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Russian Environmentalists Call On Putin to Revoke WWF's 'Foreign Agent' Status

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An Amur tiger photographed in the wild. **Vladimir Filonov / WWF Russia**

More than 60 environmental groups in Russia have called on President Vladimir Putin and the Justice Ministry to remove the "foreign agents" label from the Russian chapter of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

"We consider the listing of the WWF as a foreign agent to be extremely erroneous, unfair and unreasonable," the activists said in a joint statement published Tuesday.

"We are convinced that this decision will negatively affect the preservation of the unique nature of our country," the statement continues.

The statement's 62 signatories include environmental groups from regions in the Russian Far East, Siberia, the Urals, the Volga region and the Kola Peninsula.

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Agent'

The Justice Ministry added WWF Russia to its registry of "foreign agents" on March 10.

Organizations and individuals designated as "foreign agents" in Russia are subject to rigorous auditing and labeling requirements. Authorities have used the law to discredit those on the list and suppress dissent.

In its statement explaining the designation, the Justice Ministry accused the WWF of seeking to "influence the decisions of the executive and legislative authorities" and hindering "the implementation of industrial and infrastructure projects," all while acting "under the guise of protecting nature and the environment."

In past years, President Vladimir Putin had met with WWF officials to discuss a number of ecological issues, and highlighted the group's efforts to protect snow leopards from poaching, to return leopards to their habitats in the Caucasus region and to protect Amur Tiger populations.

Major Russian state companies like oil giant Rosneft and bank VTB had also collaborated with WWF on nature conservation projects.

Since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine last February, a number of Russian environmental groups have shut down after being named "foreign agents."

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