

Russia to Donate Tigers to South Korea

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Russian conservation specialists will go to South Korea to aid efforts to reintroduce Siberian tigers, which were wiped out on the Korean peninsula in the early 20th century.

"Korea plans to develop [a tiger] population, and we have enough experience, we will send experts to help them save the population," Natural Resources and Environment Minister Sergei Donskoi told reporters Wednesday.

Russia's own population of the critically endangered beasts has stabilized at about 450 individuals in the Primorye and Khabarovsk regions, largely as a result of intensive conservation and anti-poaching efforts in the past 20 years.

Donskoi was speaking at a two-day conference of environment ministers from the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation group in Khabarovsk.

The meeting, part of preparations for the summit of APEC leaders in Vladivostok in September, saw delegates identify fighting biodiversity loss and improving cross-border cooperation on water management and air pollution as priorities for the upcoming years.

A joint declaration adopted by the summit Wednesday highlighted five key areas as priorities: biodiversity, sustainable use of natural resources, water management and transnational watercourses, cross-border air pollution and climate change, and green growth.

Donskoi singled out biodiversity loss, pollution and climate change as the key challenges facing Russia.

By the organization's own estimates, APEC's 21 member economies account for more than 50 percent of global forest areas, 60 percent of global wood products and 80 percent of the global trade in forest products. The Asia Pacific region is the world's biggest producer and consumer of mineral resources.

Donskoi claimed the meeting had determined "which mutual decisions will be made to adapt the economy [to climate change], or how we will react to pollution, including if it comes from another country."

Cross-border issues are a sensitive topic among the 21-member group. Taiwan has said that 37 percent of its air pollution comes from abroad — a clear reference to mainland China — and that only multi-national cooperation could solve the issue. Russia has in the past squabbled with China over pollution of rivers the two countries share.

No clear mechanism on consultation or even information exchange was outlined in the declaration released by APEC on Wednesday, however. Instead, the document endorsed by environment ministers, which will be included in the declaration signed by heads of state and at the main summit in September, is confined to endorsing decisions already made at other multi-governmental summits rather than setting out new targets or specific mechanisms for action.

"Environmental protection and the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, ecosystems and biodiversity are essential foundations for achieving sustainable economic and social results for the APEC region," the declaration read.

Donskoi said other bilateral issues discussed included using the U.S. experience of allowing trust funds to finance conservation projects, and the further development of the Beringia national park, a proposed transnational reserve stretching across the Bering Strait between Alaska and Chukotka, RIA-Novosti reported.

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