

**EUROPE / NORTH AMERICA**

**BIKIN RIVER VALLEY**  
**(extension of Central Sikhote-Alin)**

**RUSSIAN FEDERATION**



View of Bikin River Valley © IUCN / Tilman Jaeger

# WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION – IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

## BIKIN RIVER VALLEY (RUSSIAN FEDERATION) – ID N° 766 Bis

**IUCN RECOMMENDATION TO WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE:** To refer the property under natural criteria.

**Key paragraphs of Operational Guidelines:**

Paragraph 77: Nominated property meets World Heritage criteria.

Paragraph 78: Nominated property does not fully meet integrity, protection and management requirements.

**Background note:** An area corresponding substantially to the current extension proposal was examined in the original nomination of the Central Sikhote-Alin property in 2001, but was not agreed as part of the inscription at that time (Decision CONF 208 X.A), on the grounds of its then legal status and management arrangement being inadequate at that time. In the same decision, the World Heritage Committee encouraged the State Party to “improve management of the Bikin River protected areas [...] before nominating it as an extension.”

### 1. DOCUMENTATION

**a) Date nomination received by IUCN:** March 2017

**b) Additional information officially requested from and provided by the State Party:** Following the meeting of the IUCN World Heritage Panel, a progress report was sent to the State Party on 20 December 2017. This letter advised on the status of the evaluation process and sought responses/clarifications on a range of issues, including: the lack of buffer zone; the lack of an overarching management plan/system for the serial site; the approach taken to ensure the full and active participation of local communities and indigenous peoples; the long term vision for ensuring the connectivity of conservation areas within the wider region; and the legal challenge to the establishment of the National Park. A response was received on 26 February 2018.

**c) Additional literature consulted:** Various sources including: Bocharnikov VN, Martynenko, AB, Gluschenko YN, Gorovoy PG, Nechaev VA, Ermoshin VV, Nedoluzhko VA, Gorobetz KV, Doudkin RV (2004) *The Biodiversity of the Russian Far East Ecoregion Complex*. Chief editor: GorovoyPG. Russian Academy of Science / Far Eastern Branch, Pacific Institute of Geography, Institute of Biology and Soil Sciences, Pacific Institute of Bioorganic Chemistry, WWF, The Conservation organization, Far Eastern Branch. Carroll C, Miquelle DG (2006) *Spatial viability analysis of Amur tiger (Panthera tigris altaica) in the Russian Far East: the role of protected areas and landscape matrix in population persistence*. Journal of Applied Ecology 43: 1056-1068. KfW Development Bank (2016) Environmental Protection – Russian Federation. Protection of the Bikin Valley. Miquelle DG, Smirnov EN, Zaumyslova OY, Soutryina SV, Johnson DH (2015) *Population Dynamics of Amur Tigers (P. t. altaica, Temminck 1884) in Sikhote-Alin Zapovednik: 1966-2012*" (2015). USGS. Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center. Paper 293. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/usgsnpwrc/293>. Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation (2010) Strategy for Conservation of the

Amur Tiger in the Russian Federation. Newell JP, Simeone J (2014) *Russia's forests in a global economy: How consumption drives environmental change*. Eurasian Geography and Economics 55(1): 37-70. Russian Federation (2016) Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation Order dated August 12, 2016, No. 429 on Approving the Regulations of the Bikin National Park. Russian Federation (2015) The Government of the Russian Federation Decree dated November 3, 2015, No. 1187 on Creation of the National Park 'Bikin'. Russian Federation (2015) Draft retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value. Central Sikhote-Alin, Russian Federation. Russian Federation (1995) On the Specially Protected Natural Territories. A Federal Law of the Russian Federation dated March 14, 1995. Turaev V, Sulyandziga R, Sulyandziga V, Bocharnikov V (2001) *Encyclopedia of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation*. CSIPN. UNESCO-WHC, IUCN (2004) Proceedings of the World Heritage Boreal Zone Workshop. Held in St. Petersburg, Russia, 10-13 October 2003. Vandergert, P; Newell, J (2003) *Illegal logging in the Russian Far East and Siberia*. International Forestry Review 5(3): 303-306. WCS (n.d.) Tiger Conservation in the Russian Far East. World Bank (n.d.) Protected Areas Network for Sikhote-Alin Mountain Forest Ecosystems Conservation in Khabarovsk Krai (Russian Far East). Medium-Sized Project Brief. Project Summary. Miquelle D., Darman Y. and Seryodkin I. 2011. *Panthera tigris* ssp. *altaica*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2011: e.T15956A5333650. Downloaded on 08 November 2017.

