

# Wildlife group targets Myanmar-China tiger trade

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In this June 2010 photo released by a wildlife trade monitoring group TRAFFIC, tiger skin is displayed for sale at a retail outlets for tiger products in Mong La, Shan State, Myanmar. Wildlife trafficking officials say they have reached a preliminary agreement with an ethnic minority group in Myanmar to close down markets where hundreds of poached tigers from across Asia are sold for purported medicines and aphrodisiacs in China. (AP Photo/TRAFFIC)

(AP) -- Wildlife trafficking officials say they have reached a preliminary agreement with an ethnic minority group in Myanmar to close down markets where hundreds of poached tigers from across Asia are sold for use in purported medicines and aphrodisiacs in China.

The markets, in an area of northeastern Myanmar controlled by the Wa minority, are considered one of the world's hot spots for wildlife trafficking and among the only places left where tiger parts are openly

sold.

"Basically closing these markets will alleviate pressure on all of Southeast Asia's [tiger populations](#) because the sourcing is being done from areas as far away as India and Sumatra," said William Schaedla of the [wildlife trade](#) monitoring group TRAFFIC. "If we were to close these markets it would stop the drain on those source populations of tigers."

Schaedla, TRAFFIC's Southeast Asia director, spoke ahead of a "tiger summit" in St. Petersburg, Russia, aimed at saving the endangered species from extinction. There are believed to be as few as 3,200 wild tigers remaining, down from about 100,000 a century ago.

The Nov. 21-24 conference, hosted by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, will attempt to finalize a plan to double the number of tigers in the wild by 2022.

A TRAFFIC report released Friday said that in a decade-long investigation, hundreds of parts of more than 400 big cats were seen in the Myanmar-China border town of Mong La, controlled by the Wa, and Tachilek, on Myanmar's border with Thailand.

Some traders operated small warehouses with shelves of rolled-up tiger and leopard skins. Bones, paws, penises and teeth were also found, used for home decor, magic amulets and products advertised as health tonics and aphrodisiacs, the report said.

The wildlife trade is especially rife in the Wa region, with Chinese traders coming to Mong La to buy and eat wild animals, gamble and consort with prostitutes in what TRAFFIC investigators described as a "wild west" atmosphere.

The Wa, who have forged a semiautonomous region and field a powerful army, have long been accused of massive drug trafficking.

"They're interested in establishing contact with the outside world, and this is a much less contentious issue than some of the other things that they're facing such as human trafficking or drugs or some of the other crime issues. And it's perhaps also a much more straightforward issue for them to take care of," Schaedla said, explaining why the Wa might want to make a deal to shut down the markets.

Schaedla said he was cautiously optimistic that the Wa could be trusted to keep the agreement with TRAFFIC, a joint program of WWF and the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

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