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Illegal recreational hunting in Russia: the role of social norms and elite violators

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Poaching in Russia has been reported to be of catastrophic proportions and threatens maintenance of biodiversity. Management of game species has stabilized some numbers, but both endangered species listed in the Russian *Red Book* and animals traditionally viewed as hunting prey are diminishing in some regions. Rank-and-file hunters, increasingly shut off from access to hunting grounds, have expressed a negative reaction to new hunting regulations adopted by the Russian government in 2012. While high-profile poaching incidents by so-called “VIP hunters” do not apparently make up a large portion of cases, the symbolism of the alleged crimes has a derogatory impact on ordinary hunters because lawlessness is reinforced by perceptions of impunity for elite poachers.

Keywords: Russia; hunting; poaching; wildlife crime; power elite

The wild boar are disappearing everywhere, as well as the hunters themselves ... (Shalygin 2014)

Introduction: wildlife poaching in the context of Russian environmental management

The Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics drew the world’s attention to issues of environmental management in Russia. The Russian Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology (MNR) released its 2013 report on the status of the environment calling in part for stricter measures of accountability for those who violated norms (MNR 2013). Scholars have explored the link between environmental damage in Russia and crime, corruption, and the need to build a stronger civil society (Feldman 2012; Feldman and Blokov 2009; Stoecker and Shakirova 2013). Russian judicial scholar, Sverdnyukov (2014), noted that the most numerous cases of environmental crime, those “making up the majority of all registered ecological crimes,” involve illegal taking of wildlife and forest resources (158). Newell and Simeone (2014, 40, 49–51), have likewise verified the destruction of Russian forests, driven by patterns in the global market and attributable largely to “unregulated” harvest of timber and corruption in government agencies.

In this paper, I examine illegal recreational hunting in Russia as an environmental crime. Sergey Donskoy, head of MNR, noted in an interview (Smol’yakova 2013) that the monetary value in Russia of poached wildlife in 2012 was estimated to be 18 billion rubles, while legitimate hunting profits were 16.2 billion (author’s note: at the December

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2012 exchange rate, reflecting ruble value at the time, the figures would be US \$576 million and US \$518 million correspondingly). The Russian Government recognized the threat to wildlife in 2012 by adopting new regulations with stricter enforcement and higher penalties, and in 2014, adopted a strategic plan through the year 2030 to improve the sustainability of the hunting economy (MNR 2014).

The investigation presented here is a survey of material gleaned from the Russian press, government reports, environmental organizations, and social media forums that express concerns of recreational hunters over the new laws and trends in designation of hunting lands, underscoring a perception that rank-and-file hunters are excluded increasingly from resources. An analysis of these sources suggests that continued impunity by the power elite who violate hunting regulations and suffer little consequences may seriously undermine societal adherence to the new legal regime.

The general public is exposed to violations by “VIP hunters” (a term used frequently in Russian media; see Popova 2011) via reports online, in newspapers, on broadcast news, and even by the poachers themselves who sometimes place videos of their actions on YouTube. For example, in December 2012, a petition from residents in the Lysye Gory region of Saratov Oblast’ was directed to Vladimir Putin, complaining of poaching by named local court officials and stating in part, “... we consider such behavior a sign of lawlessness and a feudal system! ... It is not acceptable that in our forest reserves poaching occurs, even more so by such high-placed persons” (FreeNews Volga 2013).

For his part, Vladimir Putin has emphasized his love of wilderness and nature conservation in Russia through public appearances and even during interviews with the western press (Young 2011). These images of Putin-the-outdoorsman follow from a long narrative of Russian leaders who fish and hunt, fitting the idea of *nastoyashchiye muzhiki* (“real guys,” a concept discussed in detail below). When applying this masculine image of power to the new laws on hunting, four propositions emerge:

- (1) Recreational hunters argue that they are facing increased monopolistic control of hunting land and game resources by a high-income elite. Moving to privatized, entrepreneurial management of game resources could be inhibited if people perceive restricted entry that is stacked against non-VIP actors.
- (2) Flaws in the structure of new hunting regulations adopted by the Duma in 2012 may decrease their effectiveness in reducing poaching. Additionally, regulations at the local or regional level are often unclear to hunters who try to equate them with the federal system.
- (3) While damage to game population management may be the outcome of impunity by VIP hunters, I suggest that the more serious impact may be reinforcing perceptions of general lawlessness in Russian society.
- (4) Normative expectations of behavior should be evaluated in any assessment of an effective management regime for wildlife conservation. More stringent laws may be undermined if economic and civil penalties are perceived as applied disproportionately to lower income, less powerful violators.

Background: The literature on “green criminality” and poaching

Wildlife poaching is increasingly treated as a serious crime, recognized as such by the February 2014 London Conference on Illegal Wildlife Trade, hosted by the government of the United Kingdom (Brashares et al. 2014; Coghlan 2014; CNN, July 24, 2014;

Government of the United Kingdom 2014). While such attention to so-called “green criminality” is welcomed by the international community, methodology on actual monitoring of such crimes remains elusive. A complement to economic and jurisdictional approaches to green crime monitoring is in the realm of social norms and cultural contexts.

Thus, the literature survey here is an initial glimpse at *motivation* for poaching, particularly when examining illegal taking of wildlife not for economic gain, but to express power through impunity. Precedents for this focus exist in other geographic contexts; for example, Eliason (2004), drawing upon field interviews, examined motivations for poaching in the case of hunters in the state of Kentucky. A sociological analysis in the United States was conducted by Forsyth and Marckese (1993), who noted that excitement and the desire to “outsmart” game wardens explained the behaviors of the subjects interviewed. Similarly, research has been done on motivations for poaching in low income, rural communities of the former USSR in the case of saiga antelope (Kühl et al. 2009). Alexander Bondarev, head of World Wide Fund for Nature’s Altay-Sayan regional office, also examined motivation and argued that the high rate of regional unemployment may contribute to local poaching problems (World Wide Fund for Nature-Russia 2014b). Illegal hunting related to subsistence livelihoods and the general decline of rural communities in Russia does bear further exploration (Makarova 2014, ch. 3; South and Wyatt 2011; Wyatt 2009), but the continued prevalence of high-profile cases by elite power actors suggests that examination of social norms and attitudes of both ordinary hunters and so-called “VIP hunters” toward illegal activities would be of value to evaluate the effectiveness of the new hunting regulations.

Implications of these propositions extend far beyond the realm of game management. Results of the investigation below demonstrate the conclusion by Feldman and Blokov (2009) in their work on promoting an environmental civil society in Russia that attitudinal hurdles can be as important as legal and political obstacles to achieve an improved environmental ethic. They note,

the rise of “environmental crime,” defined as cases of public or private malfeasance and/or negligence that is technically prosecutable under the law, but has in fact been difficult to prosecute – has increased dramatically in recent years. This may help explain our survey finding that regulatory bodies and courts are viewed as relatively ineffective. (737)

Even sophisticated transborder wildlife supply chains begin at the local level; therefore, environmental and governmental agencies have embraced community involvement or community-based policing. But methods that may be effective in one geographic context, such as cases of wildlife destruction in African states, may not necessarily transfer to the Russian setting. In her dissertation for the Saratov Judicial Institute, Bratashova (2011) examined green crime associated with wildlife in Russia and concluded that laws perceived as too lax did indeed contribute to the growing problem, but she also concluded that understanding the characteristics of the crimes was important to strengthen the laws. The WWF-Russia conducted a study of reported animal and fish poaching cases from the year 2000–2010 and determined that 5 percent of cases involved accused *chinovniki* (government officials), another 25–35 percent were low-income rural people, and the remainder were those engaged in commercial illegal activities. Despite the actual data, the report noted that the general public *perceived* the portion of cases by accused government officials to be much higher (Polyanskaya 2013).

Von Essen et al. (2014, 9–10) have suggested that the phenomenon of poaching may be deconstructed to a typology of activities, and that past emphasis on utility maximization models may be less useful than understanding a normative perspective of what motivates a poacher. The fields of social psychology and criminal psychology used by these researchers aid in the analysis of the normative perspective by looking at socialization and deviant behaviors within cultures. The typology of illegal hunting created by Von Essen et al. includes livelihood crime, folk crime, and sociopolitical crime. Such a typology approach may be extended in the Russian context to create a framework of *motivation* for poaching.

