

ILLEGAL GAME HUNTING BY RUSSIAN ELITE

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REECAS Northwest Conference
April 30, 2016
University of Puget Sound

ABSTRACT

Despite recent attempts to strengthen laws on poaching in Russia, illegal activities continue and threaten biodiversity of Russian game species. Cases of Russian political and economic elite violating norms and escaping consequences are documented as an example of the challenge establishing rule of law in the Russian Federation.

KEYWORDS: poaching, Russia, laws, power crime, impunity

The rise in poaching among people of the Russian Federation has alarmed environmentalists. A series of laws on poaching under article 258 of the criminal code (State Duma 2013; WWF-Russia 2014) has been adopted to mitigate the damage and bring a halt to the crimes. The number of cases in which the alleged perpetrators are among the most powerful political or economic elites in the country is a concern I examine in this paper.

Local people perceive that powerful outsiders make up the bulk of poaching cases, even though evidence suggests it is still rank-and-file hunters who are the majority of violators (Vaysman, Matveytchuk, and Min'kov 2012, 13; personal correspondence with S. Matveytchuk, 2015). An emerging literature on criminal behavior in post-Soviet Russia has underscored continued difficulties establishing the rule of law due to corruption and dysfunction by state institutions (Gilinskiy, 2006; Tittle and Botchkovar, 2005, Glazyrin, 2013). Game poaching by the Russian elite class represents a special type of power crime, different from previously identified forms such as corporate malfeasance or state human rights abuse. Instead, this type of power crime is motivated by the desire to distinguish violators as a social group within the Russian context. The illegal hunt thus becomes an open display act, more akin to ostentatious consumption than to white collar criminality elsewhere. Because the inquiry here centers on *public perceptions* of a broken system, evidence has been gathered from press accounts, past surveys, and social media.

The skepticism of rank-and-file hunters toward wildlife laws may be set against a tacit acceptance that corruption is so profoundly embedded in Russian society, hope for change is futile. Ironically, the advent of the internet and extensive press coverage of poaching incidents may contribute to the cynicism, as evidenced in comments that often accompany news accounts or appear in hunting blogs (Braden 2014).

The discouragement of the Russian public that a more transparent system will emerge has been analyzed as a failed transition to democracy. Kosals and Maksimova (2015) referred to this as an issue that undermines establishment of formal institutions and policies and “impacts

everything from the level of unreported and unregistered crime, to everyday business transactions or dealings with the police, to the very workings of the political system at an elite level” (Kosals and Maksimova, 2015, 286). Scholars who have analyzed the persistence of corruption in Russia argue that the phenomenon is in part a result of historic legacies that date back to the communist period, as elite insiders gain and maintain access to limited resources (Obydenkova and Libman, 2014; Komarov, 1980). In the realm of hunting laws, Sergey Matveytchuk (2009) has noted that the elite have worked to maintain ownership rights and even monopoly control over game resources and hunting grounds.

In terms of poaching, are the elite law violators motivated only by the desire to control game resources and obtain trophies? Drawing on the research of Michael Urban, I propose that an additional motivation lies in the search to express power: the law violation must be performed openly and with impunity in order to establish elevated status, thus explaining the large number of social media and press accounts portraying the criminality (Urban, 2010; Braden, 2014).

Four categories of actors who influence public perception of lawlessness may be discerned:

- a) VIP Poachers: high ranking officials, executives of large companies, and other well-known figures who are caught poaching but do not suffer consequences *and are known to the public through press reports or social media*;
- b) Rank-and-file, local hunters caught poaching and prosecuted, often for cases that involve low level harm to nature;
- c) Game inspectors, rangers, and police charged with protecting wildlife but who often carry out poaching, tolerate it, or are susceptible to bribes;
- d) Perpetrators of retaliatory acts against enforcement personnel who apprehend VIP lawbreakers

Collectively, publicity around the totality of these categories seems to contribute to public cynicism about the effectiveness of laws against illegal hunting. Each is therefore considered below along with examples of high profile cases.

VIP poachers: “the black safari”

Illegal hunting by elite actors in Russia is so common, several popular terms have emerged to describe this type of criminal activity: *chernoye safari* -black safari (Racheva, 2009), or *tsarskaya okhota*-Tsar’s Hunt (Zaitseva, 2013). Most often, however, these cases are simply referred to as *VIP brakon’eri* (Very Important Person Poachers).

In a previously published account, I documented press reports on thirty-six of these cases, the majority from 2001 to 2014 involving a wide range of regions and types of hunting violations (Braden, 2014, 485-488). The professional positions of the VIPs at the time incidents were reported included: members of the Duma, regional governors or prime ministers of internal republics, heads of government agencies, assistants to the Russian president, city and provincial officials, heads of various national cultural committees, chairmen of large corporations, lawyers and prosecutors, leaders of political parties, figures from entertainment, and heads of committees charged with management of hunting.

