

Biological conservation by numbers

U.S. tiger conservationists are trying a more business-like approach to saving the species: focusing on performance standards, not fund raising.

Biologists at the Wildlife Conservation Society in New York want to increase the number of tigers at the society's research sites in Asia by 50 percent during the next decade.

WCS Director of Science Alan Rabinowitz says the plan -- called "Tigers Forever" -- will differ from previous conservation attempts because the WCS has set targets by which its success can be judged.

"This is not a fund raising exercise," said Rabinowitz, but the experiment seems to be attracting donors. Michael Cline, a New York businessman and WCS board member, has contributed to the \$10 million already pledged. "More organizations should set goals like this," he says. "As a venture capitalist, I believe in fact-based judgments based on likelihood of success."

From the forests of the Asian subcontinent to the steppes of Russia, poaching, illegal hunting and habitat loss have reduced tiger numbers dramatically. The situation is most critical in the jungles of southeast Asian nations, and the WCS will begin by concentrating on selected reserves in that area.

The project is detailed in the journal *Nature*.

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