

Fire Rages in Far East Leopard Reserve

March 21, 2012

The  **Moscow Times**

A fire in the Far East region of Primorye has destroyed 3,700 acres of forest in a federal nature reserve home to rare Amur leopards, RIA-Novosti Wednesday.

The fire on the Leopardovy reserve started on Tuesday, said Andrei Fereferov, a World Wildlife Fund official responsible for Far East leopard preservation projects.

Fereferov said the fires are supposed to be put out by either local administrations or employees of the nearest fully protected reserve, Kedrovaya Pad. Workers from the reserve have already set off to Leopardovy, where only a narrow range of specific plants and animals, including leopards, are protected. But no one has attempted to extinguish the fires, Fereferov said.

Director of the Amur branch of the WWF Yury Darman downplayed the impact of the fires, telling RIA-Novosti that fires are a yearly occurrence that can consume up to 50,000 acres each year. "For the leopards, these fires are not even dangerous. What is bad is the continual degradation of their habitat," he said.

According to data gathered by conservationists, the number of Amur leopards has shrunk

by 40 times over the last 100 years, leaving only about 40 known animals.

Meanwhile, a fire in the Astrakhan region is also burning in a federal reserve area, which could have been started inadvertently by residents trying to burn reeds. Reeds are an invasive plant in the region that cause problems for human settlements and infrastructure, as well as for the environment, Greenpeace said in a news release on its website.

Greenpeace has a firefighting expedition combatting the blaze, and a spokesman for the organization said the cooperation of regional and federal emergency forces were necessary to fight the fire.

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