

Russian Amendments Legalize Trophy Hunting of Endangered Species, Activists Say

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New amendments permit the killing of rare and endangered species in “exceptional cases.” **Kirill Kukhmar / TASS**

New amendments to Russia’s hunting law will effectively legalize trophy hunting of endangered animals, Greenpeace activists [said](#) Monday.

Russia is home to 13 endangered species: the Amur tiger, Central Asian and Far Eastern leopard, snow leopard, bison, saiga, Przewalski's horse, Altai mountain sheep, gazelle, polar bear, Siberian crane, bowhead whale and gray whale.

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According to the [amendments](#), which enter into force Monday, the killing of rare and

endangered species listed in Russia's Red Book is permissible in "exceptional cases." The amendments also note that animals may only be hunted for research and education or "for the purpose of acclimatization, resettlement and hybridization of hunting resources."

While the amendments forbid actions "that can lead to the death, reduction in the number or violation of the habitat" of Red Book species, Greenpeace says that the language used effectively lifts the ban on killing these species where the law previously only allowed their capture.

"If shooting used to be expressly prohibited in the old hunting law, now there is no such thing," Mikhail Kreindlin, the head of Greenpeace Russia's program for specially protected areas, told the Govorit Moskva radio station.

"We believe that the hunting lobby in the [lower-house State] Duma asked for these amendments in order to be able to hunt Red Book animals under the guise of hunting for scientific purposes," he added, saying that Russia's elite could simply pay scientists off to justify their hunting.

The amendments were authored by State Duma deputies Vladislav Reznik, head of the committee on natural resources; Nikolai Valuev, first deputy chairman of the committee on ecology and environmental protection; Nikolai Nikolayev and Maxim Shchablykin.

According to the Kommersant business daily, Reznik is a member of the elite "Mountain Hunters' Club." The clubm headed by former FSB special forces officer Eduard Bendersky, previously requested five permits to hunt the Putorana snow sheep, a rare species listed in the Red Book.

Other environmental activists disputed Kreindlin's claims that the amended hunting law would enable unhindered trophy hunting, however.

"The wording does not fundamentally change anything, because the issuance or non-issuance of permits will depend not on scientists, but on [state environmental watchdog] Rosprirodnadzor," Vladimir Krever, the scientific director of WWF Russia's biodiversity conservation program, [told](#) Kommersant. "Although, of course, the old wording, when the hunting of Red Book species is absolutely prohibited, is better."

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