

Russia sets tougher penalties for trafficking endangered animals

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Russia has increased penalties for trafficking endangered species products like those from Amur tigers like this one. Credit: Vladimir Filonov/WWF-Canon

Russia's State Duma has approved legislative amendments that mean

tougher punishments for poaching and trafficking of rare species will come into force. The draft law was submitted by President Putin in March 2013 following a meeting with WWF Russia CEO, Dr. Igor Chestin in August 2012.

It means anyone found smuggling "endangered species" can be prosecuted under criminal law. Under previous legislation, only those caught smuggling rare animals worth more than 1 million roubles (US\$30,000) could be prosecuted under criminal law—but Russian legislation had no means to determine the value of animals in [illegal trade](#), making it almost impossible to initiate a criminal investigation.

However, this March, the government increased the compensation due from anyone convicted of killing or taking from the [wild tigers](#) and leopards and other endangered species, including certain birds of prey, to RUB1.1 million (US\$35,000), a move that has now been endorsed through a new bill by the State Duma.

"The new bill establishes a mechanism to close the existing loophole in Russian legislation," said Chestin. "Now, regardless of the value or volume of the goods, any smuggler caught with parts of a tiger or other valuable species will be prosecuted under criminal law and potentially face far more serious consequences. We've been working on this for almost 15 years and finally, with support of the president and his chief of staff, Sergey Ivanov, the law is in place."

Species classified as "endangered" include the Amur tiger, Amur leopard, polar bear and [snow leopard](#).



This Amur leopard skin was discovered in a car in Russia. Credit: WWF-Russia / S. Aramilev

In 2012, a review of Russian wildlife legislation carried out by TRAFFIC and WWF proposed amendments to Russian federal law that would tighten the penalties for [illegal harvest](#) and trafficking of [rare species](#) and their derivatives and highlighted the loophole that had allowed [poachers](#) and traffickers to get away with insignificant fines.

"While this latest improvement to Russian legislation is warmly welcomed, its enforcement becomes of utmost importance," said TRAFFIC's Alexey Vaisman, who helped in the legislative review.

"The number of rangers and game inspectors has fallen dramatically in

recent years and needs to be increased, and while we can now see the light at the end of the tunnel, institutional support is needed to see the light of day."

Provided by WWF

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