

VNII «Ecology», IPEE RAS

Marine tourism, its impact on the polar bear and the Okhotsk Sea population of the Bowhead whale, and the regulatory framework

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Polar bears (*Ursus maritimus*) live in ice-covered waters throughout the Arctic, where they prey primarily on ice-bound seals.

The remoteness of their habitats in Arctic sea ice has historically led to fewer interactions with humans compared to other bear species.

However, in recent years, the number and duration of polar bears' stay on land have increased as a result of the reduction in the area of summer sea ice.



In some areas, there has been a noticeable increase in the interaction of the animal with people, including as a result of the intensification of tourism and recreation. The review (Rode et al., 2018) lists five potential consequences of exposure to tourist and recreational activities on polar bears: 1) short-term or long-term displacement from the habitat, 2) behavior change, 3) protection of human life and cases of shooting the animal in collisions with people, 4) abandonment of shelters 5) addiction, which can lead to increased conflicts between a man and a bear.



Based on the findings and recommendations of Rode et al (2018) and other publications, the IUCN Polar Bear Specialist Group issued the following resolution at its last online meeting in June 2021:

Recognizing that polar bear viewing conducted on-foot, by tundra vehicles, snowmobiles, boats, cruise ships, drones, and aircraft is an important component of the northern tourism economy, but also a source of potentially negative human-bear interactions; and

Recognizing concern among local communities, managers, and scientists that viewing-based tourism could increase polar bear habituation to people, reduce a bear's normal level of caution, and consequently increase dangerous interactions; and

Recognizing that increasing loss of sea ice habitat as a result of ongoing climate warming is resulting in higher numbers of food-stressed polar bears fasting on land for longer periods of time and that this increases the potential for negative human-bear interactions; and

Recognizing that increasingly food-stressed human-conditioned bears may be less likely to be deterred using typical non-lethal methods; and

Recognizing that potential impacts of polar bear-based tourism are poorly studied; therefore

Recommends that the Range States and other organizations coordinate development or refinement of guidelines to ensure the safest possible management of polar bear viewing tourism and urges the Range States and relevant agencies to initiate studies on how different types of tourism practices may be influencing polar bears and develop procedures to minimize the effects of tourists on polar bears, and only increase viewing activities if such actions are deemed to be in accordance with scientifically sound conservation practices



Rode et al (2018)

Measures to minimize the negative impact of tourism on the polar bear have been developed and are being improved in many areas of the foreign Arctic.

For example, Svalbard has established snowmobile routes to minimize disturbance in the spring, and strict legislation to protect bears from disturbance.

In Alaska, the Arctic Wildlife Refuge has developed best practices for observing polar bears and established a permitting process for commercial tours of polar bear habitats on land and in water.



Analysis of materials on tourism in the regions of the Russian Arctic, where the polar bear is present, shows that:

- in such areas, many tourists use every opportunity to take a closer look and photograph the animal, but often neglect safety measures
- only in the Arctic state reserves and national parks, where tourism is especially active, are measures taken to prevent the negative impact of tourism on the polar bear. However, the question is, are they sufficient and what needs to be done to further improve them?



Legal framework at the national level for the conservation of polar bears in Russia after the introduction of a hunting ban since 1957

The most important for the conservation of polar bears are:

- Federal Laws "On Protection of the Environment" (2002), "On Wildlife" (1995), "On Natural Protected Areas" (1995)
- "Strategy for the Conservation of Rare, Endangered Species of Animals, Plants and Fungi in the Russian Federation until 2030" (2014)
- Listing the polar bear in the Federal and regional Red Data Books