- (1) *Organized criminal activity and trans-border crime.* This is causing the greatest loss of biodiversity in Russia and receives the most publicity in the Russian and international press. The motivation is utility maximization in the sense of pure economic profit. Notorious cases involve poaching of endangered iconic species such as Siberian tigers, snow leopards, and Amur leopards; bears for bile trade; musk deer for illegal perfume ingredients; birds of prey for falconry; sturgeon from the Volga for caviar; and fish stocks in Kamchatka. These crimes have received considerable attention from enforcement agencies of international treaties such as CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), as well as from environmental organizations (Homes 2004; Theile 2003) and scholars (Beitman 2013; Ishigeyev and Bondar 2013; Reeve 2006; South and Wyatt 2011; Wyatt 2009). WWF-Russia and Trade Records Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce pressured the Russian Government to tighten fines for illegal taking of wildlife, resulting in the new 2012 legislation with vastly increased financial penalties for those convicted of poaching endangered species and conducting trans-border trade (Traffic International 2013). Prison terms up to seven years and fines up to two million rubles now can be imposed on people caught poaching tigers in Russia.
- (2) *Foreign trophy hunters and hunting ecotourism.* With the fall of the USSR, foreign hunters purchasing guide services setup by Russian companies began to flood into the country for trophy hunting of big game such as bear and sheep. The sustainability of the activity is questioned because of hunters' preferences for large males or rarity, often upsetting the population dynamics of a herd (Palazy et al. 2012). The proposition that commercial trophy hunting of animals listed in the Russian Red Book of Endangered Species might be a fundraising conservation tool has been challenged vigorously by environmental organizations in Russia, such as WWF-Russia. Delisting Altay argali sheep (*Ovis Ammon*) to permit their trophy hunting received negative press response (Novaya gazeta 2014) and was opposed by WWF-Russia and Greenpeace-Russia, as well as other environmental organizations, such as The Altai Project (Tekeyev 2014; The Altai Project 2014). The outcry caused the Russian government to delay the idea at the time of this writing.
- (3) *Hunting inspectors, reserve guards or rangers, border guards, and other opportunistic poachers.* Often, the violators are the very people charged with preventing the crime, and this outcome seems to be motivated by economic pressure. Issues have been raised about the pay rate for inspectors, the very large areas they are responsible for, and the diminished funding for nature reserve support by the Russian Government (Braden 2008; Braden and Prudnikova 2008; Safonova 2007). The average salary per month for a reserve inspector in 2012 was equivalent to US

\$375 (Shalygin 2013b). Minister Sergey Donskoy reported in 2012 that there were 3500 inspectors on duty throughout Russian hunting grounds, averaging 450,000 hectares each (Smol'yakova 2013). By comparison, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that in 2013 there were 6640 fish and game wardens employed in the United States with an average monthly wage 11 times higher than the average in Russia (United States Department of Labor 2013).

- (4) *VIP hunters among the Russian power elite or wealthy*. South and Wyatt (2011) noted personal communication in 2007 from representatives at Phoenix, a Russian non-governmental organization (NGO), stating, “another category of poachers is those people who are not rich but that they have some protected position or know someone. For example, a chief of police or a prosecutor knows that there will not be any sanctions against them because of their position in society” (547).

The terms used in the Russian media for such illegal recreational hunting are *chernoye safari* (black safari; Racheva 2009), *tikhaya okhota* (quiet hunt), and *tsarskaya okhota* (Tsarist hunting; Zaitseva 2013). Elitist disregard for the boundaries of nature reserves or hunting norms has been a long tradition dating back to Soviet times, as documented by Ze'ev Wolfson in his 1980 exposé of environmental crises (Komarov 1980, 75–90). Many of the problems he outlined appear similar to complaints about poachers in the current period: lax enforcement, lack of sufficient number of inspectors, courts that look the other way, and impunity by political elite.

- (5) *Non-elite hunters*. The new hunting regulations make special provision for indigenous communities that have traditionally hunted for subsistence, but many rural people of Russian heritage have by necessity supplemented protein through hunting.¹

Additionally, both rural and urban Russians hunt for recreation. The bulk of arrests, fines, and prosecutions for illegal hunting has been attributed to violations by such hunters who do not fall into the high income or power elite category.

Biologist Makarova (2014) analyzed a database of over 300,000 violations of wildlife laws in Russia from 1999 to 2005 and drew conclusions about the type of people who most often are apprehended (19). She noted that a decline in citations paralleled the decline of rural populations in Russia, a phenomenon also examined by Ioffe, Nefedova, and others in terms of land abandonment and overall impoverished economies in the countryside (Ioffe, Nefedova, and De Beurs 2012; Ioffe, Nefedova, and Zaslavsky 2006). Makarova (2014) found in her analysis that many of the poachers were people who had licenses or belonged to hunting clubs and therefore growth of the phenomenon in Russia must be due to increased violations by existing poachers, rather than “new recruits” into the ranks of poachers (66). She also discussed the assumption that poverty is a main cause of poaching and indeed found a higher number of cases in areas that had experienced economic shocks.

Methods: value and limitations of social and advocacy media as a data source

While empirical evidence collected by experts noted above reveals that most poaching cases of recreational game are by local actors, surveys suggest that the perception of the Russian public holds a relatively small group of elite violators responsible for the majority of cases.

A clue to understanding this dissonance may be found in a 2011 article by Viktor Gurov, a hunter and ranger who discussed his attempt to appreciate the motivation of people caught poaching. After many interviews with people he apprehended, Gurov decided there were three types of poachers: (1) people pushed to the action by “material or spiritual” poverty; (2) professional, commercial poachers who are very arrogant and looking out for their customers; and (3) the powerful elite, called by Gurov the *bespredelschiki* (those without limits), who view themselves as above the law, do not worry about getting caught, and are motivated by the “sweetness of forbidden fruit” (Gurov 2011). The author goes on to make recommendations to fight poachers in Russia and notes that officials who are caught poaching and avoid responsibility just encourage ordinary hunters to think “if they can, why not me”? Elite violations, therefore, may have an impact far beyond the mere scope of the crimes themselves if the public feels discouraged about upholding legal regimes for sustainable recreational hunting practices.

I collected information sources to ascertain *perceptions* about poachers from social and press media, resulting in a largely anecdotal database based on the Russian texts. Sources of information included:

- Web-based Russian hunting journals for popular audiences.
- Web-based blogs and forums for rank-and-file hunters.
- Advocacy web sites by environmental organizations.
- Press articles reporting alleged violations by elite poachers and public comments reacting to such incidents.

Most material was gleaned from publications dating from 2010 to 2014, but in some cases, citations were made to earlier articles or press reports. Often, anecdotes were reported in multiple sources, and I made efforts to track reports to the original publication.

As in all literature surveys, limitations of this method involve incorrect interpretations of perceptions expressed in the Russian text, the potential for bias in choice of materials, and self-selection of those who comment in online forums. Because I was interested in reactions of hunters, comments and blogs were surveyed, at times resulting in vernacular jargon that required care to interpret. This survey of social and press media serves only as a starting point, and a fruitful next step for analysis would be through questionnaire surveys, such as Urban’s (2010) research on attitudes of the elite in Russia or Eliason’s (2004) on poachers in the United States.

Russian legal regime for hunting²

Although hunting has long been a tradition in Russia for all social classes, the number of registered hunters in Russia has declined from 4.5 million in the 1980s to 2.8 million in 2012 (Kuzenkov 2011; Smol’yakova 2013). Registered adult hunters in Russia were about 1.96 percent of the population in 2012, versus 4.44 percent in the United States (United States Fish & Wildlife Service 2011), this, despite the fact that 80 percent of all land in Russia is designated as hunting land, while in the United States, it is 53.4 percent (Table 1; Allen 2014; Kuzenkov 2011).

Historically, hunting grounds in Russia were controlled in part by wealthy landowners and the nobility, but, up until the 1917 revolution, rights to hunt on private lands were usually granted to lower social classes (Gamov 2014). Traditions such as hunting with dogs and falconry entered Russia via the upper classes and were often portrayed in

Table 1. United States and Russia hunting statistics 2011–2012.

	Russian Federation	United States
Total hunting land, mill. ha	1366.0	529.4
as percent national area	80.00%	53.90%
private hunting lands, mill. ha	738.0	247.0
percent of hunting land that is private	54.0%	46.7%
Number of hunters in 2012	2,800,000	13,700,000
Hunters as percent total population	1.96%	4.44%
Recreational expenditures on hunting, mill. US dollars	\$500.00	\$33,700.00
Implied average expenditure per hunter, US dollars	\$178.57	\$2459.85

Notes: Russian Government estimates 1.5 billion ha are available for hunting, almost 100 percent of national territory.

US private hunting lands figures: leased plus owned from 2011 Fish & Wildlife survey, Table 34.

US primarily measures hunters' days on public or private lands by survey.

Expenditures on Russian hunting from Smol'yakova interview with Donskoy.