**d) Consultations:** 6 desk reviews received. The mission met with a wide range of stakeholders including the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation (MNR), leadership and staff of Bikin National Park, Director of Central Sikhote-Alin, Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), representatives of the Udege, WWF Russia including past and current leadership of the Amur Branch, Greenpeace Russia, Territorial-Neighbour Community

of the Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples (TSO KMN). Informal consultations were also undertaken with BMUB, WWF International, WCS Russia, ZSL, KfW, and selected members of the network of the IUCN Integrated Tiger Habitat Conservation Programme.

**e) Field Visit:** Tilman Jaeger and Chimed-Ochir Bazarsad, 17-26 September 2017

**f) Date of IUCN approval of this report:** April 2018

## 2. SUMMARY OF NATURAL VALUES

The Bikin River Valley (BRV) is nominated as a serial extension of the existing Central Sikhote-Alin World Heritage site and is located about 80-100 km to the north of the existing property. The nominated extension covers 1,160,469 ha, which is almost three times larger than the existing World Heritage property. Central Sikhote-Alin was inscribed as a serial property under criterion (x) in 2001, and has a total area of 406,349 ha comprised of two components, the Sikhote-Alin Nature Reserve (401,600 ha) and the Goralij Zoological Preserve (4,749 ha).

The Sikhote-Alin Mountains are located in the South-East of the Russian Far East, northeast of Vladivostok. The existing property of Central Sikhote-Alin is located on the eastern slope of the range from around 1,600 metres above sea level (masl) down to sea level. The nominated extension extends from 200 to 1900 masl and is the most important intact and effectively protected forest on the western slope of the Sikhote-Alin, which is distinct from the slopes exposed to the Sea of Japan in terms of relief, climate, vegetation and landscape, and known to be more biodiverse than the eastern slope. It includes a vast area of practically undisturbed mountain taiga landscapes almost completely forested (more than 95%), with traces of ancient glaciations and volcanism, and a greatly partitioned relief of numerous deep ravines, scree steeps, rocky ridges, insular mountains, and greatly indented plateaus. The area includes valleys, mountain taiga, and forests. In particular, according to the nomination file, it contains one of the largest and best preserved broadleaf and pine-broadleaf far-eastern forests, the Ussuriyskaya Taiga.

The area holds significant biodiversity values. A wide spectrum of altitudinal belts are well developed in the nominated property including a mountain tundra belt, a forest belt of dwarf Siberian Pines, a forest belt of Erman's birch, a fir-spruce forest belt, a spruce-pine forest belt, and a pine-broadleaf forest belt. No specific floristic research has been conducted in BRV, but the nomination estimates the property could contain approximately 1,000 species of higher vascular plants.

The fauna of BRV combines species from the taiga, found among the Okhotsk-Kamchatka flora, with representatives of southern Manchurian species. Faunal diversity comprises 52 mammal, 241 bird, 7 amphibian, 10 reptile and 48 inland water fish species, including a full range of mammalian and avian apex

predators. Threatened animal species present include the mammals: Amur Tiger (*Panthera tigris altaica* – EN<sup>1</sup>), Musk Deer (*Moschus moschiferus* - VU), and Himalayan Black Bear (*Ursus thibetanus* - VU). The nominated property is considered one of the last reliable shelters of the Amur Tiger. Studies have suggested the tiger range that is the most robust to threat of extirpation is the area that connects Sikhote-Alin with the Iman and Bikin watersheds to the north. However, the entire Russian population of Amur Tiger was estimated to contain only 360 tigers based on a survey carried out in 2005 (cited in 2011). Furthermore, the Amur Tiger monitoring program has indicated a significant decline in the population, and over 90% of the population is reported to be found in the Sikhote-Alin mountain region, where there is very limited gene flow with other populations.

Threatened birds include Hooded Crane (*Grus monacha* - VU), Scaly-sided Merganser (*Mergus squamatus* - EN), Siberian Ruddy Crake (*Porzana paykullii* - EN), and Blakiston's Fish-owl (*Ketupa blakistonii* - EN). There is also one threatened reptile, Chinese Softshell Turtle (*Pelodiscus sinensis* - VU).

BRV is also reported to host some relict, endemic, and rare animal species, especially mammals, birds and reptiles. These include according to the nomination file, in addition to the Amur Tiger mentioned above, another 51 species of mammals. In addition to the threatened bird species mentioned above, rare species found in flood plain forests include the Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra* - LC), Mandarin Duck (*Aix galericulata* - LC), Greyfaced Buzzard (*Buteo indicus* - LC), and Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus* - LC). The Long-billed Ringed Plover (*Charadrius placidus* - LC) is another very rare and endemic species which is commonly found in vast pebble river bars. Rare and endemic reptile species include the Grass Lizard (*Takydromus wolteri* - NE), European Grass Snake (*Rhabdophis tigrina* - NE), Siberian Ratsnake (*Elaphe schrenki* - NE), Amur Ratsnake (*Elaphe rufodesata* - NE), Mamushi (*Agristodon blomhoffi* - NE) and Korean Snake (*Gloydius saxatilis* - LC); however, none of these species are considered as globally threatened, but either considered of Least Concern or have not yet been assessed on the IUCN Red List (2017).

