



The Russian Federation, European zoos and IUCN Species Survival Commission to broaden cooperation on Persian leopard reintroductions

Amsterdam, 16 October 2017: The Russian Ministry of Natural Resources (MNRE), the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature Species Survival Commission (IUCN SSC), today signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to work together on the reintroduction of Persian leopard to the western Caucasus region of Russia. The new memorandum is aimed at deepening an already existing cooperation that has already seen the return of several Persian leopards (*Panthera pardus saxicolor*) to a protected area near Sochi.

Persian leopards use to roam widely throughout the western Caucasus, but during the 19th century they were declared a pest and hunted until their population reached dangerously low levels; today they are listed as locally endangered, with a global wild population of less than 1000 animals. Following research that showed that the western Caucasus population could not recover without intervention, MNRE, EAZA and IUCN SSC entered discussions aimed at using the scientific expertise and experience of all three organisations to restore a sustainable population of this iconic big cat locally and across the greater Caucasus region.

Each of the parties bring specific skills and experience to the project: the population will be created by bringing leopards from the EAZA Persian leopard EEP breeding programme into an established MNRE Breeding Centre in Sochi, as well as other specialist facilities currently being developed. EAZA Felid Taxon Advisory Group and Persian leopard EEP will consult with MNRE on the care and management of leopards before their release, and the IUCN SSC Cat Specialist Group will provide expertise on the training of animals for reintroduction, the release process itself, and ongoing monitoring of the population as it becomes re-established in the protected area around Sochi. The project is a textbook example of the IUCN's One Plan Approach to conservation, a method that harnesses all available resources from zoos to field conservationists and government in the fight to save species from extinction.

The reintroduction of species is highly challenging, and usually takes decades to be entirely successful. The *IUCN Guidelines to Reintroduction and Other Conservation Translocations*, the guiding text for all responsibly conducted projects of this type, requires conservationists to assess thoroughly the environment into which animals will be released, and to plan thoroughly for the future of the animals and their human neighbours during this long process. The memorandum of understanding commits the partners to ensuring the long-term success of the project and the welfare of the restored population; monitoring of three animals released last year points to the benefits of this measured and responsible collaborative approach.

MNRE, EAZA and IUCN SSC look forward to working together over the long-term to ensure a bright future for Persian leopard in the mountains of the Caucasus.

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About the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation is the federal executive authority performing functions of public policy making and statutory regulation in the field of the study, use, renewal, and conservation of natural resources. The Ministry is responsible for the conservation of wildlife across the Federation, as well as policy areas related to the protection and responsible exploitation of natural resources. The Ministry is very active in the planning and execution of projects to reintroduce native species to the wild, including Amur tiger, Amur leopard and Persian leopard, working together with relevant stakeholders to ensure long-term conservation success.

About EAZA:

The European Association of Zoos and Aquaria is a conservation organisation that brings together over 400 progressive zoos, aquariums and other partners to collaborate on the protection and conservation of nature, research and education. With Members in 45 countries across Europe and the Middle East, EAZA is also active in advocating for nature with local, national, and regional governments, and is a member of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the world's largest conservation coalition.

About IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC)

The IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) is a science-based network of more than 10,000 volunteer experts from almost every country of the world, all working together towards achieving the vision of *"A just world that values and conserves nature through positive action to reduce the loss of diversity of life on earth"*.

Most members are deployed in more than 140 Specialist Groups, Red List Authorities, Task Forces and Sub-Committees. Some groups address conservation issues related to particular groups of plants, fungi or animals while others focus on topical issues, such as reintroduction of species into former habitats or wildlife health.