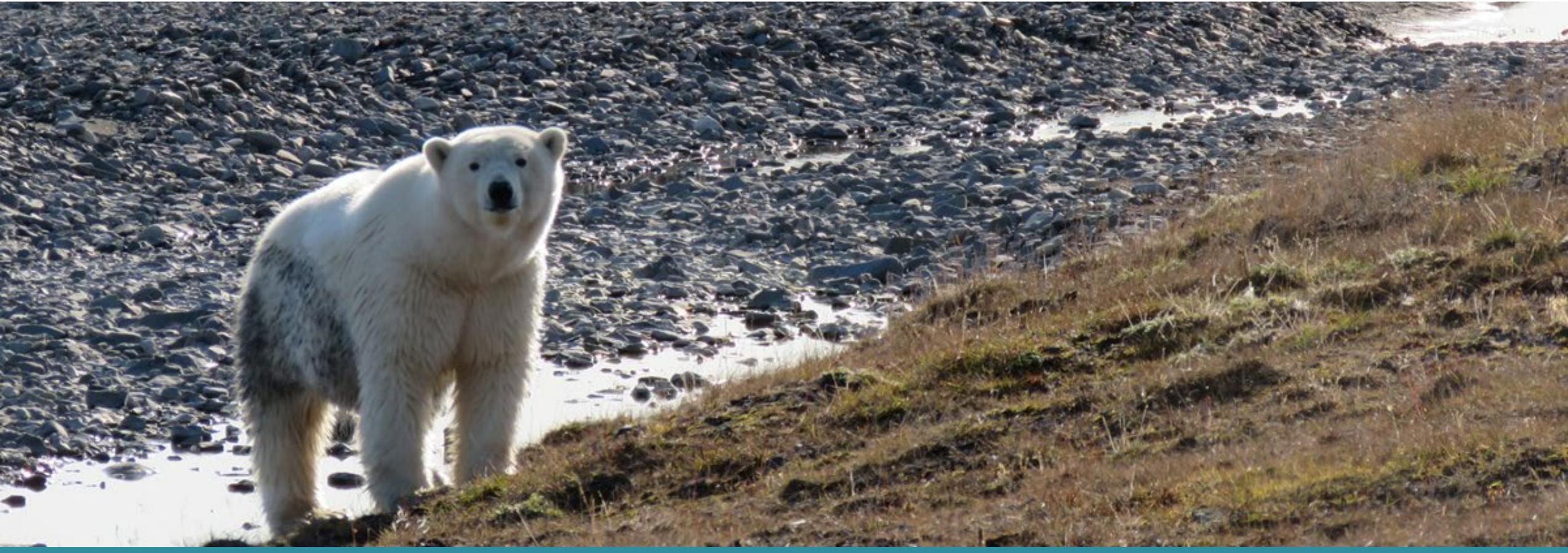
In Russia, activities related to ecological tourism are regulated by legislative acts, among which the law "On the foundations of tourist activities in the Russian Federation" should be mentioned.

In 2020, in Russia, in accordance with the federal project "Conservation of Biodiversity and Development of Ecological Tourism", the polar bear is included as one of the indicators of the Arctic environment. Another 12 species and populations, including the Sea of Okhotsk population of bowhead whales, are included in the federal project. For all species and populations included in the federal project, draft Conservation and Restoration Strategies have been developed.



In the draft Strategy for the Conservation of Polar Bears in the Russian Federation, which is being approved by the Ministry of Natural Resources of Russia, considerable attention is paid to the development and implementation of a program for the development of ecological tourism in areas where polar bears are common.

There is a need for clear and understandable rules for tourists visiting the places of stay of polar bears, behavior when meeting with an animal, as well as environmental education in order to prevent feeding animals.



Within the framework of these programs, it should be provided to reduce the disturbance factor for polar bears, exclude certain areas, and prohibit visits to dens in the spring.

To ensure the safety of tourists, it is necessary to provide them with personal protective equipment against a possible attack of the beast.