There is limited human presence in the property, with only 1,000 inhabitants residing adjacent to its boundaries and distributed over four small settlements. Many are Indigenous Peoples, mostly belonging to the Udege with some belonging to the Nanai and Orochi. As most non-indigenous "settlers" (as the nomination puts it), the Indigenous Peoples near Bikin National Park continue to directly depend on local natural resources, including explicitly within the national park. The residents are mainly continuing a long established traditional utilization of the forest resources, which seems to have limited impact on the area's biodiversity and ecological integrity.

<sup>1</sup> These codes reflect the conservation status of each species as recorded in the *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* at the time of the evaluation; for more information please visit <http://www.iucnredlist.org>

### 3. COMPARISONS WITH OTHER AREAS

The nominated extension is nominated in relation to criterion (x), and the nomination includes an adequate comparative analysis as confirmed by the expert review base consulted. As the nomination is for an extension, the focus of comparison is how the area would add to the already inscribed property.

The main argument presented in the nomination file is based on the same justification used for the successful inscription of the Central Sikhote-Alin World Heritage site: the global conservation value of the large and significant intact tracts of 'Ussuriyskaya taiga's' native dark coniferous, light coniferous, coniferous-broadleaf, and broadleaf forests, and as a key habitat of the Amur Tiger.

The biodiversity that characterizes the proposed extension is evidently of global significance, based on the information provided in the nomination file, the spatial analyses and literature review undertaken by the IUCN and UN Environment WCMC, as cited above, and adds significantly to the justification of criterion (x) for the existing inscribed property.

Compared with existing World Heritage sites found in Russia and/or the same biogeographical provinces (the East Siberian Taiga and Manchu-Japanese Mixed Forest) or freshwater priority ecoregion (the Russian Far East Rivers & Wetlands), the nominated extension has a relatively high biodiversity, with a higher number of plant species than most comparable World Heritage sites. It has approximately the same number of plant, mammal, bird and fish species as the existing site of Central Sikhote-Alin, despite being over three times larger.

Spatial analyses undertaken by UN Environment WCMC suggest that more mammal species than currently reported could potentially be present in the nominated extension. In summary, IUCN considers that there is a clear basis for the nominated area to justify the natural criteria under which it has been nominated. IUCN notes that the proposed extension would be an important addition to the natural values targeted by the existing World Heritage site of Central Sikhote-Alin.

## 4. INTEGRITY, PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT

### 4.1. Protection

The nominated extension enjoys a high level of protection, through the creation of Bikin National Park (BNP), in accordance with the Russian Federal Protected Area Legislation. The federal protected area category corresponds to an IUCN Category II protected area. BNP was formally created by federal Decree No. 1187 dated 03 November 2015. The regulations for BNP were approved by Order No. 429 of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation dated 12 August 2016. The Charter of Bikin National Park was likewise adopted in 2016.

It is important to highlight that the legislative framework includes strong and explicit provisions on the protection of rights of the indigenous peoples to use natural resources within substantial zones of the national park. However, these provisions are not derived directly from the federal law, but are legalized through a decree, which in principle could be changed or altered in the future.

The territory of the nominated property is federally owned in its entirety under the authority of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation and constitutes a "Federal State Budgetary Establishment". In 674,184 ha (58.1%) of the national park, indigenous peoples are permitted to use natural resources for traditional economic activities, as a way of life and for subsistence, in line with the federal decree that established Bikin National Park, and subsequently established regulations.

A good example of the strength and adequacy of the protection system for the nominated property is demonstrated by the strong federal protection status, which has brought an end to the possibility of industrial-scale logging for the foreseeable future, arguably addressing the most tangible threat to the integrity of the middle and upper reaches of the Bikin River watershed in the past.

IUCN considers that the protection status of the nominated property meets the requirements of the Operational Guidelines.

### 4.2 Boundaries

The nominated extension is large and coincides with the boundaries of BNP. It covers substantial areas of intact forests, and represents a significant increase in both the scale and ecological representativeness of protected lands, in addition to the already inscribed property. The large scale, remoteness, high degree of naturalness, and inclusion of the entire middle and upper watershed of a major river ensure that the conditions of integrity are high.

