The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Nature Reserve Seeks $4.6 Mln from Norway Over Reindeer Damages

August 04, 2023



A reindeer on the Salen lookout in Hammerfest, Norway. **Simo Räsänen (CC BY-SA 4.0)**

Authorities in northern Russia are seeking millions of dollars in damages from neighboring Norway after a herd of reindeer crossed over the border and damaged a protected nature reserve last winter, The Barents Observer reported.

Natalya Polikarpova, director of the Murmansk region's Pasvik nature reserve, said the animals ate away moss and shrubs and trampled ground vegetation between December 2022 and January 2023, leading to soil erosion and plant life degradation.

The nature reserve, which was established in 1992, stretches for 44 kilometers along the border of Russia and Norway. It provides a habitat for over 3,000 species, including five endangered species on the IUCN Red List.

Polikarpova says the damage caused by the reindeer amounts to 47 million Norwegian kroner ($4.6 million).

“A detailed calculation was presented to the Norwegian side with the given formula and documents on the basis of which the calculations were made,” Polikarpova told local media last month.

Related article: Russia and China Plan Cross-Border Protected Zone for Tigers and Leopards

The requested amount slightly exceeds the Murmansk region’s total 2022 federal funding for maintaining its “specially protected natural areas,” according to government statistics.

Polikarpova added that the reindeer are privately owned by Norwegian herders.

“It turns out, their reindeer eat with us, and then Norwegian herders use them for meat," explained Polikarpova. "If we had wild reindeer [on the Russian side of the reserve], there would be no questions to Norway, because then it would be a common population."

An independent expert in Russian protected areas conservation, who asked not to share their name, told The Moscow Times that reindeer could indeed have caused damage in the area, given their large numbers and the size of the Pasvik reserve.

“The reserve is very small, and there are quite a lot of animals. They really trample and eat moss,” the expert said.

“This is the northwest of the Kola Peninsula, where there is a very thin layer of moss. If it is destroyed, it will not recover for a long time. This can greatly impact the ecosystem.”

The expert added that the case goes in contradiction with a 1977 Russian-Norwegian agreement that requires Russia to allow such animals to move across the border into Russia.

At the same time, the expert could not recall similar incidents in the past involving one country filing a claim with another over harm done to protected nature sites.

Norway has yet to respond to the demands made by the Murmansk regional authorities, who say they are ready to turn to the Russian Foreign Ministry and proceed through intergovernmental channels if action is not taken.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/08/04/russian-nature-reserve-seeks-46-mln-from-norway-over-reindeer-damages-a82046