

## **Project Update: May 2011**

### *US Forest Service Experts Meet With RFE Local Community*

This meeting of US Forest Service experts and Krasnoarmeisky municipality, which is a target area for our RSG project, was designated by BROOC last year, and implemented early May 2011 with organising support of our old partners in Pacific Environment (San Francisco). The group included two experts from the National Forest Service, USA, two activists from PE, one private forest owner from Oregon and one manager of certified private forest in British Columbia, Canada.

Our trip to the northern territory of Primorye, which is about 450 km from Vladivostok, was preceded by the meeting with the director of the regional association of timber producers and exporters, PALEX. Guests, first of all, were interested in the measures, conducted by timber businesses to limit or reduce most hot and traditional problem of Primorye forestry – illegal logging and timber trade. Our guest from Canada was trying to get awareness on the methodology of getting FSC certification here and on the attitude of legal and certified timber business to the problem of deep community dependence on illegal timber. The expert on timber sales from US Forest Service, was curious mainly of the details of regulations on Russian forest lease, rights and obligations of leasers.

In Krasnoarmeiski municipality, where interests of loggers, hunters, environmentalists, indigenous people, old believers came recently from Uruguai and criminal community are deeply crossed, our American guests were interested in everything concerned with forest resource dependence of the whole community and shared their experience. One of the most dramatic and complex situations they learned together with us was ongoing degradation of national park “Udege Legend” after reduction of it’s territory by some bureaucratic mistakes and resolution of federal arbitration, caused by FSC certified logging company on behalf of fake udege commune. That arbitration loss caused replacement of initial organiser and director of park by the person deeply dependent on the logging company. All the details on his behavior and plans to give up extracted part of territory for logging we were told by key specialist of park and the deputy director. We also discussed possible ways to safe arguable piece of intact forest with director of local forest service office, which confirmed that after arbitration resolution about 30 000 ha of former park territory remain completely unprotected during 2 years by the set of legal paradoxes.

Our guests confirmed our position that such strategy of FSC certified timber company Roschinski KLPH is completely incompatible with FSC principles, and recommended to apply to FSC and ASI to suspend its certificate (which was already done by BROOC). This their position was even getting stronger after our meeting with company director, which proudly described how perfect their logging operations and social activities are and how happy they are that national park just exists here. When we get out of luxurious office, our guest from Oregon said deep sarcasm: “He seems as a saint!” We perfectly understood what she meant, since after our visit to old believers in remote village over the river we met logging site of this timber company, which looked like barbarian place of forest gangsters, trying to destroy everything and leave chaos of branches, cut and broken young and old trees, including restricted species, and turned over forest soil. Americans were simply too delicate to ask director about it. Although partially that chaos was easy explained by specialists as simply interrupted operations for inter-seasonal period of melting winter roads, which starts here with May 2011, and all will be cleaned here later in June.

Another problem which this forest community met recently is re-adoption of the former ban of logging and export of Korean pine – the key species in the food chain of Ussuri taiga, and core one for Siberian tiger habitat. The point is that many local companies are deeply dependent on this species, as well as the main Chinese consumer market, so local loggers would like to have a right to get Korean pine at least in the process of preparatory works and under forest maintenance operations. As we reported before, on Primorye Coordinating Committee on environment we already discussed this problem and supported appeal of timber business association to the government to regulate some exclusions from the total ban of Korean pine to meet local social needs in the forests with a pine as dominating species.

The most deep impression our guests got at Chinese sawmill, hidden at the outskirts of dying village Imperceptible (Nezametnoye), which accept mostly illegal or “doubtful” timber to rapidly turn it to consumer goods – boards - for marketing. During 3 years after my previous visit to this sawmill, piles of the most valuable hardwood and restricted species around it grew by several times. Chinese workers, watched our group, run away rapidly, but Chinese manager came soon and even told us the name of his company, which was impossible to understand and fix anyhow. Couple Russians on the truck, waiting for loading boards, refused to say which company they are from and where plan to go with production of this sawmill. I explained our guests that such sawmills with unclear ownership, which Chinese workers, speaking no Russian, are now located in every remote and even dying village of Ussuri taiga. At the same time local people always meet problems to get firewood for long local winter for acceptable price. Only legal Russian companies as “Gefest”, which we visited finally, provide processing wood wastes for community regularly.