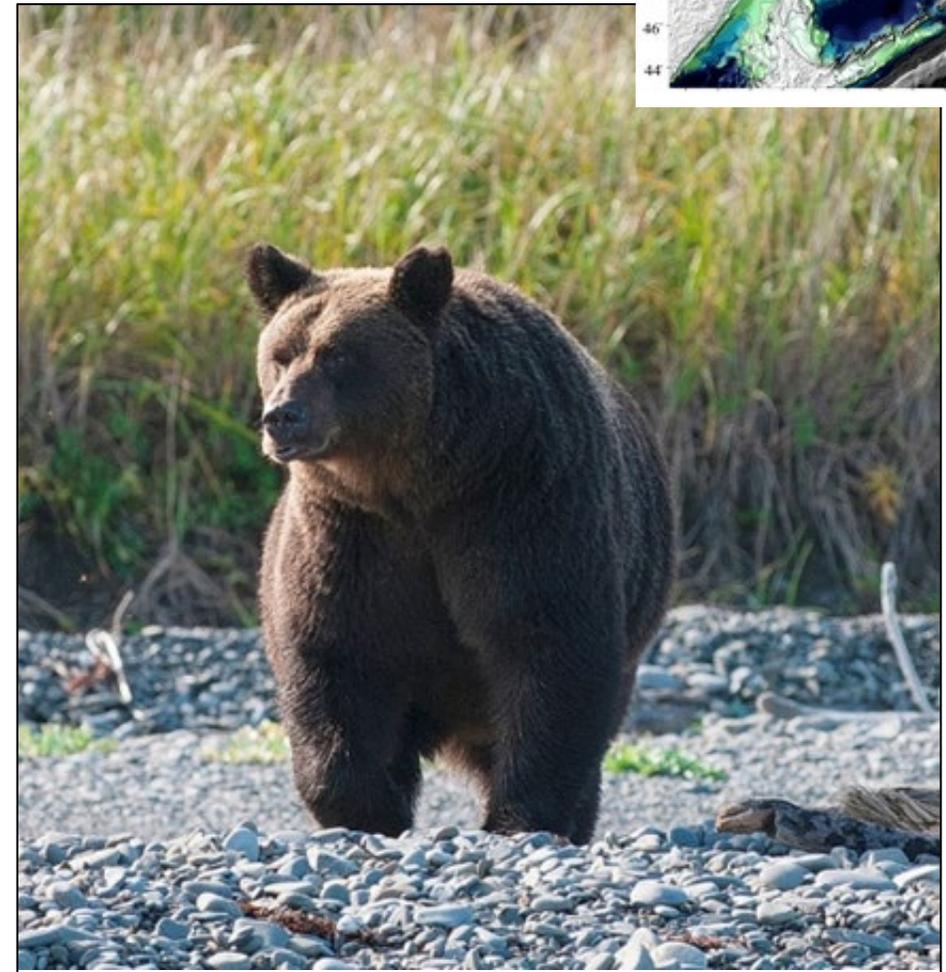
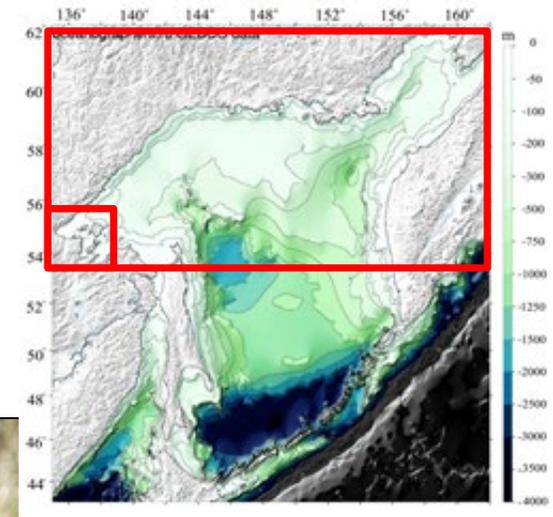
Personnel accompanying tourists must be trained in the use of personal protective equipment, and all rules and restrictions are communicated to travel companies organizing tours to the Arctic, after which repeated violations are practically not allowed.



Thus, the task is to create a modern, competitive and environmentally safe tourist complex, which, on the one hand, provides ample opportunities to meet the aesthetic, cognitive and recreational needs of Russian and foreign citizens, on the other hand, a contribution to the development of the system for the preservation of Arctic natural complexes.



OKHOTSK SEA: POLAR WHALES FROM THE BROWN BEAR LAND



The bowhead whales (*Balaena mysticetus*) of the Okhotsk Sea comprise a small, isolated population, which occupies the southernmost region of the species' range.

They never leave the Okhotsk Sea and spend summers in its western part, at the latitude of Moscow, in the mainland bays to the south of Shantar Islands Archipelago. The population is IUCN-Red-listed as Endangered, and if declining trend is confirmed, it will be categorised as Critically Endangered.



