

3 Cleared of Poaching Endangered Sheep – Again

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An Altai court has acquitted three state-connected hunters of poaching endangered mountain sheep for a second time, drawing a line under a case that has angered environmentalists and opposition politicians.

The three — entrepreneur Boris Belinsky, State Duma committee adviser Nikolai Kapranov and former senior Altai official Anatoly Bannykh — survived a helicopter crash during their hunt for Argali sheep in January 2009.

The Altai District Court ruled that the defendants could not be tried because the statute of limitations had expired, RIA-Novosti [reported](#) Friday.

The hunting trip with senior local and federal officials, including the Kremlin's envoy to the Duma, Alexander Kosopkin, ended in a crash that killed Kosopkin and six others. Four people survived.

In March, the Altai District Court acquitted the three defendants, but the region's top court

ordered a retrial with a new team of judges in August.

Although initial reports of the crash made no mention of the illegal hunt, environmentalists released photographs showing dead Argali sheep near the helicopter's wreckage.

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