

# Ecology NGO Declared 'Foreign Agent' Over Grant From Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation

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Sakhalin Environment Watch, an NGO devoted to protecting the nature of Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands in Russia's Far East, will try to overturn the decision of the Justice Ministry to add it to the list of “foreign agents,” the Interfax news agency reported Monday.

The organization was declared a “foreign agent” — a label with strong espionage connotations in Russia that is applied to organizations which receive funding from abroad and are engaged in loosely defined political activity — last Friday for receiving a grant from the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation, according to Interfax.

“We are appalled by this decision and will appeal it,” Dmitry Lisitsyn, the NGO's director, was cited by Interfax as saying Monday. “We think it doesn't comply with the Russian law. We have never been involved in any political activity, have never planned to and never will,” he

said.

Sakhalin Environment Watch operates with the help of grants from charity foundations around the world that support environmental projects, said Lisitsyn.

“We choose ecological foundations that can support the particular sphere of activity we wish to pursue. This scheme works well, it makes organizations like ours independent in the full sense of the word,” he said.

In Russia the only foundation devoted to environment protection, according to Lisitsyn, is Fond Vernadskogo, owned and financed by Russian state-owned gas giant Gazprom.

“We can't ask them for financing, because among other things we monitor Gazprom's activities on Sakhalin from the point of view of ecology. We can't take money from Gazprom, it would be a conflict of interest,” he said.

U.S. actor Leonardo DiCaprio set up his environmental foundation in 1998.

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