Expenditures on US hunting from 2011 Fish & Wildlife report, 22.

Sources: Smol'yakova (2013), Degtyarev (2010).

Federal Statistics of Russian Federation. http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/en/terprise/economy/.

Development of Hunting Strategy in Russian Federation to 2030, 3 July 2014 N 1216-p; <http://www.rg.ru/2014/07/07/oxot-zoxz-site-dok.html>.

United States Fish & Wildlife Service (2011) National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation.

Backcountry Chronicles est BLM, USFS, and state public lands available for hunting. <http://www.backcountrychronicles.com/public-hunting-land/>.

Russian art in an idealized form, such as Vasilii Perov's famous 1871 painting, *Okhotniki na privalye* (Hunters at Rest). National leaders, from tsarist to Soviet periods, were shown hunting in published photographs (Figure 1).

With the advent of the Soviet regime, hunting clubs became more widespread, and all hunting lands belonged to the state at the national or local level. The government agency *Glavokhota* (Main Administration for Hunting and Zapovedniki-Reserves) had authority for regulation of both domestic and foreign hunters and hunting lands, as well as nature reserves (a good history of the organization may be found in Weiner [1999, 241–250], and a general history of hunting during Soviet times in Gamov [2014]). The agency worked with some very large hunting unions/clubs, often attached to police professions, the railway sector, or the military. After the devolution of the Soviet Union, privatization of hunting resources and growth of companies serving foreign trophy hunters began in earnest. Some experts on hunting bemoan the post-Soviet developments. Valeriy Kuzenkov, the editor of the journal *Okhota*, in a 2010 interview noted, "Now, both our unified federal system for hunting oversight and our scientific and research facilities are in ruins ... the country doesn't have a unified and transparent system of hunting oversight" (Degtyarev 2010).

The changes to *Glavokhota* reflect many reorganization schemes for environmental management since the devolution of the Soviet Union. The State Committee for Environmental Protection was abolished as far back as the year 2000, and many functions were moved to the Ministry of Natural Resources (now, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology) of the Russian Federation; the same bureaucracy responsible for drawing profits from exploitation of Russia's resources. Another source of complaint has been about the fact that *Glavokhota* had been connected to hunting inspectors and education to prevent poaching (Figure 2), whereas *Gosokhotnadzor*, the agency



Figure 1. Historic Images of VIP Hunters. Top: Tsar Nikolay II at hunt in 1900 <http://www.ebf-tour.ru/articles.htm?id=631>; bottom left: Nikita Khrushchev (Leader of USSR from 1958 to 1964) and Josip Broz Tito (President of Yugoslavia) on a moose hunt 1961. Photo from the book *Zavidovo: Zhivaya istoriya* (Sergey Devyatov, Aleksandr Yegorov, Valentin Zhilyaev, and Ol'ga Kaykovoy. 2014. Moscow: Kreml'Fil'm) and reproduced for website National Explorer http://www.nexplorer.ru/news_12865.htm; bottom right, Leonid Brezhnev (Leader of USSR from 1977 to 1982) hunting, 1973. Photographer: Vladimir Musael'yan, reproduced at website of National Explorer: http://www.nexplorer.ru/news_12865.htm. Websites accessed January 10, 2015. Source: Permission was obtained from the copyright holder.

responsible for legal oversight of hunting, is now separated from other parts of game management in the MNR and housed instead in the Ministry of Agriculture. Kuzenkov argued that there are inadequate inspectors for a country the size of Russia and that inspectors have an insufficient power base or access to scientific norms (Degtyarev 2010). In the past, *Glavokhota* also had a Central Science and Research Laboratory on game management and wildlife biology, supervising 29 state-run experimental game farms. Professor Mikhail Perovskiy, a biologist with the Russian Agrarian Correspondence University in Moscow, argued for the revival of not only *Glavokhota*, but also its agency culture, noting that the employees and managers of the past were hunters



Figure 2. 1969 Soviet government anti-poaching poster by artist A.A. Shkrabo. Translation: “A Poacher Is the Worst Enemy of Nature!”.

Source: Permission was sought but the Darwin Museum in Moscow indicated that it was no longer possible to obtain copyright for this as the agency that holds copyright is no longer in existence.

themselves. Indeed, when Khrushchev created the agency, he drew upon members of *Rosokhotrybolovsoyuz*, the main hunters’ union (Perovskiy 2011).

Rosokhotrybolovsoyuz, which in 2013 welcomed Tatiyana Aramileva as its first female president, continues to be the largest hunting and fishing association in the country, with control of 14 percent of hunting land that is assigned to private organizations, and it serves as a powerful umbrella group for various regional clubs or unions (Degtyarev 2010; Rosokhotrybolovsoyuz 2013). In March 2013, a NGO, OD-ROS (*Obshchestvennoye Dvizheniye Rossiyskiy Okhotnicheskij Soyuz* [Social Movement Russian Hunting Union]) was formed, and it sponsored a February 2014 conference in Moscow to empower rank-and-file hunters. This new organization is emblematic of dissatisfaction with the hunting legal regime in Russia. Partly, inspired by opposition to rules eliminating some spring bird hunting because of proposed Russian accession to AEWA (Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds under UNEP), OD-ROS also adopted resolutions on improvement of access to hunting grounds and better equity on distribution of licenses (Okhotniki.ru 2013).

As of 2014, 226 species were designated as game animals (Lomanovoy 2010; Shalygin 2013a) for hunting in Russia and the government estimated the equivalent of half a billion US dollars was spent on recreational hunting in 2010 (Degtyarev interview with V. Kuzenkov 2010), while the figure for the United States was US \$33.7 billion (United States Fish & Wildlife Service 2011 Report; Table 1). Ungulate species in Russia form the main game objects and include red deer, roe deer, musk deer, spotted deer, and moose; but

wild boar is also hunted, and fur-bearing fauna such as sable, otters, and beaver are hunted or trapped. Brown bears have a limited legal hunt, but the Russian Government has at times forbidden spring hunting of hibernating bears (Walker 2012). By Russian Government estimates, populations of wild boar, roe deer, and moose increased from 2004 to 2012 by 90, 27, and 46 percent respectively, but the reported catch of these species grew at an even faster pace (Federal State Statistical Service 2012).

The rise in poaching energized environmental groups concerned over animal populations and ecosystems to agitate for tougher laws. In response, national legislation on hunting began to be reformed, and in 2009, a more unified strategy was announced (Law No. 209) with Article 2 beginning to outline plans for sustainability of game and better preservation of biodiversity in Russia (Volynskiy 2014). The plans called for more involvement by citizens and NGOs as well as for ways to make hunting resources more accessible to the general public, and it also envisioned improved scientific norms to determine wildlife management.

Meanwhile, studies by groups supported by outside international agencies such as the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) recognized the magnitude of the problem in Russia and called for much tougher laws and fines to punish poachers (see, for example, Yurkova, Almashev, and Tokova (2007) on poaching levels in the Altay region). Damage was classified by Russian law according to “major damages,” such as destroying wildlife listed in the Red Book of Endangered Species (Braden and Prudnikova 2008; Kasperek 2011; MNR 2012a) versus damage to less ecologically significant game animals. Amendments followed and even further calls went out to tighten the laws as the rise in poaching continued. One member of the Duma, Oleg Mikheev, even proposed that all hunting be banned in Russia, an idea that did not receive much support (Shalygin 2013a). But prohibitions on hunting polar bears, baby harp seals, and other popular glamor species were adopted, although some limited hunting of polar bears resumed in 2011 in Russia. Environmental NGOs were joined in the call for tougher standards by animal rights groups (such as Moscow Society of Animal Protection and IFAW, the International Fund for Animal Welfare). In some cases, anti-poaching brigades were even created by outside groups; for example, the United Nations Development Program and the World Bank Global Environmental Facility financed them in the Altay-Sayan Ecoregion project (Kasperek 2011) in cooperation with the Sosnovka Coalition (Angarova 2011). The *Zelyenyi patrol* (“Green Patrol”) NGO started in Sakhalin in 2007 as a citizens’ action group in Russia and often publicizes cases of poacher.

At some regional levels, local authorities had already raised fines for poaching; for example, in Vologda Oblast’ by March 2013, Governor Oleg Kuvshinnikov made fines 10 times higher than the previous year (Polyanskaya 2013), and he served as one source of insider pressure on the federal government. The organizations publicized how low the fines were for poaching of endangered species in Russia and the fact that even if caught, poachers obtained profits vastly outweighing financial penalties. In addition, organizations argued that the law should encompass not only those apprehended illegally killing animals, but also criminals who participated in the transport and marketing of the products.