The spatial configuration of BNP follows the watershed boundaries of the middle and upper Bikin River. The nominated area is located entirely within the administrative boundaries of the Pozharsky District, an administrative unit of the Primorsky Krai. The national park borders with Khabarovsk Krai to the north, and the Terneysky and Krasnoarmeysky Districts to the east and southeast, respectively (both within Primorsky Krai). The national park covers 51% of the Pozharsky District. This is a positive aspect in terms of governance and management, as only one local counterpart is involved in the federally managed lands, although it is also substantively influenced by the local district as half of its territories are allocated to federal land use. Overall, the coincidence of the national park boundaries with the watershed and administrative boundaries is advantageous for communication, decision-making, and management effectiveness.

Buffer zone arrangements are however less satisfactory. According to the nomination, a protective zone of 129,509 ha has currently only been established west of the national park, to serve as BNP's buffer zone. This represents a good starting point for what needs to be a more comprehensive configuration of a fully functioning buffer zone for the whole of the nominated property, which should be based on an assessment of potential threatening activities in the wider landscape, which are discussed further in section 4.5 of this report.

According to the supplementary information received from the State Party, a special working group has been commissioned to complete the configuration of the buffer zone by 2018. It is important to emphasize that a fully functional buffer zone is a critical requirement to safeguard the nominated extension from development and land use pressures coming from adjacent areas. The buffer zone is even more important in the context of the serial nomination, as it has the potential to form the foundation for ecological connectivity and effective governance across the different components of the extended property. IUCN notes that the development of the buffer zone would require close coordination with the governments of Primorsky and Khabarovsk Krays. The planned actions of the State Party are supported by a number of legislative requirements already enforced in the Russian federal legal system and from which the nominated property could benefit significantly. These include provisions contained in the national protected area legislation dated 1995 for the mandatory establishment of buffer zones around national parks. Regulations for buffer zones of protected areas were reportedly approved by Federal Decree 138 dated 19 February 2015. Provisions elaborated in the Presidential Order that are dedicated specifically to the conservation of the Amur Tiger and the Amur (Far Eastern) Leopard were ratified on 07 November 2013. This order was reported to include provisions for the mandatory establishment of buffer zones around all federal protected areas including all national parks and federal nature reserves located in Primorsky and Khabarovsk Krays (i.e. the tiger and leopard range). Provisions of the Russian Forest Code are also dedicated to "specially protected forests", and annex 3 to the Russian Forest Inventory Instructions grants protection status to forest belts along water courses and all forests on slopes exceeding 30% inclination.

Further, the process of configuration of the buffer zone of the nominated property could be linked to a number of important planning platforms, including the ongoing development of a cultural inventory, the ongoing revision of the buffer zone of the Central Sikhote-Alin Biosphere Reserve and the potential integration of buffer zone planning with the management of the recently established Udege Legend National Park, as well as the existing large protected area of Chukensky Zakaznik, and the nearby Mataiskiy Wildlife Refuge, as areas in the immediate vicinity of the property or the nominated extension which merit incorporation in the wider planning outlook of protection of key species such as the Amur Tiger.

Lastly, the connectivity between the existing property and the proposed extension would benefit from land and resource use planning that integrates conservation considerations. It is important to recall that Amur Tigers have huge home ranges (250 to 450 km<sup>2</sup> for females and 450 to over 1,000 km<sup>2</sup> for males), hence, most protected tigers inevitably also range outside of their protected areas, increasing their vulnerability. Examples of mitigation measures include strategic environmental assessments, development project impact assessments, and safeguards from transport infrastructure, resource extraction, and tourism development.

IUCN considers that the boundaries of the nominated property do not meet the requirements of the Operational Guidelines, in view of the need to strengthen buffer zone arrangements for the nominated extension, and connectivity with the existing property and other key conservation areas.

### 4.3 Management

The nomination file contains limited information on the exact arrangements for the governance and the collaborative management of the nominated extension and the existing inscribed property. This may be due to the early stage of development of the national park, which was declared and given legal status only recently between 2015 and 2016. Nevertheless, it is evident that significant efforts and important steps have been undertaken to communicate and negotiate with stakeholders in preparation for the establishment of the national park. For example, harvesting and use rights were negotiated and granted to indigenous groups well before the establishment of the national park.

As a result, a Committee for Indigenous Issues has been set up within the national park administration, and seems to be functional. The objective of this committee is to ensure participation of local people in the decision-making process, to protect and support the legal rights of local people in terms of economic activities, to elaborate on recommendations regarding management priorities, to adopt regulations promoting traditional use of natural resources in line with the national park's protection regime, and to maintain traditional knowledge on nature conservation and natural resource use. The Committee has 15 elected members with a two-thirds majority of indigenous representatives. The chair of the Committee serves as one of several Deputy Directors of the National Park, responsible for traditional nature resource use.

