

Project Update: January 2011

Gazprom and wood

by Anatoly Lebedev, BROCC, Vladivostok, Russian Far East

Serious anger expressed by Presidential Representative at the Far East Federal District Victor Ishaev with regards to timber lost by Gazprom subcontractors in Primorye and Khabarovsk regions remains one of the top issues for regional mass media in January. Ishaev was informed that 204000 cu meters of timber had been totally logged in 2010 under the preparatory process for construction gas pipeline Sakhalin-Khabarovsk-Vladivostok. But, officially only 23000 cu meters, about 11 % were delivered to specially determined timber yards for the further legal sales in favor of State Property Fund. That has happened despite that during last 3 years after deep forest reform local communities in the forest and agricultural districts suffer with the lack of financially accessible timber for construction and firewood. Legal model to satisfy that needs means either to present new leases to bidding especially for firewood logging, or sell for heating low quality wood produced under forest maintenance operations. But, the problem is that demand on commercial logging amongst local timber companies is essentially higher than the number of free or reserved forest plots. To the other hand, companies which get forest plot for maintenance operations, target to enhance forest quality and produce some firewood, always conduct commercial logging instead, producing perfect marketable timber for themselves and budget. Thus the need of firewood remains unsatisfied.

On this background, BROCC several times – in our own magazine “Ecology and Business”, other mass media and in official dialogues - promoted model of firewood supply, implemented by Krasnoarmeiski and other municipalities, as well as by some progressive, socially and environmentally friendly companies like “Terneylesstroy” holding. The idea is simple and environmentally reasonable – to distribute logging remainders among the poorest members of the forest related communities for free or at least for some symbolic price including cost of timber transfer from the forest. This practice demonstrate that in the country with wrong, unreasonable and corruptive legislation as Russian Forest Code is many depends on the good will of forest leasers and their awareness of the whole environmental and social complex of forest management and use.

Getting back to the story with Gazprom and it's lost timber, article in the most popular opposing newspaper “Novaya in Vladivostok” (NovayaGazeta.Ru) published on 27.01.11 my comment to the situation with another comment of WWF-Amur Forestry coordinator Denis Smirnov. The essence of comment is that under governmental pressure to speed up construction of pipeline, Gazprom subcontractors received logging permits without any appropriate evaluation of species contents, technology and scheme to use received timber via State Property Fund and together with it in favor of local communities. Using catastrophically weakened, symbolic forest inspection, loggers illegally widened cleared path to get more valuable species, including recently restricted Korean pine. Totally Gazprom signed 46 subcontracts for logging upon 2600 ha in Khabarovski and 920 ha in Primorski Krai, and did not report about logged volumes in time. This became the ground for criminal investigation now, since no timber from these operations appear anywhere in local communities or markets. Experts forecast that the most possible destiny of it was, as usual, rapid export to China in the form of raw logs.