

Concept Note

Workshop for the Establishment of the Big Cats Network and Transboundary Conservation of Amur Tiger, Amur Leopard, and Snow Leopard in North-East Asia

21 – 22 May 2026

Land of the Leopard National Park (Barabash), Russian Federation

1. Background

Big cats are keystone species across types of ecosystems, who regulate prey populations and thereby maintain the integrity of ecosystem structure and functions. As ecologically significant as they are, the abundance and population health of these species have been subject to anthropogenic threats including poaching, fragmentation or loss of habitat, prey competition with hunting, human-wildlife conflict, and other socio-environmental factors. Given their endangered status and their habitats in North-East Asia being mostly cross-border areas, the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC) has been supporting conservation of big cats in North-East Asia since the 2000s, by identifying Amur tigers, Amur leopards and Snow leopards as NEASPEC flagship species¹.

For over a decade, NEASPEC has played a facilitating and coordinating role in a series of collaborative efforts among experts, research institutions, and governments of the range countries focusing on cross-border monitoring and conservation of the flagship feline species. In the mid-2010s, NEASPEC successfully facilitated field surveys and joint analysis of China and the Russian Federation on the number and behavioral patterns of Amur tigers and leopards crossing the national border, thereby enhancing knowledge of ecological connectivity across the border. In 2019, NEASPEC co-organized the International Forum on Tiger and Leopard Transboundary Conservation in Harbin, China. The “Harbin Consensus” produced in this forum has strengthened cross-border conservation, ecological corridors, and information-sharing mechanisms. From 2020 to 2022, the project “Transboundary Cooperation on the Conservation of Amur Tigers, Amur Leopards and Snow Leopards in North-East Asia” further promoted collaboration among key protected areas such as Northeast China Tiger and Leopard National Park and the Land of the Leopard National Park (LLNP) in the Russian Federation, alongside efforts in the Lesser Khingan Mountains and the transboundary Altai and Sayan regions. Concurrently, through hosting workshops and capacity-building events, NEASPEC has continued to collaborate with experts to review outcomes and guide future conservation directions for flagship feline species within the NEASPEC Nature Conservation Strategy.

Through decades of continuous and collaborative efforts in the subregion, substantial progress was made in the conservation of these endangered species. In 2024, the Amur Tiger was seen returning to reserves

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

in the Changbai Mountain ranges after 30 years², while conservationists in LLNP observed the highest record of densities for Amur Leopards³. Snow Leopards' subpopulations monitored across the transboundary regions between the Russian Federation and Mongolia also appeared to be stable⁴.

While continuing efforts and collaborative progress have been made, common threats and interconnected conservation challenges remain. All three feline species face the challenges of fragmented habitats, low genetic diversity, and restricted gene flow within small and isolated populations. These conditions increase the risks of inbreeding and susceptibility to single catastrophic events, low prey density in their current habitats, which both impede population recovery and induce human-wildlife conflict as they search for livestock to feed^{5,6,7}. In addition, exposure to multi-host diseases (e.g., canine distemper virus and African swine fever) necessitates multi-faceted conservation efforts for Amur Tiger and Amur Leopard. For Snow Leopards, the impact of climate change further exacerbates their survival conditions, causing possible range shifts and further emphasizing the importance of habitat connectivity⁸.

Recognizing the interconnected challenges and needs for more effective transboundary conservation, the Workshop on the Establishment of the Big Cat Network and Transboundary Conservation of Amur Tiger, Amur Leopard, and Snow Leopard in North-East Asia will be held in Land of Leopard National Park, Vladivostok, the Russian Federation from May 21-22. The workshop aims to conduct a brief review of the big cat conservation outlook in North-East Asia and proposes to establish a Big Cat Network as a joint platform for monitoring and conserving the target feline species across range countries, in response to recommendations for a more structured transboundary mechanism including those made at the NEASPEC Workshop on Nature Conservation in 2024. The proposed network will serve to promote regular communication and timely information sharing among participating countries through the development of data-sharing instruments, such as a knowledge-sharing platform, to cross-border exchange of population data and the dissemination of advanced monitoring techniques. By supporting capacity building programmes that aim to equip young conservationists and frontline staff with advanced skills and knowledge, and awareness-raising programmes that engage the local communities as well as other affected stakeholders, the network aims to enhance the coordinated conservation efforts for the target

² <https://conservewildcats.org/2024/12/18/amur-tiger/>

³ <https://conservewildcats.org/2025/06/24/amur-leopard-density/>

⁴ 'Transboundary Cooperation for Conservation of Amur Tigers, Amur Leopards, and Snow leopards in North-East Asia', to be released soon in 2026.

⁵ Qi, J., Gu, J., Ning, Y., Miquelle, G., Holyoak, M., Wen, D., Liang, X., Liu, S., Roberts, N., Yang, E., Lang, J., Wang, F., Li, C., Liang, Z., Liu, P., Ren, Yi., Zhou, S., Zhang, M., Ma, J., Chang, J., Jiang, G. (2021). Integrated assessments call for establishing a sustainable meta-population of Amur tigers in northeast Asia, *Biological Conservation*, 261: 109250. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2021.109250>.

⁶ Cho S, Pandey P, Hyun JY, Marchenkova T, Vitkalova A, et al. (2022) Efficient and cost-effective non-invasive population monitoring as a method to assess the genetic diversity of the last remaining population of Amur leopard (*Panthera pardus orientalis*) in the Russia Far East. *PLOS ONE* 17(7): e0270217. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0270217>

⁷ Wang, D., Li, Q., Hou, L., Su, X., Lian, X. (2024). Spatiotemporal overlap among snow leopard, bharal, and free-ranging livestock: Suggestions on mitigating human-snow leopard conflict, *Global Ecology and Conservation*, 53, e03029. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gecco.2024.e03029>.

