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Russian Ecology NGO Returns DiCaprio Grant Over 'Foreign Agent' Label

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Sakhalin Environment Watch had received $159,000 earlier this year from the foundation set up by the U.S. actor.

A Russian NGO has returned a grant it received from the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation after being labeled a “foreign agent” last week, it said Wednesday in an online statement.

Sakhalin Environment Watch had received $159,000 earlier this year from the foundation set up by the U.S. actor that it had planned to spend on the conservation of wild salmon in the region. About $30,000 received from the U.S.-based Wild Salmon Center will also be returned, the NGO said, adding it would refuse all foreign funding in the future.

Russia's Justice Ministry last Friday included the environmental protection group in Russia's Far East on a list of “foreign agents,” — a label attached to NGOs that receive foreign funding and are engaged in activities deemed political.

The NGO earlier denied it was involved in any political activity and said in the statement it would defend that position in court “until the very end.”

The Sakhalin group said it would close down if the moves proved insufficient to get it removed from the “foreign agents” registry.

In the absence of foreign funding, the NGO appealed to Sakhalin residents to give it financial support for its projects.

“Now we can count only on you!” the statement said.

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