'SHANTAR ISLANDS' TOURIST DESTINATION HAS TURNED INTO WHALE-WATCHING MECCA

Официальный сайт Правительства Хабаровского края

Подписаться на новости Сегодня 07 декабря 2021 18:49:03 Обновлено 15 минут назад

Новости Анонсы Настройка Обращения 76 лет Победы Открытые данные Помощь бизнесу Город Президентского внимания

Главная / События / Новости

С развитием круизного судоходства Шантарские острова станут доступнее для туристов

22 августа 2018 г. в Хабаровске



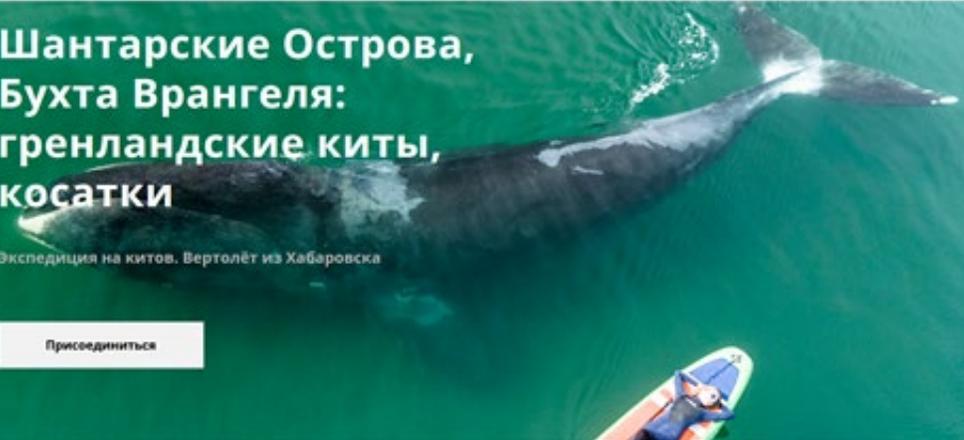
Туристический потенциал территории и перспективы развития приграничных районов края обсудили сегодня в Хабаровске. Так, в регионе продолжается работа по созданию круизного маршрута в рамках реализации туристско-рекреационного кластера «Остров Большой Уссурийский – Шантары». Строительство инфраструктурных объектов по проекту будет способствовать удешевлению туров на архипелаг. Об этом сообщил на пресс-конференции заместитель Председателя Правительства края – министр культуры Александр Федосов.

Начиная с 2014 года, Хабаровский край является активным участником федеральной целевой программы «Развитие внутреннего и въездного туризма в РФ на 2011–2018 годы». В рамках реализации круизного туристско-рекреационного кластера «Остров Большой Уссурийский – Шантары» за счет софинансирования из средств федерального бюджета в сумме 632,5 млн рублей в текущем году будут завершены берегоукрепительные работы.

Team Trip

Шантарские Острова, Бухта Врангеля: гренландские киты, косатки

Экспедиция на китов. Вертолёт из Хабаровска



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Сезоны

Регионы

Азия

Туры на Шантарские острова к китам

[Фото](#) [Карта](#)



Сивучи, киты и морские птицы, Шантарские и Лисие острова, Магаданской заповедник

Раннее бронирование



Шантарские острова Архипелаг открытий. Экспедиция на Шантарские острова

Раннее бронирование



Шантарские острова Китовая бухта. Тур на Шантарские острова с вертолётной заборской

Раннее бронирование

Остается на ваши вопросы!

Ten years ago, rare and small Russian tourist groups have visited the area to see the remote and “mystic” Shantar Islands. Marine mammals were hardly mentioned as attraction.

Starting 2015, after a tourist base was established in the cove near Wrangel cape, where bowhead whales concentrate quite predictably and in large numbers, whale-watching and swim-with-whales tours quickly superseded other types of adventure tourism, with both Russian and international tourists and film-crews overbooking small local tourist businesses. Cruise ships now also deviate from their regular routes to show the whales. Zodiac-driven whale-watching tours from large cruise-liners are now advertised as a zest of the cruise and soon may crowd up the cove in addition to already numerous tourist boats belonging to local tour operators.

SUP-boarders, divers and free-swimmers spend days in the water with whales. In recent two years, another known place of bowhead whale aggregation became a spot for the second whale-watching camp. With a fast development of tourism, especially in the time of pandemic, when most popular destinations are closed, bowhead whale-watching in the Shantar region will spread into all known spots where whales come close to shore and can be approached. With plans to improve Shantar travel logistics by building an air-strip on the Big Shantar Island, the number of tourists may further increase in the order of magnitude within the next 3-4 years.

