Concept Note

Workshop on conservation of big cats in transboundary areas of North-East Asia

12 October 2021, Virtual, 14:00-17:20 (GMT+9)

Background

Big cats play an important role in ecosystems by regulating prey populations at the top of the food chain and preserving the balance of healthy ecosystems. However, they have been under increasing threats from poaching, habitat loss, prey depletion and other environmental factors. To conserve endangered big cat species, NEASPEC has been supporting conservation of big cats in North-East Asia since 2000s, by identifying Amur tigers, Amur leopards and Snow leopards as NEASPEC flagship species[1].

NEASPEC activities include a series of studies and consultations among experts and member governments, and scientific research projects focusing on cross-border habitat areas. For instance, NEASPEC project conducted in mid-2010s[2] successfully facilitated field surveys and joint analysis of China and the Russian Federation on the number and behavioral pattern of Amur tigers and leopards crossing the national border, thereby enhancing knowledge of ecological connectivity across the border. Such NEASPEC activities also contributes to achieve SDG 15 (Life on land), specifically target 15.5 "take urgent and significant action required to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species" at the subregional and national level.

Against this backdrop, NEASPEC has been implementing a project "Transboundary cooperation on the conservation of Amur tigers, Amur leopards and Snow leopards in North-East Asia", funded by the Russian Federation, since 2020. The project consists of three components (see Table 1):

   i.   Component 1: Transboundary cooperation between the Northeast Tiger and Leopard National Park (TLNP) of China and the Land of the Leopard National Park (LLNP) of the Russian Federation to conserve Amur tigers and leopards

   ii. Component 2: Transboundary cooperation between neighboring protected areas in Lesser Khingan Mountains to conserve Amur tigers; and

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[1] For more details, please see **Nature Conservation Strategy of NEASPEC** adopted in 2007, available at http://neaspec.org/sites/default/files/Publication_SavingNatureConservation_0.pdf
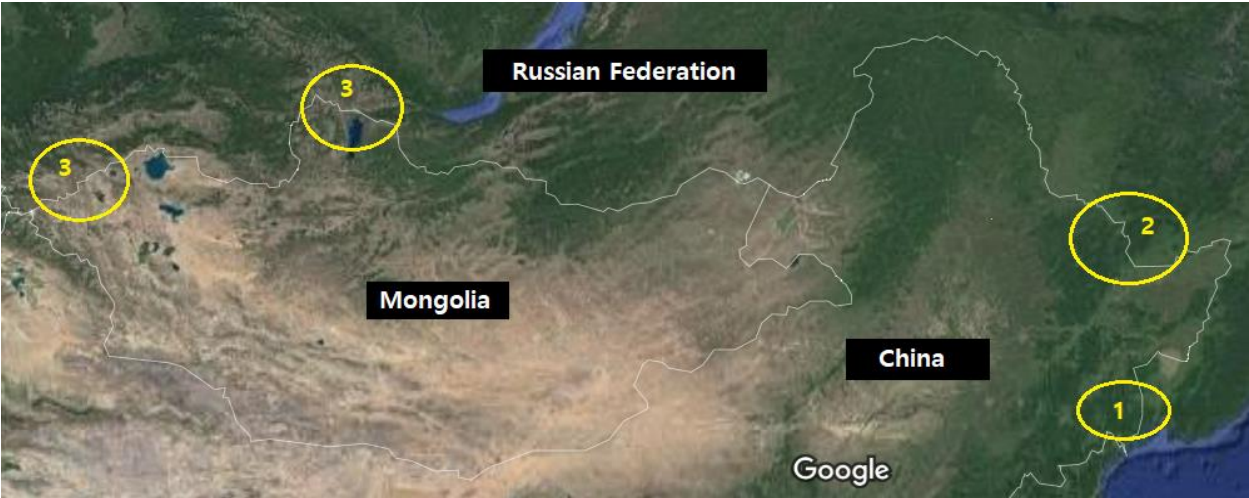
[2] For more details, please refer to the project report titled "Saving the Amur Tiger and Amur Leopard", available at https://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files//2018_12_17_UNESCAP_%ED%98%B8%EB%9E%91%EC%9D%B4.pdf

iii. Component 3: Assessment of the current status of two snow leopard subpopulations in Transboundary are between Mongolia and the Russian Federation

