

Emergency situation in Kedrovaya Pad Reserve!

On October 8, the oldest nature reserve of Primorski region had its 93rd anniversary. Unfortunately, there was no cause for celebration, because the reserve's work has been paralysed due to lack of funds as the result of a poorly executed reorganisation of the protected areas in the range of the Amur leopard.

On October 27, 2008 Prime Minister Vladimir Putin signed a decree creating Leopardovy Wildlife Refuge. This new wildlife refuge combines the territories of two refuges, Barsovy and Borisovkoe Plato, into one large refuge. The responsibility for managing Leopardovy Wildlife Refuge was transferred to Kedrovaya Pad Nature Reserve, which passed from the jurisdiction of the Far Eastern branch of the Russian Academy of Science to the Ministry of Natural Resources of Russia. The rationale for this reorganisation was to bring the three connecting protected areas (in which half of the remaining Amur leopards live) under one, improved management structure. In theory this was a very good idea, but as a result of poor execution, the reorganisation has created enormous problems and has now left both the Leopardovy Wildlife Refuge and the Kedrovaya Pad Nature Reserve without protection.

In June 2009, the bank accounts of Kedrovaya Pad Reserve were closed, and no state funds have since been transferred to the newly opened accounts and as a result the reserve's staff has not received salaries for five months! The reserve took the matter to court and registered complaints with various authorities. This led to complicated investigations and checks by these authorities, including the Federal Tax Agency, the local Prosecutor's office, the Employment Agency of the Primorski region and the President's representative office in Vladivostok. A number of high-ranking officials, such as a senator of the Primorski region, the chairman of the Far Eastern branch of the Russian Academy of Science, the chairman of local branch of the ruling political party "Edinaya Rossiya" (United Russia) and many others expressed their indignation at the state of affairs, but that did not accelerate the resolution of the bureaucratic hold-up. The reserve's director sent official letters to the Ministry of Natural Resources, Rosprirodnadzor (Federal Natural Resources Supervising Agency) and the local Khasan district administration. None of these actions have produced concrete results. At present, there are no funds left and the director has started to pay for essential necessities (telephone, postage, court fees, etc.) with his own personal money.

Currently 24 of the reserve's 32 employees are on a forced vacation because of the salary delays. Even staff members that volunteered to continue their work without a salary cannot do so because there are not even funds to pay for fuel that is needed for patrols to protect the reserve and refuge against fires and poachers. This is especially alarming because the fire season has already started. On October 8, the first fire was observed in the south of Leopardovy Wildlife Refuge and the protected areas will suffer from dozens more fires until the first snow fall.

Phoenix, ZSL, IFAW, Tigris Foundations and individuals offered their help to the reserve, although the reserve's management believes that it is the Government's responsibility to provide at least funds for salaries and the most basic necessities.

On October 14, Phoenix Fund sent a letter to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin asking for him to take action in resolving this prolonged bureaucratic process.