BUSINESS **VERSUS** CONSERVATION

Khabarovsk Government stimulates mining industry, commercial fishing, shipping and tourism in the western Okhotsk Sea

National Park “Shantar Islands” sets tourism development as priority task

No unified system to define critical habitats for endangered species and regulate industrial development in such areas

No special laws/rules to regulate Whale-watching



BUSINESS **VERSUS** CONSERVATION

Khabarovsk Government has taken course on industrial and tourism development in the western Okhotsk Sea. The system of protected areas in Russia (Zapovedniks, reserves, national parks) is also undergoing dangerous changes by setting priority of tourism development over preserving biodiversity.

The conflict of industrial (including tourism) development and conservation of nature may only be solved by implementing effective and transparent regulations for business and preserving at least most critical habitats for endangered species and high biodiversity spots. No regulations, except for very general federal laws concerning biodiversity, exist to-date.

BUSINESS AND CONSERVATION

Ministry of Nature Resources and Ecology

Federal Project *Conservation of Biological Diversity and Ecological Tourism Development*

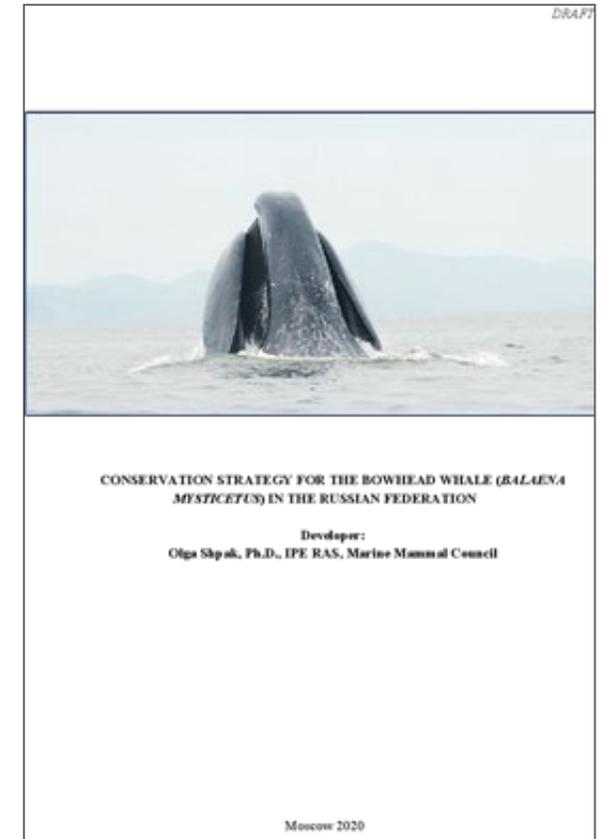
Initiative *Business and Biodiversity*

EXPERT SECTION CREATED IN 2021

- Development and implementation of Conservation Strategy (at pre-final draft stage)
- Scientific support for the preparation of biodiversity conservation programs for commercial organizations
- Raising of extrabudgetary resources and funds for conservation of endangered whales

The Ultimate goal is conserving the biodiversity (in our case: Okhotsk Bowhead whales) and sustainable development of the region

IMPORTANT: CONSERVATION ≠ BUSINESS



In 2021, the Ministry of Nature Resources and Ecology established Cetacean expert section in the framework of the Federal Project “Conservation of Biological Diversity and Ecological Tourism Development” and “Business and Biodiversity” initiative. The National Strategy for the conservation of the Okhotsk Bowhead whale population has been drafted, and now is at it’s final stage of development. The Section includes scientists, conservationists as well as representatives of business and fisheries institute. In tense discussions between the opposing sides, it is crucial to find a solution, which would not be “stillbirth”, but an effective compromise to save biodiversity and support sustainable development of the region.

