

Top 10 Tiger Trouble Spots in 2010

Introduction

The year 2010 is the Year of the Tiger in the Chinese lunar calendar and will be celebrated beginning February 14 in many parts of Asia. Since the last Year of the Tiger in 1998 tigers use 40 percent less of their habitat and they now occupy only seven percent of their historic range. There are now as few as 3,200 tigers left in the wild, down from an estimated 100,000 at the beginning of the 20th century.

Three tiger subspecies went extinct in the last century and a fourth, the South China tiger, may well be extinct in the wild. The remaining populations have been pushed to historically low numbers, mostly due to poaching and habitat loss. New threats such as climate change and captive breeding for trade are looming on the horizon.

But there is hope. Wild tigers thrive when they have strong protection from poaching and habitat loss, along with sufficient prey. In September a Global Tiger Summit will be held in Vladivostok, Russia. At the summit, cohosted by Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and World Bank President Robert Zoellick, the tiger conservation community and tiger range countries will lay out an ambitious agenda for the recovery of tiger populations throughout Asia.

WWF is celebrating the Year of the Tiger with a campaign to highlight tiger issues and develop new plans and funding sources. The overarching goal is to double the number of tigers by the next Year of the Tiger in 2022 – a goal that was recently adopted by all tiger range countries and by partners at a ministerial meeting in Thailand. The campaign will build on WWF's many years of work to help save tigers in the wild.

The *Top 10 Tiger Trouble Spots in 2010* map is an effort to increase awareness of the many threats to wild tigers, both in their home ranges and in parts of the world that have an impact on them. It is not an exhaustive listing. Rather it serves as a "big picture" overview of the major issues that need to be vigorously addressed before, during and after the Vladivostok summit if we are to secure a future for tigers in the wild.

Top 10 Tiger Trouble Spots in 2010 – The List

- **India: Tigers and Humans Come Too Close for Comfort**
The combination of habitat degradation, the loss of connectivity between tiger habitats and a growing human population has inevitably resulted in tigers and humans coming into conflict with each other. This is common across the country around most tiger reserves, including Corbett, Dudhwa, Kaziranga, Kanha and Bandipur. The consequence is losses for both sides. For people, the situation leads to loss of life and livestock. For tigers, it leads to retaliatory killing, poaching for trade and loss of prey.
- **Bangladesh: Scuba Gear May Be the Only Hope for Sundarbans Tigers**
A new study led by WWF predicts that sea level rise may cause the remaining tiger habitat in Bangladesh's Sundarbans mangrove forest to decline by 96 percent this century. This will result in tiger numbers reaching a level that is not viable for their long-term survival. This population of tigers is already under extreme pressure from poaching and human encroachment on their habitat. If their mangrove forest home disappears, they will join the polar bear as early victims of climate change-induced habitat loss.

- Russia: Illegal Logging and Poaching Take a Heavy Toll on Amur Tigers**
 An increasing global demand for Korean pine and Mongolian oak has fueled a massive logging increase in Russia's remaining temperate forests and a resulting loss of habitat for Amur tigers. As much as 70 percent of all hardwood exports from the Russian Far East are tainted by illegal logging. Sustainable production is beginning to take hold along with increased antipoaching efforts, but tiger populations are still under threat.
- China: Demand for Tiger Parts Persists**
 Despite efforts to stop the demand for tiger parts, Chinese demand for illegal tiger products is among the highest in the world. Due to their high demand, some entrepreneurs are stockpiling and breeding tigers in anticipation of a possible opening of the domestic market. Hopefully that day will not come.
 Last February, the Chinese government reiterated its commitment to prohibiting trade in tiger parts under its obligations to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). And in December 2009, China's State Forestry Administration issued a directive calling for stronger enforcement against the illegal tiger trade, along with habitat management to increase protection of wild tigers. China is also eager to work with its neighbors on cross-border tiger conservation.
- Vietnam: Ancient Traditions Are Bad Medicine for Wild Tigers**
 The discovery last October of two dead frozen tigers in suburban Hanoi may be the tip of the iceberg when it comes to tiger trafficking. Seizures by authorities of tiger parts have been on the increase in Vietnam and throughout Asia. This reflects a greater demand for tiger parts to be used as ingredients for health tonics and some traditional Asian medicine, meat for restaurants and skins for fashion. While many schools of traditional Asian medicine have phased out the use of tigers and other endangered species, the lucrative black market trade has thrived. The trade even occurs in some big cities in Europe and the U.S.
- United States: Captive Tigers Pose Dangers to Their Wild Cousins**
 There are more tigers alive in captivity in the U.S. (more than 5,000) than there are in the wild. Numerous loopholes in U.S. federal and state law create openings for black market trade in captive tiger parts. This further endangers wild tigers because a steady supply of parts from captive-bred tigers may fuel the demand for parts from wild tigers, which are considered even more valuable. Texas has the highest number of captive tigers, and in many states the laws on keeping dogs as pets are more stringent than those on keeping tigers.
- Europe: Huge Appetite for Palm Oil Fuels Destruction of Tiger Habitat**
 European countries currently have an annual import of around 5.8 million tons (5.3 million metric tons) of palm oil, an ingredient used in making countless everyday foods and products, from lipstick to ice cream to biofuels and detergents. Rain forests are often leveled to make way for palm oil plantations, and much of that destruction is taking place in Indonesia and Malaysia, home to Sumatran and Malayan tigers. Efforts to require that palm oil be produced from sustainable sources that don't destroy forests are gaining ground, but much more needs to be done to save these two tiger subspecies.
- Nepal: A Global Crossroads for Illegal Trade**
 Nepal is a major crossroads for illegal trade in tiger parts from South Asia into the Tibetan Autonomous Region and elsewhere in China. Tiger skins for traditional Tibetan costumes, tiger bones for traditional medicine, and a host of other illegal wildlife products

taken from India and Nepal's tiger reserves are ferried through the country by a covert network of middlemen from Kathmandu and elsewhere.

- **Mekong Region: Poorly Planned Dams and Roads Push Tigers to the Brink**
Growth in the Greater Mekong region (Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam) is moving at an unprecedented pace, with hundreds of proposed new dams and roads. If not properly planned with environmental criteria in mind, these dams and roads will damage watersheds, increase access for poachers and further fragment large wilderness areas that are critical for the long-term survival of tigers, humans and countless other species. A recently published WWF report, *Tigers on the Brink*, states that tiger populations in this region have plummeted to about 350.
- **Indonesia and Malaysia: Pulp, Paper, Palm Oil and Rubber Leave Tigers in Limbo**
Indonesia's only tiger, the Sumatran, is critically endangered, with fewer than 400 alive in the wild. Also home to orangutans, elephants and rhinos, Sumatra's forests are being cleared fast – to make way for plantations to feed a world hungry for paper and palm oil. The island lost half (31 million acres or 12.5 million hectares) of its natural forest between 1985 and 2008. More than a third of that loss happened in Riau Province, pushing its globally unique biodiversity, including tigers and elephants, to the brink of extinction.

Palm oil and pulp and paper industries have been driving the natural forest loss to make the province the number one producer of both commodities in Indonesia. Companies such as Sinar Mas Group's Asia Pulp and Paper and Raja Garuda Mas' APRIL operate in Riau and export their products globally. In Peninsular Malaysia, the federal government's ambitious goal of doubling the population of Malayan tigers to 1,000 by the year 2022 is challenged by the state governments' plans for increased timber extraction and forest conversion to rubber and oil palm plantations, and by their simple lack of participation in federal plans for enhanced enforcement within tiger habitats.