyers and conservation updates at bus-stops in the leopard range. However, these additional plans can only be implemented if we succeed in raising additional funds and developing effective working relations with the new administration in Khasan, the main district in the leopard's range.

Conservation Support Programme. The CD was followed by selected materials on the pipeline campaign, eg sample protest letters and text for web alerts, to enable zoos to use their websites, graphics, magazines and local press contacts to help generate the necessary publicity and political pressure to help get the terminal moved. Copies of all these materials have been shared with the PMP Coordinator in North America so that US zoos can also get involved. Fifteen European zoos are now formally registered for the campaign and we are sure that others are also making use of the materials; if your zoo is doing so, please register so that we know you are being active!

We have also set up a system of Award Certificates for zoos for success in fundraising, similar to the one we used in the EAZA Tiger Campaign, and will be kickstarting this by issuing backdated certificates to existing supporters. A full list will be circulated a little later this year - Helsinki Zoo may need a lorry to take theirs away on - and we are delighted to report that the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA) will be presenting UK zoos with their certificates during this year's annual meeting next month.

The Amur leopard website on www.amur-leopard.org, run by Nigel Hodgetts on a voluntary basis, is currently being updated and turned into the website of the Amur Leopard Conservation Support Programme. News items will be featured there in the future and there will be a download area for access to reports, information and pictures. The pictures will be protected by password because of copyright issues and will only be available to zoos that have registered and thus agreed to abide by the rules on picture use; so please register your zoo if you have not already done so!

We need your help to make our awareness programme a success!

We want local villagers to feel proud of 'their' leopard. This will help us to convince them that it is wrong to shoot a leopard. We believe we can instill a feeling of pride by showing that people from all over the world care about the Amur leopard and contribute to its conservation. For this purpose we need photographs and footage of Amur leopard conservation fundraisers and awareness activities in western countries, for instance in zoos. We will use the images for publication in local Russian newspapers and broadcasts on local television. It will be essential to show the '*Amur leopard conservation emblem*' on flags, T-shirts, etcetera. Seeing the familiar emblem being used in Europe or the USA will not fail to make a big impression on the local Russian villagers! It will make them realise that their leopard is special and worth protecting!

Please contact Sarah Christie of the Zoological Society of London (sarah.christie@zsl.org) if you can assist in this matter