At present there is no complete and adopted management plan for the nominated extension, and thus the requirements for inclusion on the World Heritage List are not yet in place. However, the State Party included an outline of the foreseen management plan in the nomination file, which could be an important basis for an effective management system. Also encouraging are the notable efforts and achievements made by the national park administration in terms of engagement of local people, law enforcement, and management capacity development.

The management plan of the nominated property needs to consider both the existing inscribed components and the proposed extension, and to be based on adequate levels of ecological and land use baselines and interactions. The successful preparation of the management plan will enable the management authorities to integrate knowledge related to natural values in terms of inventories, distribution, status, and trends with the current or foreseen sustainable utilization of resources associated with social rights or economic prospects. Furthermore, as noted above, there is an absence of baseline data for some key values, such as floristic diversity. It is imperative that such baseline knowledge is put in place as the foundation of the national parks management system. Whilst the mission has focused on the proposed extension, it is apparent that there is a need to strengthen the connections between the management of the proposed extension and the existing property.

The IUCN field mission was made aware of the “Strategic Development Plan of the Bikin River Basin in Cooperation with the national park”, a document prepared by the Russian Education Center of Indigenous Peoples (Moscow, 2016). The document identifies several impacts and risks related to the establishment of the national park including notably: overall limitation of areas accessible for hunting, fishing, and collection of wild plants by local people; limited access to sacred places; limited commercial use of natural resources and consequently, reduced household income; risk of alteration of the national park decree related to local rights of access and use which are not guaranteed by federal legislation. Addressing these concerns and other use-related issues requires in depth analysis and the incorporation of mitigation measures into the strategic management of the nominated extension. The management plan should clearly define the nature, level, and distribution of all resource use and utilization with a clear assessment of their interaction and impacts on the natural values of the national park.

The capacity to manage the nominated extension seems to be developing steadily considering the recent establishment of the national park. The nomination states that approximately 30 staff were dedicated to the park management in 2016, with about 80 additional staff being planned for deployment in 2017. At the time of the field mission, the property had three directors (head and deputies), 12 inspectors, and 36 local staff, mostly locally recruited. Building technical and administrative capacity of the property’s management team is essential to ensure effective management, monitoring, and reporting. The management capacities of the nominated property should also extend to cooperating and coordinating with neighbouring protected areas as part of the planning process associated with the buffer zone establishment and management. This could include, *inter alia*, the Chukensky Zakaznik and Mataisky Wildlife Refuge in the Khabarovsk district. Should this extension be approved it will also be necessary to significantly improve coordination with the existing Central Sikhote-Alin property to ensure consistent capacity across the

serial property and to boost management capacity within the smaller (regional level) component.

At the time of nomination, the annual federal budget allocated to the national park was about USD 780,000. Additionally, the park seems to benefit from several bilateral cooperation programs undertaken with NGOs and donor agencies. Locally, the nominated property is perceived as relatively well financed due to its high-level political support related to tiger conservation priorities. Adequate funding for the capital investment and running costs of the nominated extension will need to be addressed on an ongoing basis.

IUCN considers that the management of the nominated property does not meet the requirements of the Operational Guidelines, significantly due to the absence of an adequate management system.

#### 4.4 Community

The establishment of the national park appears to have resulted from many years of efforts that have taken place to promote participatory decision-making of resource use. The indigenous peoples appear well-organized and have contributed and represented themselves actively in the designation process.

The area has been and continues to be used by indigenous peoples for hunting, fishing, and harvesting of a broad range of non-timber forest products. While such use has certainly influenced the forest ecosystem and in all likelihood has reduced populations of some target species, such as *Panax ginseng*, it is not known to have resulted in any loss of nature conservation values. Aside from a few modest management facilities and traditional wooden huts and smoke houses temporarily used by hunters and tourists, there is no infrastructure within the park. Access is restricted to foot, small plane/helicopter, and boat. Snowmobile access is also possible in winter. As noted above the designated area includes a management zone explicitly designated as an exclusive traditional natural resource use area by indigenous people. As long as these rights are not changed, the situation may be regarded as a significant consolidation of indigenous rights at the federal level.

The intact and productive native forest underpins the local livelihood systems. Moreover, the forest and many places, features and species, including Tigers and Bears within it, are considered intangible cultural and spiritual values for the Indigenous Peoples of the region. The IUCN mission heard that the erosion of traditions, lifestyles and knowledge is considered less pronounced than in many other, more accessible regions of the Russian Far East. Despite some tensions and conflicts, the coupling of the establishment of the national park with the granting of far-reaching rights to Indigenous Peoples appears to be an encouraging response to the local reality. IUCN understands that analysis of cultural values is ongoing which may result in the establishment of cultural zones, which is to be encouraged.

