The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

3 Cleared of Poaching Altai Sheep

May 23, 2011



An Altai court cleared three men of poaching charges Monday, ruling that their presence on a helicopter that crashed while carrying senior officials on an illegal hunting trip was insufficient proof that they had participated in it.

Prosecutors said the defendants poached endangered argali sheep on the slopes of the Altai mountains during a helicopter trip in 2009. The crash killed seven of the 11 people on board.

Photos from the crash site leaked by ecologists showed slain argali — of which some 200 remain in Russia — strewn among the rubble with hunting guns.

The crash stirred public outrage, but the case proceeded slowly, only reaching the court last month after the two-year statute of limitations had expired. That meant the defendants could not be sentenced to prison terms of up to two years.

Prosecutors charged three of the four survivors, including Moscow entrepreneur Boris Belinsky, State Duma committee adviser Nikolai Kapranov and former senior Altai official Anatoly Bannykh. The fourth, a pilot, was not charged.

The defendants did not deny poaching but blamed the act on those who died, including the Kremlin's envoy to the Duma, Alexander Kosopkin, Interfax said.

The judge sided with the defense, ruling that prosecutors failed to present proof that the three defendants actually shot the animals. Prosecutors promised to appeal the verdict. The World Wildlife Fund and Greenpeace said the ruling de-facto authorizes poaching by top officials.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/05/23/3-cleared-of-poaching-altai-sheep-a7137