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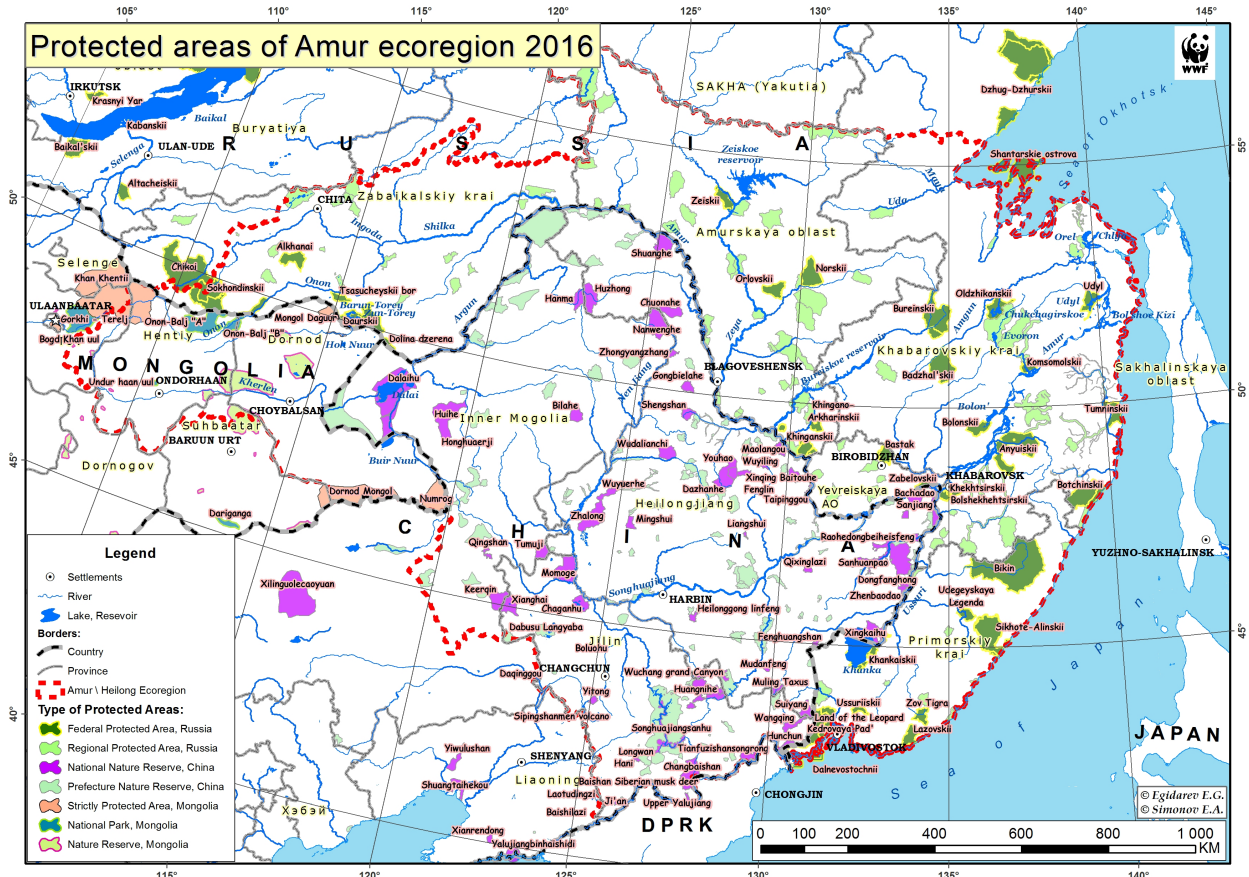


Amur Green Belt

Anna Barma
abarma@wwf.ru
891-472-82737

<http://amur-heilong.net/vicarr/>

Russia, China, Mongolia
Size: 246121793 ha and 2461217,93 sq/km



Participants in coordinating the ongoing transboundary cooperation:

National Government:

- State Forestry Administration in China
- Provincial Department of Forestry in China
- Green Development and Tourism (MEGDT) in Mongolia
- Ministry for Natural Resources in Russia
- Federal Service for Supervision of Natural Resource Usage in Russia, etc.