On 15 June 2012, a new law (registered at Ministry of Justice 04.02.2011 No. 19704) entered into force with a subsequent law signed in May 2013 by Vladimir Putin (Federal Law No. 91 07.05.2013), creating increased fines and penalties for those convicted of poaching. Depending on the species and the circumstances, fines have risen up to 10-fold. The law allows guns to be confiscated and the right to hunt may be revoked for up to two years. Penalties for officials, citizens who reoffend, or organized crime members caught and convicted of poaching are much harsher, with higher financial penalties and prison

terms up to seven years (Shalygin 2013b; Smol'yakova 2013; State Duma 2013; WWF-Russia 2014a). These stricter penalties were hailed by experts and environmentalists as an important first step to reduce poaching (Polyanskaya 2013), with Olga Zherebkina of WWF Amur branch arguing that revocation of the right to hunt was one of the most effective tools to combat poaching (WWF-Russia 2014a). Penalties were increased for hunting out of season, hunting without proper documents, or using hunting areas under lease without permission. Inspectors were given more power to stop people, demand documents, look at photographs or other artifacts, and apprehend offenders.

Since the advent of the new laws, the Russian press and environmental web sites have indeed publicized many cases of apprehended poachers. The newspaper *Vremya* in the Nizhniy Novgorod Oblast' reported that nearly 3000 criminal cases of illegal hunting had been prosecuted in the first half of 2014 alone (Stepanova 2014). In Omsk Oblast', a resident of Nizhneomsk district was fined 160,000 rubles (equivalent to more than US \$4000) for illegally killing from a snowmobile two roe deer and a rabbit (Yemelyanova 2014). The government arrest rate for game poachers will in all probability continue to increase (Lizer 2014). For example, Oleg Mitvol', former head of *Rosprirodnadzor* (Service for Oversight of Natural Resources within MNR), reported during an interview with *Pravda.ru* that an estimated 20 percent of urban-based hunters and 30 percent of rural ones hunt without a license, while the figure for the North Caucasus region was as much as 100 percent (Polyanskaya 2013).

But will the laws be effective enough to stop some of the most egregious forms of poaching by organized crime elements and VIP hunters, or will they serve to mainly apprehend more common lawbreakers who illegally take game stock?

It was noted quickly after adoption of the new laws that they had a significant flaw: paragraph 53.1 prohibiting certain motorized forms of hunting (for example, using helicopters to hunt saiga antelope or shooting ungulates from ATVs) was dropped from the new code. Representatives from Greenpeace-Russia and WWF-Russia called attention to the problem and began public campaigns to correct this omission. Vladimir Krever of WWF's Moscow office argued that it had not been an oversight, but eliminated purposefully and called it "legalized poaching" (Chizhova 2012; Greenpeace Russia 2012). Some comments ironically suggested that there was more in the new laws about use of hunting dogs than the use of helicopters (Sinyakov 2012), and one online news service read "Minpriroda (MNR) Has Created Ideal Conditions for VIP-Poachers" (Gomzikova 2012). Public pressure caused the law to be amended (Registered in the Ministry of Justice on 30 May 2012 No. 24,394) to reinsert paragraph 53.1.

Environmental groups were not the only ones examining the new laws. Recreational hunters seemed to be less welcoming of the legislation passed since 2009: online forums and journals began to point out what were perceived as errors in the legislation. The complaints from the hunting communities encompassed the following issues:

- Lack of clarity, especially congruence of local and federal laws and understanding of scientific norms for setting seasons and rules for each species; the need for clearer definition of allowances of trapping for "educational purposes" and what constitutes a scientific quota; lack of clarity about constraints on the use of hunting dogs (Degtyarev 2010; Kuzenkov 2011; Shalygin 2013a).
- Continued impunity by powerful poachers with political or economic clout; failure to deal with falsification of documents and permits in some local areas (Kuzenkov 2011).
- Continued favor for privatization, making fees for use of privatized hunting grounds more expensive; lack of recourse in the courts for hunters who have complaints about

Table 2. Government support of hunting resources and privatization trends, 2005–2012 (in current prices, million rubles).

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2005–2012 (%)
Federal financial support									
Total expenditures on the environment	233,930	259,228	295,200	368,627	343,368	372,382	412,014	432,319	184.81
<i>Expenditures on biodiversity</i>	12,542	16,052	21,681	26,597	21,463	22,975	13,381	17,850	142.32
biodiversity as percent of environmental expenditures	5.36%	6.19%	7.34%	7.22%	6.25%	6.17%	3.25%	4.13%	77.01
General expenditures on game management	1489	2003	2601	3344	3847	4515	5502	6196	416.12
game mgmt. as percent environmental expenditures	0.64%	0.77%	0.88%	0.91%	1.12%	1.21%	1.34%	1.43%	225.16
expenditures for biological conservation measures	225	307	431	500	608	655	743	986	438.22
expenditures to monitor game populations	34	40	59	70	94	90	117	151	444.12
expenditures to maintain hunting infrastructure	446	514	520	
Privatization indicators									
Number of approved hunting organizations	2006	2276	2812	2975	3189	3614	3908	3956	197.21
legally defined organizations	1954	2204	2679	2825	3022	3338	3583	...	183.37
individual entrepreneurs	52	74	133	150	170	276	330	...	634.62
Area of leased hunting lands, thous. ha	626,000	662,000	686,000	682,000	699,000	721,000	762,000	738,000	117.89
Avg. leased land per hunting organization, thous. ha	312	291	244	229	219	200	195	187	59.78

Source: Government of Russian Federation, Federal Service for State Statistics, "okruzhayushchaya sreda".
http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/environment/.

private hunting organizations with land leases who do not follow regulations (Volyanskiy 2014).

- Unclear laws about road access to public hunting grounds (particularly if routes must cut across surrounding privatized lands) and about rules for hunting on agricultural and forest lands (Degtyarev 2010).
- Increased restrictions for public target practice areas or shooting ranges.
- Higher costs of licenses creating burdens for rural poor, especially elderly pensioners (Degtyarev 2010).
- New cost imposed for recertification to renew licenses every five years by requiring gun safety training, even for lifelong hunters. The cost of the certification program, 8000 rubles, represents about US \$225, or, by 2011 values, one-half month's wages in terms of averages for 45 percent of the Russian population (Federal State Statistical Service 2012).

Concurrent with the tighter laws, the government of the Russian Federation issued a strategic plan to the year 2030 (MNR 2014). The plan was signed 3 July 2014 by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and recognizes the shortage of trained personnel and the need to improve the population management of game animals. The goals call for:

- increasing the number of game species to their “ecological capacity” and maintenance of genetic diversity;
- increasing the economic value of hunting in Russia to one-half of one percent of GDP (the value of hunting resources was estimated to be one-half billion US, but has the potential to increase to US \$12 billion: Shalygin 2014);
- training sufficient state inspectors to allow three for each municipal district that contains hunting grounds;
- reducing poaching by a factor of 2.5; increasing the privatization of hunting lands in Russia and number of lease agreements with private organizations, but making liability stricter for hunting companies who do not follow regulations;
- increasing the number of game farms and public access to hunting areas;
- clarifying the rights of hunters and the method for obtaining permits;
- establishing incentives to attract private investment in recreational hunting. The plan also recognizes that development of ecotourism would be a positive income source for indigenous communities.

Budget allocations to achieve the plan were to be announced separately as each budget cycle unfolded. From 2005 to 2012, game management expenditure as a percent of federal Russian Government spending on the environment grew from 0.64 to 1.43 percent, a small portion of overall environmental spending, but outpacing overall environmental expenditures in terms of growth trajectory (Table 2).

Privatization of hunting lands

The plan for 2030 also underlines the strategy of increased long-term leases on hunting grounds that were formerly state run and open to the public, respectively, termed *zakreplennyye okhotnich'yye ugod'i* (allotted hunting grounds) versus ODu, for *Obshchedostupnyye ugod'i* (commonly accessible hunting grounds). Table 2 shows the trend in allotments from 2005 to 2012 and the number of *okhotpol'zovateli*, or designated private enterprise hunting organizations. While leased land has grown (MNR 2012b), it

has been outpaced by the increase in approved hunting organizations, indicating the high demand for privatization. In some areas, such as the Voronezh region, leased hunting lands take up 85 percent of all hunting grounds; in the Altay Kray, 85.7 percent (Gorbachev 2014; Shalygin 2014; web portal for Hunting Administration of Altay Kray, <http://www.altayohota.ru/> accessed 13 September 2014). Private hunting grounds tend to be better managed, often with better paid staff and the ability to control game populations; therefore, there is a tendency for game to concentrate on private grounds, away from areas of publicly accessible hunting – the Russian Government in creating the 2030 plan noted that 91 percent of wild boar, 75 percent of moose, and 61 percent of roe deer are now located on private land allotments (MNR 2014).