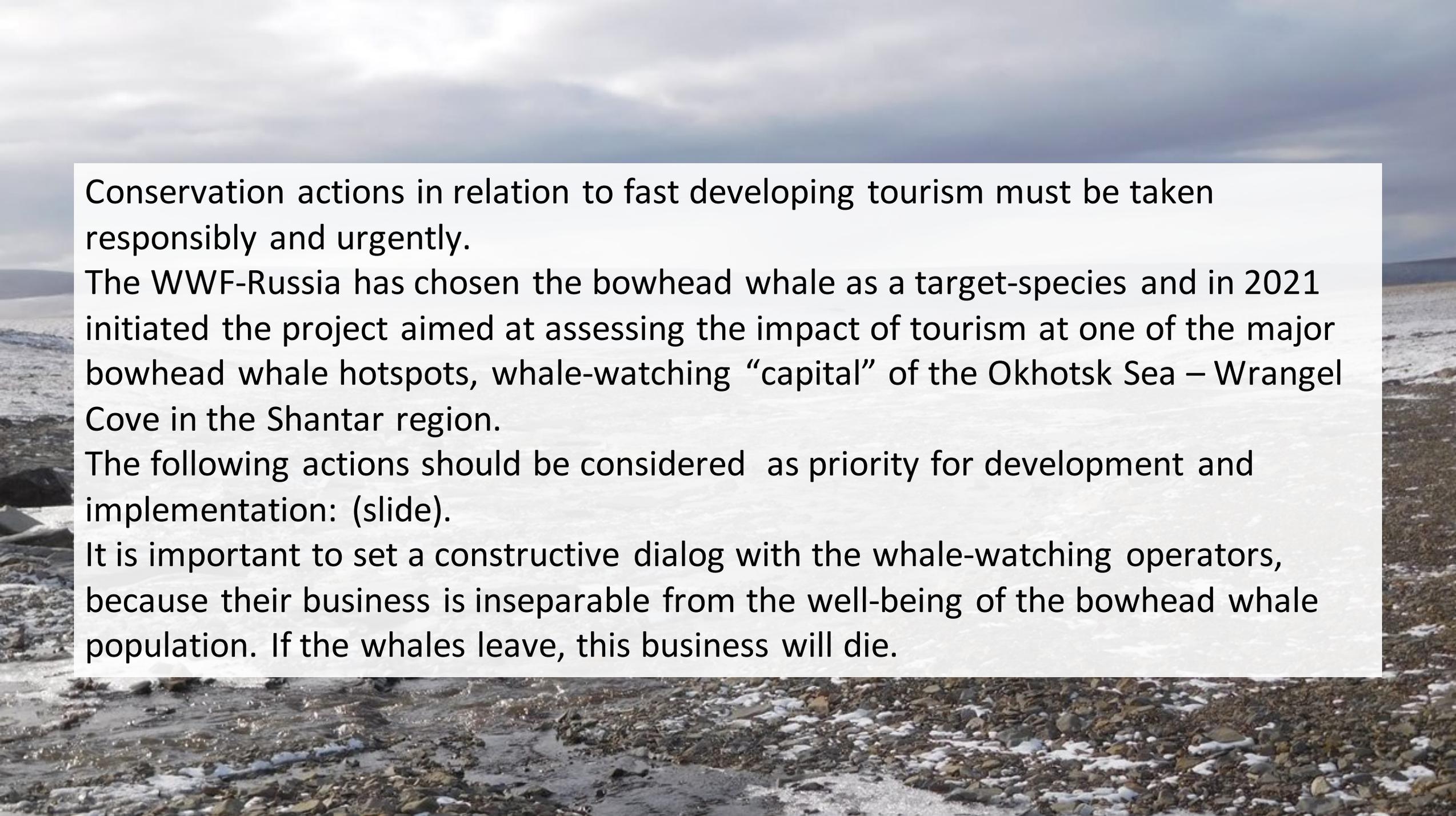


URGENT MEASURES (TOURISM)

2021-2022 project funded by WWF-Russia

- Defining critical habitats
- Assessing tourist activities and impact
- Establishing system of monitoring tourist activities
- Tourist / boat number restrictions
- Regulation of boat-based whale-watching (rules)
- Restriction of “swim-with-whales” options
- Creation of MPAs and Rest (tourist-free) zones in critical habitats
- Regulations on using drones over whales
- Regulations on waste and chemical discharge from coastal bases
- Broad education programmes for tourist operators
- Raising general public awareness





Conservation actions in relation to fast developing tourism must be taken responsibly and urgently.

The WWF-Russia has chosen the bowhead whale as a target-species and in 2021 initiated the project aimed at assessing the impact of tourism at one of the major bowhead whale hotspots, whale-watching “capital” of the Okhotsk Sea – Wrangel Cove in the Shantar region.

The following actions should be considered as priority for development and implementation: (slide).

It is important to set a constructive dialog with the whale-watching operators, because their business is inseparable from the well-being of the bowhead whale population. If the whales leave, this business will die.



**Thank you for
your attention!**