Participation rights are incorporated in the national park regulations. One mechanism to ensure indigenous participation is a corresponding committee, the chair of which serves as one of several Deputy Directors of the national park. Furthermore, the national park administration is an important local employer, thus providing socio-economic incentives to the local population from its establishment and management. Tourism could also provide further income and employment opportunities. Cultural rights are acknowledged in both the decrees and the regulations of the national park.

Despite the apparent positive approach to questions of rights, it is noteworthy that a law suit was filed against the establishment of the national park by the Tribal Commune Tiger (TCT). Supplementary information from the State Party confirmed that this was dismissed by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, including an appeal attempt filed in November 2017. Whilst resolving questions of legal status, the fact of the law suit indicates that engagement of local stakeholders and right holders must remain integral to the governance system of the nominated property. To do so, effective ongoing mechanisms and platforms need to be established and regularly assessed and maintained.

#### 4.5 Threats

The nominated extension is substantially wild and unmodified by past or current human influence and pressures. The remoteness of much of the nominated area both reduces access for threatening activities, but also makes control and law enforcement difficult. The strong federal protection status and the presence of indigenous rights-holders are widely considered to serve as effective deterrents to illegal resource users.

The nomination dossier provides limited information on land use related interactions between the national park and the economic activities of surrounding districts, including marble mining north of the national park, commercial logging in most areas adjacent to the park, and poaching and illegal extraction of wild biodiversity products for trade and subsistence use. The main threat facing the integrity of the nominated area is the large-scale industrial logging going on in the wider Sikhote-Alin range, which comes with multiple direct and indirect impacts at the landscape level. For example, logging increases the risk of poaching for the wildlife trade. It is evident that widespread active logging in the lower Bikin River Valley is taking place close to the west side of the national park. This increases the importance of establishing an effective buffer zone, especially in areas of high potential for human-nature conflict such as the western peripheries of the nominated property.

Historically, what is now the national park was once subjected to very high levels of trapping for the fur trade, the exact impacts of which are not known. Likewise related to the fur trade, farmed American Mink (*Neovison vison* - LC) escaped into the wild decades ago, and today, it is the only known non-native vertebrate species in the national park. The

impacts of this species on the ecosystem are presently unknown.

Wildlife poaching is difficult to address in the remote areas of the nominated property, and no accurate estimates of current poaching levels are available. It is noted that most areas remain accessible from several neighboring districts in both Primorsky and Khabarovsk Krays, especially in winter. It is known that Musk Deer is under pressure from poaching for its glands, and so are the two species of Bear for meat and selected organs. Tiger poaching appears strongly deterred due to severe sanctions and specific law enforcement efforts. Nonetheless, there are different opinions related to the level of direct and indirect threats facing tigers in the nominated property. Some local experts express their concern over the actual levels of tiger hunting, as many hunters are not deterred by hunting penalties due to the extremely high sums that tiger products can fetch. Reportedly, there are also some incidents of helicopter access by wealthy poachers. Overall, the exact poaching levels remain unknown and ill documented.

Recreational angling apparently reached excessive levels prior to the establishment of the national park, which is likely to have impacted target fish species. Unregulated fishing tourism was described as a serious past threat, with more than 1,200 anglers documented for a single day in 2014 just on the Bikin River. Technically, under an effective management system, the control of angling should be readily achievable as all anglers must access the Bikin River through a well-equipped checkpoint at the park entrance.

Tourism is an explicit objective for the corresponding zones and potentially an important source of income and employment for indigenous people, for example, as guides. Proper tourism planning and development is essential to take advantage of opportunities while minimizing the risks and negative impacts.

The local hunting and harvesting rights should be accompanied by participatory monitoring, as well as strategies that prevent hunting and harvesting levels to reach beyond natural productivity and regeneration capacities. As highlighted above, tiger prey species deserve particular attention in the management program of the nominated property in terms of numbers of hunters, acceptable levels of harvest, timing and distribution of hunting activities, and tools and mechanisms utilized for the activity.

In conclusion, IUCN considers that the integrity of the nominated extension meets the requirements of the Operational Guidelines, but the protection and management requirements of the Operational Guidelines are not met.

## 5. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

### 5.1 Consideration in relation to serial properties with Central Sikhote-Alin

#### a) What is the justification for the serial approach?

The nominated property represents an extension of the existing serial property of the Central Sikhote-Alin World Heritage site which currently consists of two components. The serial approach is already accepted by the current listing, and the previous decision that encouraged the further extension. The proposed extension is a significant and very large complementary component which would strengthen the conservation priorities of the wider landscape in the northern and western regions of the Sikhote-Alin Mountains. It is strongly argued that the biodiversity of the western slopes is more diverse and intact than the eastern ones, making a clear case for the added value of the new component proposed.