Shalygin (2014), writing in the politically conservative hunting news source, *National Explorer*, called for a more vigorous public debate among the hunting public about the wisdom of the strategic plan. The strategic direction of the Russian Government may seek to head off the “tragedy of the commons” with respect to wildlife sustainability, but it also creates a stronger monopoly control of game resources (Figure 3). The editor of the journal *Okhota* noted this in a 2010 interview about the direction the new laws were taking:

New proprietors often look at these lands as their own private domain – they think that they have the right to do what they want with them. Very often they close access to the territory for the local population. This provokes conflicts. (Degtyarev 2010)

The Russian Government set a goal of keeping at least 20 percent of hunting lands public (federal law on hunting Article 7, para. 3), but hunting leases are becoming a common method for game management in other countries (note Table 1, United States). To attract investment, the Russian Government concludes special agreements with hunting organizations and entrepreneurs for terms from 20 to 49 years. These entities in turn pledge that game resources will be subject to conservation measures. Leases are determined at auction, and the process is supposed to be transparent and publicly scrutinized, with the rental fees accruing to the federal budget. Reporting requirements are quite detailed, with forms requesting information on every aspect of the lease from number of employees to estimated cost of road maintenance on the grounds.

Regions set limits and boundaries on leased land and collect fees according to a schedule set by the tax code if the land is not bid by auction. In 2010, the average was 10 rubles per hectare for a land lease, though in remote regions, such as Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, the cost might be only one ruble per hectare (MNR 30 June 2010 law No. 490).

From 2005 to 2011, the number of *okhotpol'zovateli* categorized as legal organizations grew by 83 percent (Table 2), while the number of private individuals with such designations grew more than six times (from 52 to 330). By the year 2013, there were 4033 *okhotpol'zovateli* reported by the Federal Statistical Service.³ These enterprises, whether leases or outright purchases, are part of the general transfer of rural land to oligarchs and wealthy business elite, as outlined by Visser, Mamonova, and Spoor in their 2012 article in *The Journal of Peasant Studies* and by Grigory Ioffe and others (Ioffe, Nefedova, and De Beurs 2012) in their examination of the impoverished state of rural land holdings in Russia. On the one hand, the phenomenon represents needed investment in economic development of abandoned land. But questions are raised over whether laws are followed and investments benefit local, underemployed populations.⁴

In 2011, reporter Valeriy Serdyukov in the newspaper *Vedomosti* published select data on the size of some hunting leases by 16 well-known individuals or organizations,

totaling 2.573 million hectares, an area almost three times the size of Yellowstone National Park (Serdyukov 2011). The percent of land available for leasing and the number of hunting organizations are supposed to be distributed across the country according to scientific norms for game sustainability and demand, but in reality, the pattern reflects urban populations. Thus, Leningrad Oblast' has 133 organizations with long-term leases ranging from 232,000 to 406 hectares in size (*Vedomosti* news, January 20, 2012). E.V. Benderskiy, Chair of *Rosokhotrybolovsoyuz*, published an open letter to the deputy minister of MNR on the issue of exclusionary rights to hunting grounds, complaining that the criterion for setting standards on maximum amount of leased land per region was not clear and the part of the law trying to prevent monopolistic control of land was subject to interpretation (Benderskiy 2012).

The director of the hunting department for MNR, Anton Bersenyev, addressed perceived inequities in the privatization process in an interview with Sergey Fokin for the online hunting journal *Okhotnik.ru*. The reporter stated,

for our conversation, it is appropriate to begin with the issues of concern to many hunters who believe that the transfer of hunting grounds to legal entities, including individual users, leads to the infringement of the rights of hunters, especially local ones, who have hunted in such places for many generations. (Fokin 2013)

Perhaps, the sensitivity to unfairness in more recent hunting land leases may be summed up best by Valery Serdyukov in his article on oligarchs and hunting. Noting that various public organizations and hunting clubs had been losing out on their long-term leases, broken by the government in favor of being auctioned off (sometimes in a non-transparent manner) to new private enterprises, he wrote:

Only ten years ago, almost all hunting land was public in terms of the number [of individual grounds] listed for common hunting. But then everything changed. "Muscovites arrived and hunted. They liked our places and said they wanted to take the land," remembers one member of a regional hunting society. "We put in a claim, won the competition, and received a license for the plot we wanted," noted a Moscow businessman, one of the largest renters of hunting lands in the Northwest. (Serdyukov 2011)

Did the advent of the improved hunting laws even the playing field? Serdyukov (2011) cites evidence that before the new laws came into force, those with information and power made preparations to win the auctions in advance and secure long-term, 49-year leases. He cited the example of Tver Oblast', where 16 agreements were signed by the governor for leases totaling 220,085 ha, each for a 49-year period, all concluded on the eve of the open auction.

Such anecdotal evidence cannot be accepted as a pattern, but discussions on hunting forums suggest there is at least a *perception* among ordinary hunters that they are increasingly being shutout from hunting resources while at the same time, the power elite are allowed full access to game, even if it violates the law.

The impact of high-profile poaching cases

As suggested by such exposés as Ze'ev Wolfson's book noted above, men in power in Russia or the USSR have long exhibited unconcern and impunity about violating hunting norms. In 1997, for example, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and Anatoly Lisitsyn, governor of Yaroslav' Oblast', were accused of illegally shooting a hibernating

female bear, but no charges were ever filed (Apal'kov and Averin 2008). Boris Yeltsin and the governor of Novgorod Oblast' were alleged to hunt moose out of season (Moiseyenko 2004). An important difference with the past is the availability of information in the Internet age. The Russian press (print, online, and broadcast), social media, environmental organizations, and hunters' online forums have all publicized VIP-poaching. Sufficient cases emerged just in the last few years to allow creation of Table A1 in Appendix 1 via information from media outlets. Not all the cases listed have resulted in convictions; therefore, I present the information as a demonstration of how *perceptions* are created in the mind of the public, not as a list of people convicted of poaching.

WWF-Russia and TraSSS (Center for Study of Terrorism, International Organized Crime, and Corruption) released a report on poaching in the Russian Far East, and their survey research seemed to affirm that local people believe that wildlife crime is often perpetrated by a powerful elite. A majority (78 percent) of those surveyed felt that poachers were primarily people in power and 59 percent surveyed thought that the wealthy were the most common poachers (Vaysman, Matveychuk, and Min'kov 2012, 13). While the authors of the report felt that involvement of the local community to halt the crimes was necessary, at the same time it was acknowledged that local people's perceptions shift the blame to elite outsiders. Baydykov (2012), a former hunting guide who worked for years in the Altay Kray's Kislukhinskiy reserve, echoed this impression when he discussed elite hunters who for years practiced illegal helicopter hunting in the region. He stated that such people crushed the institution of real hunting in the Altay Kray and that ordinary, poorer hunters could certainly not afford the mechanized equipment:

Not satisfied with open hunting grounds and seasons, confident in their impunity, they enter a wildlife sanctuary on snowmobiles and helicopters. The only obstacle in their way might be a ranger. And the consequences of those encounters I find offensive.

Vladimir Aramilev, a renowned wildlife scientist who coordinates the Amur leopard program for WWF-Russia, argued in an editorial for *Russkiy okhotnichiy zhurnal* (2014) that all the efforts and funds to halt poaching in Russia might be in vain because of a system that does not inherently have a design to stop it. He did find some hope in improvement of some game animal numbers, since privatized game farms look out for their investments. However, Aramilev also wrote that those who prosecute the crime do not work actively enough to condemn the perpetrators and therefore the impunity that poachers enjoy breeds contempt for the law:

A citizen who is law-abiding is guided by his inner convictions which coincide with laws of human society and fear of inevitable punishment. Double standards completely ruined the system of loyal relations to one's neighbor, the conservation of the environment, and compliance with the law. The post-Soviet period with raging theft and banditry put an end to the soul of a Russian person. Therefore, a law abiding citizenry can only be achieved through the second path, through the fear of inevitable punishment. And what type of inevitable punishment for poaching can there be if even those who work for powerful offices are not interested? (Aramilev 2013)

While poaching accusations against officials and wealthy businessmen occur throughout Russia, the record in the Altay Republic has been especially gruesome. Several high-profile cases were broadly covered in the Russian press and followed keenly by environmental organizations. In 2003, a local wildlife manager encountered a group

who illegally hunted from a Mi-8 helicopter a protected herd of ibex, and the group turned out to include Aleksey Saurin, who at the time was head of federal management for hunting resources (Braden and Prudnikova 2008, 15–16).