Local Government:

- Leaders (Vice-Governors) of 5 provinces in Amur ecoregion Russia;
- Regional departments for wildlife protection;
- Amur Basin Water Management Board;
- Directorates of the regional PAs in Russia;
- leaders of provincial wetland management authorities of Heilongjiang, Jilin and Inner Mongolia in China;
- Local Department of Forestry in China;
- Local government organizations (aimag and soum) in Mongolia;
- Research Institutes Russia, China and Mongolia

Protected area administration:

- Leaders National and Provincial protected area Russia, China and Mongolia

National NGOs:

- WWF Russia, WWF Mongolia, WWF China

Local NGOs: Organized into the Coalition of the Amur NGOs

- AmurSEU
- All-Russia Society of Nature Protection
- FarEastern Center for Development of Civic Initiatives & Social Partnership

Intergovernmental organizations:

- Wildlife and Hunting Management Department
- Directorate on Wildlife Protection and Protected Areas Management

Community-based Organizations:

- The Association of Indigenous Peoples of the Far East

Objectives: Amur Green Belt Program aims to create an ecological carcass of protected areas along Amur river that would sustain a stable and long-term existence of the biodiversity.

Values and importance: The Amur-Heilong River basin covers approximately 2 million km² in China, Russia and Mongolia. The basin supports 130 freshwater fishes, 95 percent of the world's nesting Oriental storks, 65 percent of nesting red-crowned cranes, 90 percent of nesting white-naped cranes, Siberian tiger, wild ginseng and three WWF Global

200 priority ecoregions. Many important biodiversity "hotspots" and ranges of endangered species populations are dissected by national borders. This is due to high biodiversity value of main rivercourses and floodplain wetlands, which make up 35000 kilometer stretch of national borders, as well as to peculiar history of local development and international relationships, which left areas adjacent to disputed borders less developed in comparison with inland parts. Development strategies and patterns of resource use are environmentally unsustainable in all three basin countries, and have led to rapid deterioration of ecosystems. At many locations ecosystems are also threatened by international development projects along rivers. The driving force of resource extraction in the Russian Far East (RFE) as a whole is trade with China and other Asian neighbors, and areas near the border have potential for even faster and unregulated development. The same holds true for Mongolia.

Aspects of transboundary cooperation:

- 1) Facilitate trans-boundary cooperation of key authorities on conservation among Russia, Mongolia and China;
- 2) Set up protected areas (PAs) and form as an integrated network to safeguard the ecosystem;
- 3) Promote preservation of rare species (namely amur tiger, Amur leopard, fishes and birds);
- 4) Promote the acknowledgement of nature capital of freshwater ecosystem related to agriculture, water infrastructures and land use planning by governmental stakeholders through research and lobbying.

Stage in the process: Green Belt Amur is one of WWF programs in the Amur-Heilong Ecoregion Complex (AHEC). WWF Russia, WWF China and WWF Mongolia has a joint plan of transboundary cooperation.

Official Protected Area Designation of the protected areas involved in this transboundary conservation initiative:

Protected areas of the Amur ecoregion

	National			Provincial and local			Total		
	Quantity	Area, thous. ha	%	Quantity	Area, thous. ha	%	Quantity	Area, thous. ha	%
China	67	4941	5.5	260	9322	10.3	327	14263	15.8
Mongolia	5	1644	8.7	4	812	4.3	9	2456	13.0
Russia	33	7305	5.7	626	7605	6.0	659	14910	11.7
Total Amur Basin	105	13890	5.6	890	17739	7.2	995	31629	12.8

International nominations for PAs and valuable natural territories in the Amur River basin

Country	Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar)	UNESCO Biosphere Reserves	World Heritage UNESCO	Important Bird Areas
China	11	5	0	60
Mongolia	3	2	0	7
Russia	6	4	1	14
Total Amur River Basin	20	11	1	81

The Catalyst: The understanding of the interdependence between biodiversity conservation and ecosystems management and preserving key ecosystem services.

