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Putin Abandons Plan to Help Endangered Sochi Leopards

By The Moscow Times

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Russia is backing out of a former pledge to help endangered leopards in Sochi, the Foreign Policy news outlet reported Friday.

Persian leopards used to call Sochi home. Right now only around 1,000 of the leopards remain in the world: in the late 19th century, hunting and habitat loss almost completely eliminated the population.

In 2006, Russia's Natural Resources and Environment Ministry said it would help reintroduce leopards back into the area in an effort to compensate for the ecological damage caused by preparations for the Sochi Olympic, the report said.

During the past few years, however, Russia has all but abandoned this project, allowing expansion for a ski resort owned by billionaire Vladimir Potanin to occur in the same places where the leopards would have been reintroduced.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has supported expansions for the ski resort, though the possibility remains that he will withdraw the proposal or ask to postpone it. In the meantime, biologists fear that the resort will stop leopards from ever again inhabiting the area, Foreign Policy reported.

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