Perhaps, the most notorious case was referred to as “Altay-gate” (Castner and Ewald 2009). A VIP group had apparently been illegally hunting argali in the Kosh-Agach district when the helicopter crashed (the Altapress was quickly on the scene of the accident and published pictures, including of the ibex). Among the dead, were the presidential envoy to the State Duma, Aleksandr Kosopkin, and Viktor Kaimin, chairman of the Committee for the Protection, Use, and Reproduction of Fauna of the Altay Republic, who had earlier promoted trophy hunting in the Altay. The four who survived included the Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Altay, Anatoly Bannykh; chief for the State Duma Committee on Economic Policy and Entrepreneurship, Nikolai Kapranov; CEO of the Moscow-based industrial environmental company “Ineko,” Boris Belinsky; and a co-pilot, Maxim Kolbin. Bannykh resigned his position after the crash and he, along with Belinsky and Kapranov, were charged with illegal hunting. The investigation dragged on for two years, with the case alternately dismissed and reopened as environmental groups brought pressure on the government. The defendants claimed they had not participated in the actual shooting but only were guilty of being present on the helicopter. On 23 May 2011, the three men were acquitted, and the prosecutor appealed. When sent back to local courts, it was decided that the statute of limitations had expired. Commenting on the case, Mikhail Kreyn-dlin of Greenpeace-Russia noted, “Truly, now VIP-poachers have gotten a clear signal: ‘all is possible and nothing will come of it.’ The ordinary citizen caught poaching can be punished with a real prison term. Senior officials are not threatened with anything” (Vishnevskiy 2011).

But other high-profile cases have been brought under suspicious circumstances. Aleksey Navalny with the Progress Party and an active opponent of Vladimir Putin was accused by VOOP (the All-Russian Nature Conservation Society) of poaching because he posed for a picture after moose hunting that appeared to be taken in the summer, while the season does not start until October (The Moscow Times 2014). Lyubov’ Duyko, who heads up the society’s legal affairs, sent an official complaint to the prosecutor’s office. Navalny denied the charge. Duyko is a prominent member of Putin’s United Russia Party (along with other members of the VOOP Board) and stood for 2014 municipal elections in the Porokhovyye district of St. Petersburg as a party member (Varkhivakh.net 2014).

Some attempts to bring valid complaints against VIP illegal hunters have resulted in difficult times for inspectors or prosecutors. One well-known case involved Aleksandr Dovydenko, a hunting guide with the organization “Mosoblokhotupravleniy,” who lost his job in 2013 and was sentenced to probation in a prison term for abuse of power. He had apprehended people he accused of illegal hunting, including the head of Gazprom’s geology division, Gennady Kucherov, and the CEO of the firm “Transseti” (Table A1). Questions arose during the trial of whether Dovydenko had shot one person in a group of poachers, whom he claimed were resisting arrest by escaping on their snowmobile. An unemployed hunter who accompanied the others was the only one eventually charged and convicted of poaching (Shvarev 2013b). The Dovydenko case received much attention and inspired a petition via the NGO “Change.org” to relieve him of the charges.⁵ A similar incident occurred in Kurgan Oblast’ with an inspector who suspected police of poaching from snowmobiles, reported it, and then was arrested himself

and accused of taking bribes in earlier incidents. The poaching case against the officials was never prosecuted (Chelovek i zakon 2014).

Motivations for VIP-poaching

Recreational poaching has been examined by Muth and Bowe (1998) in the United States, and the authors suggested two motivations: poaching as “thrill killing” and obsession with display of trophies (15–17). One aspect that differentiates motivation in these cases from the Russian context is the element of secretiveness. Illegal trophy hunters in the American West take pains to hide the evidence from authorities (Archibold 2006), while VIP poachers in Russia usually operate in an open fashion.

Urban’s (2010) study of the cultures of power in post-communist Russia provides a useful framework for exploring the motivations of Russian VIP poachers. While abuses of power by oligarchs and the nouveaux riches have been well documented (see for example Dawisha 2014; Hoffman 2002), Urban’s study allows a look inside the culture of the elite through interviews and defines the importance of the sub-culture or “in” group. He suggests that, for those on the outside, the actions of the elite may seem mistaken or crazy, but “for those sharing the same habitus informed by the same cultural practices and participating in the same discourse, they are regarded as real” (6). Further, Urban presents a strong case that law and morality do not go hand in hand for those in power, but actually may work in opposition: moral criteria are established through interpersonal relationships, while the law itself is regarded as a weakness (15–16). This argument coincides well with Aramilev’s position noted above that once respect for the law through an inner moral compass disappears, there is only the threat of punishment that will halt lawbreakers.

Researchers have suggested that part of Vladimir Putin’s mass appeal to citizens is his role in “re-masculinizing” their self-image as Russians (Foxall 2013; Riabov and Riabova 2014). Gender is an important boundary marker for those in power and the attempt to make concrete an “us” versus “them” mentality. Riabov and Riabova (2014) noted that the traditional attributes of masculinity suggest power, while submission correlates with what (in the authors’ view) some Russians perceive as feminine attributes (25–25). A study of the public images portrayed by Putin in settings that are hyper-masculine (Figure 4) underscores these arguments. Foxall has examined a series of Kremlin-approved photographs released of Putin that show him in traditional male activities associated with outdoor recreation and noted that these have created an “Action Man” portrait of a leader (Foxall 2013, 134; see also Young 2011). A militarized virility is an expression of state power. The term associated with such images is *nastoyashchiy muzhik*, in the past referring to the peasant tradition in Russia, but now co-opted by elite such as Putin to suggest it is he who is the “real” Russian guy (Riabov and Riabova 2014).

What might the *real* “real muzhiki” think of such seemingly hyper-masculine expressions of power? Online forum responses by rank-and-file hunters suggest an attitude of contempt. While Putin may remain popular with the public, press coverage and social media discussion of unpunished, elite criminals often highlight the bloodthirsty nature of the crime, the seeming unconcern of the VIP hunters, and even public disdain.⁶



Figure 3. Editorial cartoon on privatization of hunting resources by artist Mikhail Larichev, *Vecherniy Peterburg*, October 20, 2009. Translation: "Sold". Source: Permission was obtained from the copyright holder.



Figure 4. Vladimir Putin on a hunt in the Tyva Republic, 2007. Photograph by European Press Photo Agency. Source: Permission was obtained from the copyright holder.

Greedy people, driven by vanity and after blood ... not poor people, but people in good positions. (Baydykov 2012)

What land is left to defend? Only those asshole oligarchs are left...if the state laws are not functioning, it's time to fire the officials and their entourages -blogger comments on poaching in Samara Luka Nature Park. (Sistema Opoveshcheniya 2014)

It seems to be that soon the only justice in Russia will be vigilante justice.- blogger comment on Altay-gate helicopter crash incident. (Mir Novostey 2014)

On the theme of poaching: a law should be perceived normally as a law by hunters. A bad law is not a law but just derives from rotten conditions ... Right now, order is only upheld through repression, but the order is spoiled. Controllers are caught up in it ten times over for this bullshit, not a society determining its own traditions. Blogger "dEretik". (Guns.ru forum 2013; Shvarev 2013a)

Officials are lawless ... you can't beat the system; you can only be indignant and learn from the mistakes of others. Blogger Xgod89. (Guns.ru forum 2011)

The truth about Russia now is that MNR and the courts do not rule, but insolent jerks who muzzle the courts and prosecutors' offices are in charge. Blogger A. Bonch-Bruyevich commenting on Dovydenko case. (Shvarev 2013b)

Some fat urban dyad'ka who goes into the forest and finds a bear or moose, poached with help of hunting guide. (Shalygin 2013a)

Conclusion: for hunting sustainability – the value of a moral compass

I have argued that VIP illegal hunting, though not a high percentage of poaching cases, sets a destructive tone not only because of direct damage to wildlife sustainability, but also because it contributes to corruption of inspectors and prosecution personnel, cynicism about rule of law, and a discouragement to non-elite hunters, who are increasingly cut off from prey due to regulations and higher costs.

The utility for VIP hunters may not be economic gain, but may be the sense of power enhancement and differentiation from the masses. Social science research has suggested that unhidden violations of social norms may actually signal power, whereas lower power individuals are more subject to social constraints (see, for example, Van Kleef et al. 2011). There are rewards to elevated power and the establishment of identity in a select subgroup of actors. Resources are more accessible, as is the ability to make decisions on how to distribute those resources to others. Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson (2003) have cited numerous social-psychological experiments suggesting that elevated power increases the likelihood of socially inappropriate actions, often showing up in males as "profligate behaviors" (276–277) Given these precepts, it is possible that overt incidents of impunity in wildlife crime by VIP hunters in Russia are signs of status and a way to maintain group identity, a proposition that calls for further investigation.