#### b) Are the separate component parts of the nominated property functionally linked in relation to the requirements of the Operational Guidelines?

The nominated extension is part of the same forest landscape as the inscribed property, and there are undoubtedly ecological linkages between these sites. Both the existing property and the proposed extension contribute to the maintenance of the significant wild population of the Amur Tiger. However, there appears to be no detailed analysis of the nature of threats to the linkages between the extension and the existing site, let alone possible conservation responses. Buffer zones, corridors, and land and resource use planning need to be in place to inform the overall planning of all components using a wider landscape approach, as also noted above.

Udege Legend National Park serves as an additional stepping stone between the existing property and the nominated extension. It could be argued that potential inclusion of Udege Legend National Park as another possible future extension deserves to be examined. In this regard there appears to be the potential for other areas to be added to the series as further extensions in the future.

#### c) Is there an effective overall management framework for all the component parts of the nominated property?

The nomination file does not provide a specific proposal for an integrated approach to the planning, management, and monitoring of the nominated property in conjunction with the two components of the existing property. In fact, there are indications that the existing serial property suffers from a lack of coherent management, attributed to the insufficient staffing and funding. An overall management framework is lacking, and needs to be established in order to comply with World Heritage expectations, taking account of the analysis in previous sections of this report.

## 6. APPLICATION OF CRITERIA

**Bikin River Valley** has been nominated under natural criterion (x). If eventually inscribed, the below assessment would need to be integrated with a new Statement of OUV for the extended property as a whole.

### Criterion (x): Biodiversity and threatened species

The nominated extension holds globally significant biodiversity values. The vegetation of the Bikin River basin belongs to two botanical-geographical regions: the South-Okhotsk dark coniferous forests and the East-Asian coniferous broadleaf forests. There is a well-developed altitudinal zoning of the vegetative cover within the property, with a mountain tundra belt, a forest belt of dwarf Siberian Pines, a forest belt of Erman's Birch, a fir-spruce forest belt, a spruce-pine forest belt, and a pine-broadleaf forest belt.

The fauna of the nominated extension combines species from the taiga, found among the Okhotsk-Kamchatka flora, with representatives of southern Manchurian species. It comprises 52 mammal, 241 bird, 7 amphibian, 10 reptile and 48 inland water fish species. It hosts a number of notable and charismatic mammal species, including the Amur Tiger, Elk (*Alces Alces* - LC), Siberian Musk Deer, Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa* - LC), Roedeer (*Capreolus capreolus* - LC), Himalayan Black Bear and Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos* - LC), Lynx (*Lynx lynx* - LC), Wolverine (*Gulo gulo* - LC), Sable (*Martes zibellina* - LC), American Mink, Otter (*Lutra lutra* - NT) and Badger (*Meles meles* - LC).

In addition, the national park has a very uncommon bird species composition and ecologic structure, with 241 bird species, belonging to 17 families, including 171 nesting species. It includes notable nesting areas of the Scaly-sided Merganser and Blakiston's Fish-owl, as well as other rare bird species found in flood plain forests. A range of endemic reptile species can also be found in the nominated property, however, none of these species are classified as globally threatened, but are either considered of Least Concern or have not yet been assessed on the IUCN Red List (2017).

The area is large and substantially wild, and with a high degree of natural integrity. Nevertheless, assuring the conservation of its values relies not only on the management of the area, but also the maintaining and strengthening of meaningful connectivity with the existing components of the World Heritage property, and other important neighbouring protected areas, and effective buffer zone arrangements for the proposed extension.

IUCN considers that the nominated property meets this criterion.



## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

IUCN recommends that the World Heritage Committee adopts the following draft decision:

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined documents WHC/18/42.COM/8B and WHC/18/42.COM/INF.8B2;

