

13 countries craft plan to save tigers

29 January 2010, By MICHAEL CASEY , AP Environmental Writer



In this photo taken Jan. 20, 2010, two adult male tigers look on at Wat Pa Luangta Bua Yannasampanno Forest Monastery in Kanchanaburi, Thailand. The monastery and its Buddhist Monks dedicated to what has become a wildlife sanctuary for tigers. Estimates for the number of tigers in the wild has fallen in the past decade to somewhere between 3,600 to 3,200 according to the New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society. Many of the tigers at the Thai temple are the cubs of parent tigers that have been killed in the wild. (AP Photo/David Longstreath)

(AP) -- More than a dozen Asian nations aim to double the numbers of wild tigers by 2022 and prohibit the building of roads, bridges and other infrastructure projects that could harm their habitats.

However, a draft declaration that was to be adopted by the 13 countries Friday includes no new money to finance the conservation efforts which scientists said must be more than doubled. The draft, a copy of which was obtained by The Associated Press, mentions only a commitment from countries to use money from ecotourism, carbon financing and infrastructure projects to pay for tiger programs.

"With political will and implementation of the needed action, the extinction of the wild tigers across much of their range can be averted," the declaration states. "Tiger conservation is important to protect biodiversity and preserve a vital part of our national heritage."

Officials at the first Ministerial Conference on Tiger Conservation, in Thai coastal resort of Hua Hin, were to adopt the declaration Friday. It will then be considered for approval by heads of state of the 13 countries in September at a meeting in Vladivostok, Russia.

Tiger numbers in recent decades have plummeted because of human encroachment - with the loss of more than nine-tenths of their habitat - and poaching to supply a vibrant trade in tiger parts. From an estimated 100,000 at the beginning of the 20th century, the number of tigers today is less than 3,500.

John Seidensticker, head of conservation ecology at the Smithsonian National Zoological Park and chairman of the Save the Tiger Fund, said the draft declaration included all the components for ensuring a steady recovery of tigers.

Along with a target for doubling tiger populations, countries would agree to protect core tiger habitats as well as buffer zones and corridors that connect key sanctuaries and national parks. The declaration also supports maintaining a permanent ban on the trade of tiger parts and reducing poaching through beefed-up law enforcement.

"If we get everything done in this declaration, we will turn tiger populations around so in fact it's a positive not a negative," Seidensticker said. "For me, I'm very happy with this."

The meeting which opened Wednesday was organized by Thailand and the Global Tiger Initiative, a coalition formed in 2008 by the World Bank, the Smithsonian Institute and nearly 40 [conservation](#) groups. It aims to double [tiger](#) numbers by 2022.

The 13 countries attending the meeting are Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russia, Thailand and Vietnam.

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