History: The Amur Green Belt Program is a concept rather than a specific initiative. It is promoted by NGOs in the Amur-Heilong Basin including WWF, WCS, Amur Ecological Foundation, and Zov Taigi Nature Conservation Center. WWF has been actively working in the Amur-Heilong Ecoregion Complex starting at the Russian Far East in 1999. In 2006 the program was expanded to north-east of China and in 2007 to north-east of Mongolia. The concept of the Amur Green Belt was also discussed during the international meetings in Beijing, Moscow, Switzerland and was supported by the WWF Russia, WWF China and WWF Mongolia. In 2011, governments approved the Sino-Russian Strategy for development of bordering PA in Amur River Basin. Russia, China and Mongolia joined their efforts to create transboundary ecological network of PA, called “Amur Green Belt”. Its concept includes the development of the vast network of protected wetland and forest ecosystems with particular focus on bordering ecosystems. The project is developed on the foundation of the Action Plan for Conservation of Biodiversity of the Russian Far East Ecoregion supported by the leading NGOs. 28 June 2016 was signed on Memorandum of Cooperation between 16 Chinese and 12 Russian protected areas.

Barriers, challenges, obstacles, or constraints: An initiative coming from the grassroots level doesn’t have standard regulations and experience. Many of the projects are implemented for the first time and their implementation requires a lot of time.

The Governance and Management Structures

- **Cooperative relationship:** informal ad hoc cooperation
- **Legal basis for cooperation:** Countries of the Amur River Basin have signed a number of international conventions: Biodiversity Conservation Convention, Ramsar Convention, Wildlife Trade Convention (CITES). Russia and China, as well as China and Mongolia have signed bilateral cooperation Agreements on environment protection, such as Sino-Russian Strategy on establishment a Network of Transboundary Protected Areas in the Amur River Basin, as well as a series of separate agreements on certain areas and resource management. In particular, separate agreements on establishment of two international nature reserves: Dauria (Russia-China-Mongolia) and “Lake Khanka” (China-Russia).

- **Governance structure:** For the Russian Far East, the Amur Coordinating Committee coordinates the activities of state bodies and other partners and stakeholders. WWF-Russia is a part of this Committee together with the representatives of the five Russian regions of AHEC (Vice-Governors) and relevant federal structures. Within the Committee there is a Public Scientific Council – the structure which includes representatives from 25 NGOs from all regions of the Russian part of the Amur River basin. The work of WWF-Russia is based on the established links with partners in all regions. Under these agreements a plan of activities is created annually and is carried out jointly by WWF, government authorities and regional NGOs. WWF representatives are included in the advisory bodies at various government agencies.

In China, WWF CPO renews an MOU with the State Forestry Administration, P. R. China (SFA) every year and a cooperation logframe with SFA every three years. WWF CPO has already set up solid relationship with provincial wetland management authorities of Heilongjiang, Jilin and Inner Mongolia. Contact with river management authorities in NE China is not very strong, which needs to be further developed.

In Mongolia, the key stakeholders for activities planned will be local government authorities - decision makers, PA and River basin administrations, law enforcement agencies, community-based organizations, formal and informal education institutions, academia and media.

- **Cooperative management arrangement:** strategic plan

Results: Due to long-term efforts, the network of PA covers about 30% of nesting habitats of Oriental stork, 50% of White-naped crane and 70% of red-crowned crane. The Amur tiger habitats are protected on 24% of its range in Russia and 50% in China, while 70% of Far Eastern leopard range covers in both countries. Creation of PA network together with other protection measures was resulted in real conservation success: the number of Amur tiger is stable and has been 15% increasing since 2005 up to 540 animals, the last wild population of Far Eastern leopard stepped from extinction – from 30 cats in 2000 to 80 in 2015, we counted double more breeding pairs of Oriental stork on the permanent sample plots in Amur province. Moreover, the growing populations in Russia became the sources for restoration of tiger and leopard in North East China. During the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok (September 2015), the Russian Minister of Natural Resources emphasized the fruitful cooperation with China and proposed to spread program to the tiger and leopard habitats in DPRK.

