

IFAW: Shell agrees to move oil pipeline to protect endangered Western Gray Whales

(Yarmouth Port, Mass. - 30 March 2005) - IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare - www.ifaw.org) today hailed the decision of the Sakhalin Energy Investment Company (SEIC), a Shell-led operating company, to move an oil pipeline off the east coast of Sakhalin/Russia in an effort to protect the last 100 Western Gray Whales.

Shell announced today that they will move the pipeline 20 kilometers to the south, away from the main feeding area of the critically endangered Western Gray Whale. A coalition of environmental organizations from around the world has been demanding that Shell move the pipeline for several years.

This February, a group of internationally renowned IUCN experts published a scientific report confirming that the Sakhalin-2 project threatened the extinction of the Western Gray Whale.

IFAW, together with the IUCN panel experts, urged Shell to review the construction plan of the pipeline near Sakhalin Island. IFAW and other environmental groups insisted that the next SEIC oil platform should be stationed at least 12 nautical miles off the Sakhalin shore and the planned route of the pipeline should be moved at least 12 nautical miles to the south.

In November 2004 the IUCN congress recommended that Sakhalin Energy "should delay all the current activities and postpone the planned development of the Sakhalin-2 project till the proper evaluation of the risks is undertaken and the whale conservation measures are elaborated".

Although the scientists came to a conclusion about the serious negative impact of the mentioned oil projects on the endangered Western Gray Whale population, the Shell Company (main shareholder of SEIC) first seemed to ignore the opinion of the IUCN panel and, in contradiction to the position of the scientists, announced the expansion of its activity on the Sakhalin shelf. But now it looks like the worries and demands of the environmentalists were partly heard.

Maria Vorontsova, director of IFAW Russia, said, "We are satisfied that Sakhalin Energy showed its willingness to cooperate with international NGOs and to re-route the pipeline, but we believe further steps have to be undertaken by SEIC to secure the future of the endangered Western Gray Whales. We are calling the Sakhalin Energy to move the platform further away from the whales feeding grounds."

About IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare)

The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW -- www.ifaw.org) works to improve the welfare of wild and domestic animals throughout the world by reducing commercial exploitation of animals, protecting wildlife habitats, and assisting animals in distress. IFAW seeks to motivate the public to prevent cruelty to animals and to promote animal welfare and conservation policies that advance the well-being of both animals and people.