In turn, the narrative of VIP poaching solidifies the perception of corruption – a phenomenon measured in Transparency International's *Corruption Perceptions Index* (Transparency International 2014), and a sense of hopelessness about the system – a fact observed by Russian social scientists such as Kofanova and Petukhov (2006), who suggest a narrative about endemic corruption is created in the minds of ordinary Russians. Survey results show that most Russians believe the state does not act in the interest of

its citizens; bureaucrats are motivated by personal gain, and corruption penetrates all spheres of society (Kofanova and Petukhov 2006, 29). This narrative of corruption and crime is supported by a Russian mass media that “vigorously relays” a normative system of a criminal world, engendering disrespect for the judiciary and for formal laws and an impression that the most successful people in Russia today display the most negative behavior models (Iurevich and Ushakov 2010, 21–22, 26–27). Similarly, Dawisha (2014) has explored the “sistema” inside the Russian hierarchy in her book *Putin’s Kleptocracy*, noting that the risk of activities is transferred from the elite to the state, but the rewards are privatized, thus allowing those in power “to act with impunity” (332–333). Given Putin’s arguments in favor of fighting corruption, how can the actions of insider elites be reconciled with evidence of environmental lawbreaking?

Dawisha (2014) rightly notes, “This is not to say that the Russian ruling elite does not see the benefits of a robust rule-of-law system” (9). While her exploration focused on elite actions in international financial circles, I make a similar argument of a selective approach to application of domestic Russian laws on illegal hunting. Protections against prosecution for some in the government and rights conditional upon loyalty to the regime ensure that those in power can act in a predatory manner. Informal associations, useful friends, and privileged access to resources are hallmarks of the insider “sistema” (Ledeneva 2013). As empirical data are presented in the future on violators apprehended and convicted under the new 2012 hunting laws, the number of cases involving people in power should be instructive to observe.

Feldman and Blokov (2009) found in their survey that personalities mattered in terms of public perception: the most influential people for solving environmental questions cited by respondents were those in political power, business leaders, ministry officials, and heads of NGOs (737). Precisely because high-profile people have sway over the public in terms of societal norms for environmental law, that fact might be put to use for improved observance of the 2012 regulations. I suggest a new tool for social norming with respect to hunting laws in Russia: publicity for well-known Russians who demonstrate a new type of power and masculine image by *adhering* to regulations. Vladimir Putin, for example, noted in an *Outdoor Life* interview, “Today, when hunting and fishing are more like a tribute to traditions, a sort of hobby, enthusiasts of these outdoor activities should guide themselves by the ‘Do No Harm’ principle” (Young 2011, 58). In his examination of how to improve law enforcement in the realm of environmental norms, Sverdyukov (2014) wrote, “the mechanism of moral influence on offenders is practically not used, it is true, but it is necessary to rework the levers of moral action” (160).

While some of the initiators of OD-ROS were people of power,⁷ myriad bloggers from online hunting social forums picked up and repeated the text that the organizers of the 2014 OD-ROS Conference used in launching the effort:

In past decades, a host of serious problems have occurred in the sphere of Russian hunting. Life has shown that the government is not capable of solving them. The wider hunting community can and should undertake a discussion of these problems, identify solutions, and formulate constructive proposals for organs of state power ... the first hunters’ conference was the initiative of ordinary hunters, unburdened by property or hunting lands, with one goal: to conserve the historic right of Russians to hunt. This was not first given under Soviet power, but much earlier – by tradition, a significant part of the culture and in the blood of the Russian people. (Rossiyskiy okhotnichiyy soyuz 2014)

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Notes

1. The rights of indigenous groups, especially those designated of the North, Siberia, the Altay Republic, and the Far East, have been described through sections of the hunting regulations and amendments of various years. While these populations are not the focus of this study, the author recognizes the importance of the survival of indigenous cultures, access to traditional hunting grounds, and land use rights for minority people in the Russian Federation.
2. The focus here is on recreational hunting with firearms and excludes the myriad of illegal fishing cases covered in the Russian press. Likewise, use of snares and other traps, particularly by poachers, has been very controversial and warrants additional discussion.
3. No breakdown by organizations versus individuals was available after the year 2011 at the time of this writing. Often the hunting leases run by private owners are large recreational centers, such as the Dubakinskiy resort in Leningrad Oblast', owned by Nikolai Shamalov, a banker whom Forbes dubbed one of the richest men in Russia. The site, accessible with a helicopter landing pad, includes a well-appointed cottage ("VIP-House") with television, sauna, and billiard rooms, available for rental during moose season. The newspaper *Izvestiya* reported on 26 September 2012 that three millionaire businessmen, including Alfa Bank's Pyotr Aven, had invested 80 million rubles into creation of a hunting enterprise "Medved'" in Arghangel'sk Oblast' for VIP hunters, a closed hunting club specializing in brown bear, wild boar, deer, moose, and Siberian stag (*maral*). The brainchild of businessman, Vladimir Butorin, the enterprise is located in the town of Bereznik, where Butorin's companies also are involved in agriculture and forest products. This was the second enterprise invested in by Aven, who had also registered in Moscow a hunting club called "Hunting Ground," financed by his private investment (*Izvestiya* 26 September 2012. Accessed 25 July 2014. <http://izvestia.ru/news/536084>).
4. Butorin, for example, has not always done well with local farmers, but has argued he is bringing access, electrical power, and other infrastructure, as well as a fund for social programs into the area. Visser, Mamonova, and Spoor (2012) argued that the benefits of land transfers have been mixed, and laws, while purportedly passed to cut down on monopolies, have instead strengthened the hands of large-scale land owners, often shored up by corrupt local officials (925).
5. As of August 2014, the case was still unresolved, and Mr Dovydenko was considering whether he should appeal based on an amnesty declared by the Duma in honor of the 20th anniversary of the Russian Constitution.
6. In addition to hunting news and environmental web sites, one called *Brakon'ero.net* has been established to both to support legitimate hunters and to report news, photographs, and videos on poaching incidents.
7. For example, Nikolay Valuev, former boxing champion, elected to the Duma in 2011 under Putin's party. Valuev himself had been accused of poaching, but the Arkhangel'sk regional prosecutor had refused to consider the case. He was added in 2014 to MNR's Public Council on Hunting.

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Appendix 1

Table A.1. Sample reports alleging VIP-poaching in post-Soviet period (does not imply conviction).

Year	Location	Position(s) of VIP(s) at time incident reported	Source(s)	Web address. Access of each verified 11 January 2015
1997	Yaroslavl Oblast', Ananin village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President, Russian Federation • Governor, Yaroslavl Oblast' 	Argumenty i fakti 9/26/2007; Kompromat.Ru; ecoethics.ru	http://www.compromat.ru/page_21495.htm http://gazeta.aif.ru/online/aif/1404/14_01
2001	Khakasiya Republic, Karatshko-Ineyskiy reserve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actor and chair, Russian Cultural Foundation • Former speaker of Russian Duma 	NovayaGazeta.Ru 2/10/2005	http://2005.novayagazeta.ru/nomer/2005/10n/10n-s01.shtml
2002	Altay Republic, Tarhatinskiy Lake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former assistant to Vladimir Putin and Boris Yelisin 	Vita: Tsentr zashchity prav zhivotnykh	http://www.vita.org.ru/amusement/hunt/black_list.htm
2004	Vladimir Oblast', Suzdal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Owner of newspaper Moskovskiy Komsomlets, former member of the Public Chamber Russian Federation; Moscow hunting club 	Zavtra 2/04/2004; Kompromat.Ru	www.compromat.ru/page_14416.htm http://zavtra.ru/content/view/2004-02-0451/
	Novgorod Oblast'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governor, Novgorod region • President, Russian Federation 	Argumenty i fakti 9/26/2007; Kompromat.Ru	http://www.compromat.ru/page_21495.htm http://gazeta.aif.ru/online/aif/1404/14_01

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Table A1. (Continued).