⁸ Zhang, Y., Dai, Y., Li, J., Cong, W., Zhang, Y., Nie, X., Wu, Q. and Xue, Y. (2025). Climate Change and Human Pressure: Assessing the Vulnerability of Snow Leopard (*Panthera uncia*) Habitat Integrated With Prey Distribution on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. *Ecol Evol*, 15: e71232. <https://withorg/10.1002/ece3.71232>

feline species in the subregion, and contribute to biodiversity goals across the national, regional, and global levels.

2. Objectives

- To review the current conservation status of Amur Tiger, Amur Leopard, and Snow Leopard in North-East Asia
- To discuss the proposed big cat network, including its objectives, core programmes, and organizational structures, as well as other matters
- To develop the modality of collaboration with relevant stakeholders
- To review the draft Terms of Reference for consideration of the 29th Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-29) in 2026

3. Venue

Land of the Leopard National Park, Primorsky Krai, Vladivostok, Russian Federation

4. Language

English

5. Programme

[Day 1] 21 May 2026	
08:30 – 09:00	Registration
09:00 - 09:30	Opening • Opening remarks: Mr. Riccardo Mesiano, Deputy Head, ESCAP East and North-East Asia Office / NEASPEC • Congratulatory remarks: Mr. Philipp Govderdovsky, Deputy Head of the Intergovernmental Commissions Division of the Department of International Cooperation in the Field of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection • Welcome remarks: Mr. Victor V. Bardyuk, Director, Land of Leopard National Park Tour de Table Group Photos
09:30 - 10:30	Session 1. Status Updates on Amur Tiger and Amur Leopard Conservation Moderator: Mr. Riccardo Mesiano, Deputy Head, ESCAP East and North-East Asia Office / NEASPEC Presentations • Ms. She Wen, Feline Research Center of the National Forestry and Grassland Administration

	○ <i>Integrating Smart Monitoring for Amur Tiger and Leopard Conservation</i> • Mr. Andrey Shorshin, Press Secretary, Autonomous Non-Commercial Organization «Centre for Research and Preservation of Amur Tiger Population» ○ <i>A summary report on the Amur tiger population in Russia, transboundary groups, and areas of mutual exchange of individuals</i> • Mr. Victor V. Bardyuk, Director, Land of the Leopard National Park ○ <i>Status update on Amur Leopard Conservation</i> • Mr. Marcello Zorzi, Researcher, Far Eastern Leopards NGO ○ <i>Implementation of the program for the conservation and restoration of the Far Eastern leopard population for 2026-2030</i>
10:30 – 10:50	Break time
10:50 – 12:00	Session 2. Status Updates on Snow Leopard Conservation Moderator: Mr. Riccardo Mesiano, Deputy Head, ESCAP East and North-East Asia Office / NEASPEC Presentations • Ms. Liu Yixuan, Head of Snow Leopard Program, Eco-Bridge Continental ○ <i>Progress on snow leopard research and conservation practice in China</i> • Mr. Bariushaa Munkhtsog, Executive Director, Irbis Mongolia Center, and Mr. Bayaraa Munkhtsog, Senior Researcher, Mammalian Ecology Laboratory of the Institute of Biology, Mongolian Academy of Sciences ○ <i>Current status and results of monitoring of the snow leopard population in Mongolia</i> • Ms. Daria Petrova, Director, Interregional Association “Center for the Study and Conservation of the snow leopard “Irbis” ○ <i>Current status and results of monitoring of the snow leopard (irbis) population in the Russian Federation</i> • Mr. Diinmey Balban-ool, Director, Ubsunuur Hollows Nature Reserve ○ <i>Current status and results of monitoring of the snow leopard (irbis) population in the Russian Federation</i>
12:00 – 13:30	Lunch
13:30 – 14:30	Session 3. Knowledge-Sharing Platform: Progress and Expert Advice • Led by Ms. Jeung Eun (Anyu) Lim, Principal Researcher of the Mammal Research Team, National Institute of Ecology
14:30 – 14:50	Break time

14:50 – 15:50	Session 4. Toward a North-East Asia Big Cat Network: Review of Draft Terms of Reference • Led by Mr. Riccardo Mesiano, Deputy Head, ESCAP East and North-East Asia Office / NEASPEC
15:50 – 16:10	Break time
16:10 – 17:30	Session 4. Toward a North-East Asia Big Cat Network: Review of Draft Terms of Reference (Continued) • Led by Mr. Riccardo Mesiano, Deputy Head, ESCAP East and North-East Asia Office / NEASPEC Closing
18:30	Dinner
[Day 2] 22 May 2026	
9:00 – 10:00	[Side event] International Conference on Transboundary Conservation of the Amur Leopard: Outcomes and Best Practices Moderator: Mr. Victor V. Bardyuk, Director, Land of the Leopard National Park Presentations • Ms. Maria A. Okulova, Deputy Director for Environmental Education and International Cooperation ○ <i>Building a Transboundary Partnership: The History of Cooperation between Land of the Leopard and China</i> • Ms. Dina Matiukhina, Senior Research Fellow, Land of the Leopard National Park ○ <i>Methods of Endangered Big Cats camera trap monitoring in the Land of the Leopard</i> • Ms. Taisiia Marchenkova, Research Fellow, Land of the Leopard National Park ○ <i>Amur leopard and Amur tiger monitoring in Transboundary region</i>
10:00 – 15:30	Site Visit to Land of the Leopard National Park