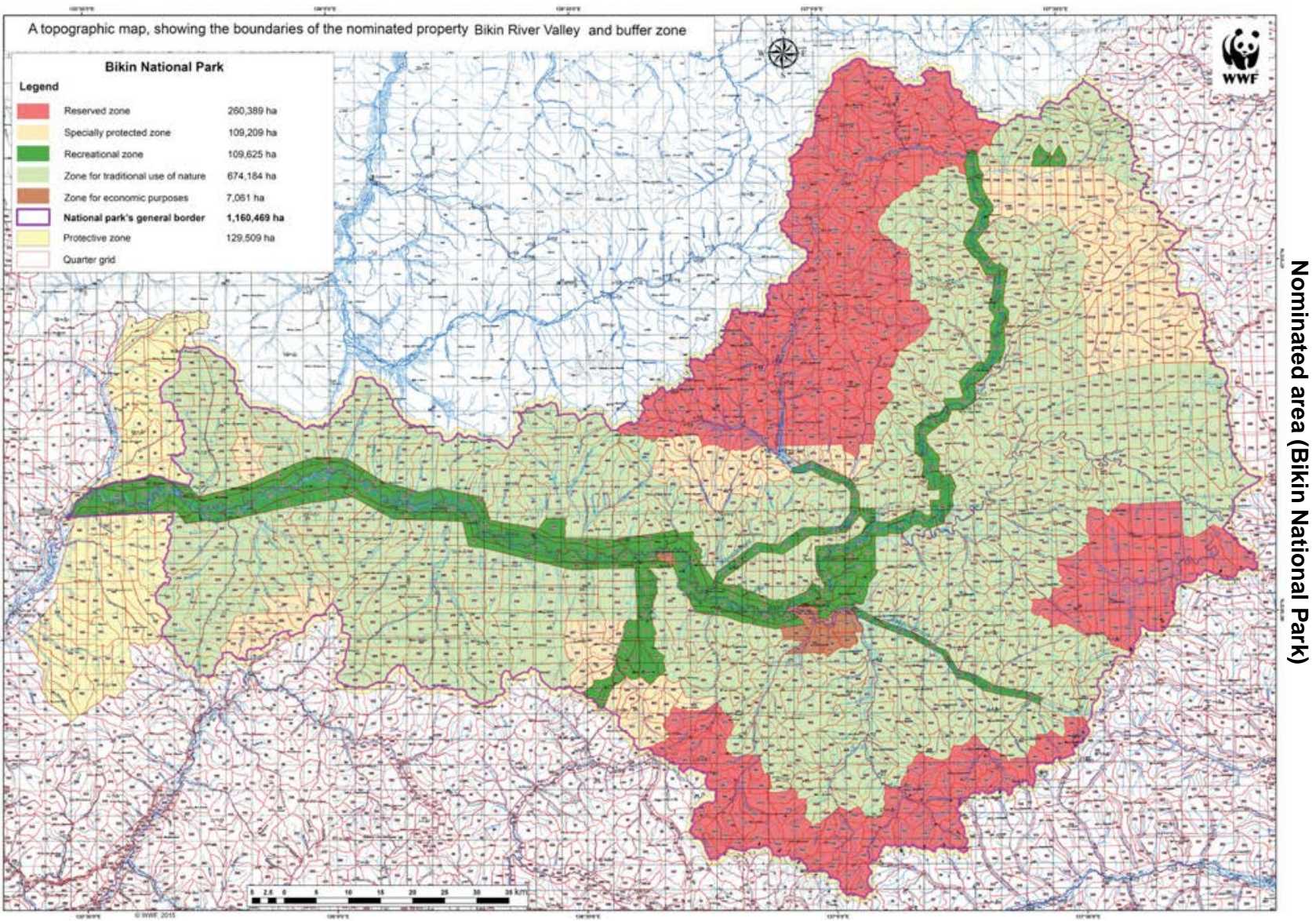
2. Refers **Bikin River Valley (Russian Federation)**, proposed extension to Central Sikhote-Alin, back to the State Party, noting the strong potential for the nominated extension to meet criterion (x), to allow the State Party, to:

- a) Complete the process of configuration and designation of the nominated property's buffer zone in conformity with Clause 10 of Article 2 of Russian Federal Law and consistent with the requirements of Paragraph 104 of the Operational Guidelines, with the aim of providing the necessary protective measures to safeguard the property against current and foreseen anthropogenic impacts;
- b) Finalize the preparation of the Integrated Management Plan for the nominated extension, to provide a single and cohesive framework for the management of Bikin National Park and the existing World Heritage property, Central Sikhote-Alin, as a whole.

3. Commends and encourages the continuation of the State Party's efforts to strengthen the involvement of local indigenous people in governance, planning and management of the nominated extension through, *inter alia*, the establishment of the Council of Indigenous Minority Groups, and to build on the achievements of the Consultative Working Group.

4. Further encourages the State Party to develop and adopt a long-term vision in order to ensure connectivity of Amur Tiger habitat at the landscape level, through a range of strategies, including building enhanced connectivity with other protected areas, and investigating conservation connectivity strategies outside the formal protected area system. The State Party may also wish to consider the possibility of nominating further such areas as extensions to the nominated property in the future.

Map 1: Nominated property and buffer zone



Nominated area (Bikin National Park)

**Map 2:** Proposed extension and current World Heritage Site