Year	Location	Position(s) of VIP(s) at time incident reported	Source(s)	Web address. Access of each verified 11 January 2015
2005	Kursk Oblast', Korenevsky district, Kursk Poppy forest reserve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair, Committee on Youth Sports 	Drugdruga online 1/27/2004	http://www.dddkursk.ru/number/486/new/000,657/
	Altay Republic, Shavlinsky reserve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department Head of Conservation & Hunting Resources, Ministry of Agriculture 	Vita: Tsentr zashchity prav zhivotnykh 5/29/2007	http://vita.org.ru/new/2007/may/29-hunters.htm
	Khakasiya Republic, Karatoshko-Ineyskiy reserve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head, Ministry for Civil Defense and Emergency Situations, Russia 	Vita: Tsentr zashchity prav zhivotnykh 5/29/2007	http://vita.org.ru/new/2007/may/29-hunters.htm
2006	Altay Kray, Choya district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairman, Barnaul City Council 	Bankfaks 10/02/2006	http://www.bankfax.ru/news/38,014/
2008	Kamchatka Kray, Kronotskiy reserve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former head of Federal Taxation Service, Volgograd region 	Life News 1/28/2010	http://lifenews.ru/news/10930
2009	Altay Republic, Kosh Agach district "Altay-gate" incident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presidential envoy to the State Duma • Deputy Governor, Altay Republic • Altay Republic Committee to protect wildlife • Officer of lower house of Parliament Duma staffer deputy head of Russian President Medvedev • Policy chief counsel, State Duma Committee on Economics • Governor, Altay Republic 	New York Times 1/12/2009 p. 6; Novaya gazeta (Aleksy Tarasov) Apr. 15, 2011, p. 8	http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/12/world/europe/12russia.html?_r=0 http://old.novayagazeta.ru/data/2011/040/08.html
	Sakha Republic		Ruspres 3/02/2009	http://rospres.com/corruption/3727/

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Table A1. (Continued).

Year	Location	Position(s) of VIP(s) at time incident reported	Source(s)	Web address. Access of each verified 11 January 2015
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretary of regional United Russia Party • Presidential envoy to Central federal district 		
	Krasnodar Kray, Adygea Republic, Caucasus Biosphere Reserve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prime Minister, Adygea Republic • Deputy finance minister, Adygea Republic • Director of hydro resources, Adygea Republic 	Pasmi.ru 9/20/2013	http://pasmi.ru/archive/96715
	Irkutsk Oblast', Lake Baikal, Bolshaya Goloustnoye	Governor, Irkutsk Oblast, killed in helicopter crash	Pasmi.ru 9/20/2013; RBK 5/16/2009	http://pasmi.ru/archive/96715
	Buryatiya Republic, Khorinskiy district, Khudakskiy biosphere reserve	United Russia Party elective Deputy People's Khural of Buryatia	BMK Informatsionnoye agentstvo 9/02/2009	http://top.rbc.ru/society/16/05/2009/304213.shtml http://www.baikal-media.ru/news/conflicts/56142/
	Irkutsk Oblast'	Governor, Irkutsk Oblast'	Argumenty RU 5/16/2009	http://argumentiru.com/news/2009/05/16/14811
	Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug	Deputy chief of staff of Taz district	News ru.com 6/17/2009	http://www.newsru.com/russia/17jun2009/smoljar.html
2010	Moscow Oblast', Potlovo village, Zarayskiy hunting reserve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OAO "ВымпелКом" (Vimpelcom Ltd) mobile phone • Businessman, "Коломнамежрегионгаз" (Kolomnamezregiongaz) gas company • Municipal district deputy, Lukhovitskiy region 	VIP Trophy 12/05/2010	http://vip trophy.com/articles/1964
			Ekho Moskvy 12/21/2010	

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Table A1. (Continued).

Year	Location	Position(s) of VIP(s) at time incident reported	Source(s)	Web address. Access of each verified 11 January 2015
	Moscow Oblast', Vysokovo district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of Interior Affairs of Dmitrov district • Head of industrial geology administration 		http://www.echo.msk.ru/news/735728-echo.html
	Sakha Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yakut deputy Gosduma • Member of the Board of "ALROSA" diamond mining group 	Rossiyskaya gazeta 5/28/2010	http://www.rg.ru/2010/05/28/vertolet.html
	Tyumen Oblast', Surgut	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy head of United Russia Party, Surgut region 	Tyumenskiye izVestiya 10/20/2010	http://old.t-i.ru/article/16450/
2011	Volgograd Oblast', Kamyshin district, Shcherbakovskaya nature park Sakha Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director of building supply for Kamyshin town • Governor of Arkhangelsk Region 	Informatsionnoye agentstvo Vysota 102.0 5/07/2014 ResursLes.ru 4/09/2011	http://v102.ru/accidents/44598.html http://www.resursles.ru/news/index.html?id=185
	Volgograd Oblast', Olkhoviy reserve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy of district DUMA United Russia Party 	Volgograd-Times 2/09/2011	http://volgograd-times.ru/stories/188
2012	Amur Oblast'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vice mayor of Blagoveshchensk • Rosselkhoznadzor executive • Specialist regional ohotpravleniya (hunting management) 	NTV 2/16/2014; News ru.com 2/11/2014	http://www.ntv.ru/hovosti/842956/ http://www.newsru.com/arch/russia/11feb2014/vjpoacher.html

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Table A1. (Continued).

Year	Location	Position(s) of VIP(s) at time incident reported	Source(s)	Web address. Access of each verified 11 January 2015
	Krasnoyarsk Krai, Stolby reserve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of police, Kolosovskiy region 	Okhota rybalka v Omskoy Oblasti 1/17/2013	http://oirp.pfb/zakondocum/41-2013-01-15-04-45-38/673-2013-01-17-11-05-32.html
	Kirov Oblast'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress Party & Russian Opposition Coordination Council 	Moscow Times Feb. 19, 2014	http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/494848.html
2013	Sverdlovsk Oblast', Bogdanovich reserve,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Duma deputy, member of Liberal Democratic Party 	URA.RU 1/11/2013	http://ura.ru/content/svrd/11-01-2013/news/1052151694.html
	Saratov Oblast' Novoburasskiy region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First vice president of municipal administration, Novoburasskiy region 	News ru.com 8/22/2013	http://www.newsru.com/russia/22aug2013/ohota.html
	Arkhangelsk Oblast'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy State Duma United Russia Party and famous boxer; 2014 member state hunting council 	MK 95 let, 5/23/2013	http://www.mk.ru/social/2013/05/23/858813-valuev-ubil-medvedya-chestno.html
	Kaliningrad Oblast', Vishnyets nature park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representative of bar association of lawyers 	Novyye kolyesa 2/08/2013	http://www.rudnikov.com/article.php?ELEMENT_ID=22241
	Saratov Oblast' Lysogorskiy region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prosecutor for Saratov Oblast • Saratov district court official 	Vzglyad-info 12/02/2013	http://www.vzsar.ru/news/2013/12/02/jiteli-raiona-pojalovalis-pytiny-na-brakonerstvo-vysokih-chinov.html
	Omsk Oblast' Isilul'skom district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister of Construction and Transport Omsk Oblast • General Director of "Omskoblvodoprovod" • deputy chief engineer "Omskoblvodoprovod" 	Omskinform 5/30/2013	http://omskinform.ru/news/56598

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Table A1. (Continued).

Year	Location	Position(s) of VIP(s) at time incident reported	Source(s)	Web address. Access of each verified 11 January 2015
2014	Saratov Oblast', Engelskiy district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of Hunting Committee for Saratov Oblast' 	Obshchestvennoye mneniye 8/18/2014	http://www.om-saratov.ru/novosti/18-August-2014-il-13994-gubernator-nazval-nedopustim
	Sakha Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President of Sakha (Yakutia) 	An-onlayn 1/24/2014	http://argumenti.ru/society/2014/01/314414
	Tuva (Tyva) Republic, Todzhinskiy district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local branch of Ministry of Emergency Situations-State inspector for small vessels • Former policeman 	MK 95 let 4/01/2014; Sibnovosti.ru 6/25/2014	http://www.mk.ru/incident/article/2014/04/01/1007116 http://omsk.sibnovosti.ru/incidents/271633
	Mordovia Republic, Mordovia reserve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy governor of Zubovo-Polyanskiy district Mordovia 	Portal Progorod Saransk 4/16/2014	http://pg13.ru/news/view/1254
	Altay kray, Yegor'evskiy reserve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Altay Deputy, Novchikhinskiy region 	Altayskaya pravda 2/20/2014	http://www.ap22.ru/paper/paper_11619.html
	Voronezh Oblast', Pavlovsk district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actor and chair, Russian Cultural Foundation 	MKRU Nizhniy Novgorod 2/20/2014	http://nn.mk.ru/article/2014/02/20/9881151
	Primoriye Kray, Khankayskiy district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former head of regional animal conservation administration 	PrimaMedia.ru 12/12/2014	http://primamedia.ru/news/primorye/12.12.2014/40800