The concept of the “Amur Green Belt” was approved by Amur Coordination Committee and incorporated into the Schemes of PA development in 5 provinces in Russia. It has been implemented by WWF offices in Russia, China and Mongolia with long-term financial support from donor’s community. On the first stage, the cooperation has been developed on the base of bilateral agreements between partnering protected areas, such as Khinganski (Russia) and Honghe (China), Bastak (Russia) and Bachadao (China),

Bolshekhkhcirskiy (Russia) and Sanjiang (China), Sokhondinski (Russia) and Onon-Balj (Mongolia). The collaboration between Khankaiskiy (Russia) and Xinkaihu (China) is based on the high level Sino-Russian Agreement on this transboundary nature reserve. But most successful is the Dauria International Protected Area (DIPA) which was founded at the junction of the borders between Russia, Mongolia and China in 1994 (Daursky, Tsasucheisky Bor and Dolina Dzerenov in Russia, Mongol Daguur national park in Mongolia and Dalai Lake in China).

The very promising idea of Russian-Mongolian transboundary PA "The sources of Amur" is already under consideration by government of two countries. The large buffer zone was specially established to form real connection between Sokhondinski NR in Russia and Onon-Balj national park in Mongolia. The joint territory will cover about 1 million ha of steppe and boreal forests, helping for free migration of Mongolian Gazelle, breeding for White naped cranes and Daurian bastard.

In 2004, within the NEASPEC project, the backgrounds were elaborated for creation of transboundary PA in Tumen River Basin. To implement this idea, in Russia it was established the Land of leopard national park under management of united directorate with Kedrovaya pad biosphere nature reserve. In China, Hunchun, Wangqin and Laoeling nature reserves were created along the border with Russia. They collaborate based on bilateral agreement, but now China State Forest Administration initiates formation of Tiger and Leopard PA network, which in future can be launched as Sino-Russian transboundary nature reserve. The draft of such high level Agreement was already sent to China by Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This year, NEASPEC supported the Sino-Russian project «Study of the transboundary movements of the Amur tiger and Amur leopard using camera traps and molecular genetic analysis". For the first time, we got information from both side of the border and can compare the individual photos of cats, which freely move between countries without visa.

In 2011, the Sino-Russian Strategy for development of bordering PA in Amur River Basin was approved by governments. It can serve as the basis for improvement of existing collaboration and creation of new clusters of transboundary nature reserves such as Ussury/Wussuly Godge, Middle Amur/Sangjiang Plain, Khingan Gorge, Korsakovski Godge and Cherpel Godge. As the first stage, we agreed with the Forest Bureau of Heilongjaing province to form the Amur network of PA to improve exchange of information, conduct joint research and communication activities.

Thus, the Amur Green Belt program can be part of Bio-Bridge Initiative creating the condition to protect flag-species and their habitats in the bordering area of Russia, China, Mongolia and North Korea, providing ecosystem services for all countries and benefiting the sustainable socio-economic development of great part of North East Asia.

For More Information

<http://amur-heilong.net/vicarr/>

Name	Title	Organization	Email	Phone
Yury Darman	Director of Amur branch, WWF Russia	WWF RFE	ydarman@wwf.ru	89147913205
Peter Osipov	Conservation director of Amur branch, WWF Russia	WWF RFE	posipov@wwf.ru	89145584610
Anna Barma	Amur Green Belt coordinator, Amur branch, WWF Russia	WWF RFE	abarma@wwf.ru	89147282737
Peiqi Liu	Director interim NEC Office, Manager, Flyway Programme	WWF NEC	pqliu@wwfchina.org	
Batbold Dorjgurkhem	Director WWF Mongolia	WWF MPO	batbold@wwf.mn	
Munkhchuluun Basan	AHEC program manager, WWF Mongolia	WWF MPO	munkhchuluun@wwf.mn	

Video Amur-Heilong Ecoregion: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10Qh8-OxU_c

http://www.wwf.ru/about/where_we_work/dvo/web-map-amur

<http://panda.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=b5ded83f97534ce19a61d5f8257ef6f9>