Table 1. Project overview

Project component		Component 1	Component 2	Component 3
Implementing period		• September 2021 – December 2022	• July 2020 – June 2021	• May 2020 – March 2021
Implementing partners		• LLNP	• Feline Research Center (FRC) of China • WWF Russia	• Irbis Mongolia Center • WWF Russia
Target areas		TLNP and LLNP	Lesser Khingan Mountains	Chikhachev ridge and Eastern Sayan ridge
Target species		Amur tiger & Amur leopard	Amur tiger	Snow leopard
Objective		Enhance the collaboration between two national parks; and create the condition for the establishment of a Sino-Russian Transboundary National Park ("Land of Big Cats")	Enhance collaboration between the existing bordering PAs; and create conditions for the establishment of a new national park in Russia and the expansion of the bordering PAs in China	Assess the current status and identify individual snow leopards in the transboundary areas between Mongolia and the Russian Federation, by utilizing modern methodologies
Key Activities	**Desk research**	• Assessment of national legislation of China and Russia for PAs and TBPAs; • Analysis of existing TBPAs; • Preparation of a basic unified geographical map of projected TBPA and its adjacent territories; • Development of unified classification of habitats and preparation of habitats map of the projected TBPA	• Assessment of national legislation and protection regime across the target area; • Environmental and socio-economic analysis; and • Production of a joint geographical map of the target area	Comparative study of camera trap data collected in the Mongolian-Russian border to identify snow leopard individuals and their transboundary movement
	Field study	-	Winter census on Amur tigers and their prey in the target area	Camera trapping using modern survey methodologies (mobile app developed in 2018)

Capacity building/ awareness-raising	• Coordination to establish a unified information and analytical system for information sharing • Data exchange of up-to-date status on target species • Training and workshop for local field staff • Joint brochure in English/Chinese/Russian	Brochure in English/Chinese/Russian	• Training of national park admin staff on camera traps and modern survey methodologies
Expected outcomes	An analytic report including policy recommendations to establish the "Land of Big Cats"	A project report including policy recommendations and follow-up phases to develop a joint monitoring system and management plan	A project report including analysis of camera trap data and priority action plans for follow-up phases

1. TLNP + LLNP; 2. Lesser Khingan Mountain areas; and 3. Chikhachev ridge (left) and Eastern Sayan ridge (right)

This workshop will be a major occasion to review progress in the project components and discuss policy recommendations and follow-up activities for the final report.

Objectives

- To review outcomes of the project component 2 and 3 and overview planned activities of the project component 1; and
- To facilitate discussion among project partners and experts to elaborate policy recommendations and follow-up actions for setting up more systematic transboundary conservation mechanism among range countries

Expected participants

- Project partners: WWF Russia, Feline Research Center of China, Irbis Mongolia Center, Land of the Leopard National Park, and Northeast Tiger and Leopard National Park of China
- Government, academia, research institutes, and any other stakeholders who are interested in big cat conservation

Virtual meeting platform

- MS teams

Language

- English

Provisional programme (GMT+9)	
14:00-14:10	**Opening** • Opening: Ganbold Baasanjav, Head, ESCAP East and North-East Asia Office/ NEASPEC secretariat • Introduction of the meeting (tour de table)

14:10-15:20	**Session 1. Transboundary conservation of Snow leopards in the Mongolian-Russian border**
	• Presentations:
	    ○ Dr. Bariushaa Munkhtsog, Irbis Mongolia Center and
	    ○ Dr. Alexander Karnaukhov, WWF Russia (Altay-Sayan branch)
	• Q&A and Discussion

15:20-15:30	Break

15:30-16:40	**Session 2. Transboundary conservation of Amur tigers in the Lesser Khingan Mountain areas**
	• Presentations:
	    ○ Dr. Alexey Kostyria, WWF Russia (Amur branch); and
	    ○ Prof. Jiang Guangshun, Feline Research Center, China
	• Q&A and Discussion

16:40-17:20	**Session 3. Transboundary cooperation of Amur tigers and leopards between TLNP and LLNP** • Presentations ○ Mr. Ivan Rakov, Land of the Leopard National Park, Russian Federation • Q&A and Discussion • Closing