The call noted above by Duffy et al. (2015) for placing poaching in a broad context of analysis resembles arguments put forth by Viktor Gurov (2015), an experienced hunter and editor of a hunting newsletter, who made the case that poaching is in essence a sociological phenomenon in Russia. Similar to a taxonomy of poachers created by Aleksey Vaysman (2012) of Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF)-Russia, Gurov divided illegal hunters into four categories: protest poachers among ordinary rank-and-file hunters who do not like the lock up of leased land or the rules imposed on them, poachers driven to crime due to poverty, professional criminal rings, and lastly, VIP poachers, a group he refers to as the most repulsive for ordinary hunters. He concluded with the argument that authorities were depriving ordinary hunters of their rights and transferring them to the “correct” people.

Three notorious cases illustrate the symbolic importance of this category to the Russian public when famous violators are not punished:

- Yegor Borisov, President of the Yakut Republic (Sakha) in Siberia was accused of illegally shooting three arkhari (*Ovis ammon*), listed as an endangered species in the Russian Red Book (Tikhomirov, 2014). Evidence included a photo of Borisov posing with the dead sheep. He claimed at first that the image was a forgery. Later, threatened with prosecution, Borisov admitted shooting the animals but said it had been many years earlier and that it was a different species- chubuki, Siberian sheep or *Ovis nivicola*. The environmental NGO, “Green Patrol” pushed for prosecutors to take up the case, but as of 2015, the case had languished and Borisov was still serving as head of the republic.
- Vladimir Taskaev, member of Duma from the Sverdlovsk district in the Urals, and known as the “Siberian Zhirinovskiy” for his larger-than-life personality in politics within the Liberal Democratic Party bloc, was accused of illegally hunting deer in the Bogdanovich reserve (Bakin, 2013). On January 2, 2013, an SUV was stopped in the reserve by hunting inspectors who found two roe deer carcasses in the vehicle. Because of Taskaev’s parliamentary immunity, the case was sent to the Duma to inquire whether his protection should be taken away in order to prosecute. In April of 2015, TASS and the news source *Kommersant* reported that the case had been dismissed due to expiration of statute of limitations, confirmed by the public spokesman for the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs in Sverdlovsk oblast’ (*Kommersant*, 2015). Dismissal of cases for VIP poachers are often done on the basis of expiration of time.
- Altay-gate was the poaching incident most widely covered by the Russian press, environmental NGOs, and even Western news sources because it involved a spectacular tragedy: the crash of a helicopter in 2009 carrying various high profile officials and carcasses of illegally killed argali sheep (see for example: *Russian Officials Among 7 Killed in Copter Crash*, Associated Press, January 11, 2009 and *Official Caught Poaching After Deadly Copper Crash*, *RT*, May 25, 2012. Accessed July 8, 2015 at <http://rt.com/news/prime-time/poaching-deadly-crash-altai-255/>). The Altay Republic in central Asia is a prime hunting and recreation region because of its wildlife and mountain scenery and the so-called “Altay-Gate” incident was not the first publicized case involving poaching by VIPs. Viktor Kaimin, chairman of the Committee for the Protection, Use, and Reproduction of Fauna of the Altay Republic, was killed in the crash, but had been apprehended earlier in 2003 by game inspector Viktor Yantiev for

illegally shooting ibex from a helicopter in the Shavlinskiy game reserve (Braden and Prudnikova, 15-16). Other VIPs accused by Yantiev included Aleksei Saurin, head of the Russian Department of Conservation and Hunting Resources. When Yantiev reported the incident and showed photographic evidence, he was told by the local prosecutor to remain silent because it involved high-profile individuals. The inspector instead took the matter to the local press, but even after the story was published, there was no prosecution (Braden, 2005; Vitovsev, 2004).

The 2009 crash did result in an investigation and prosecution, in part because press photographers documented the incident and NGOs such as WWF-Russia pursued it, pressuring Vladimir Putin for a response. Putin's envoy to the Russian Duma, Aleksandr Kosopkin, was among the dead, along with Kaimin. Survivors included the Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Altay, Anatoly Bannykh; Nikolai Kapranov, expert with the State Duma Committee on Economic Policy and Entrepreneurship; CEO of the Moscow-based industrial environmental company "Ineko," Boris Belinsky; and a copilot, Maxim Kolbin. For many years, the Russian public continued to read about the case, but in 2011, the VIPs accused were acquitted. After the prosecutor sent it back on appeal to local courts, as in the Taskaev case, it was ruled that the statute of limits had expired.

Despite these widely publicized cases, poaching incidents continue to be frequently described in the Altay Republic (Aleksandr Zakharov, 2015). Additionally, Amir Qaydiazam published a video in 2013 purportedly showing hunting in the Altay region from a helicopter in the Shavlinskiy reserve, still illegal under Russian law. The veracity of the video cannot be confirmed, but it was distributed widely on Russian language internet sources and Mr. Qaydiazam claimed the helicopter belonged to an Altay Republic official (website at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmy-lgQCBnE>, published November 26, 2013 and accessed June 25, 2015).

Rank-and-File Violators

Data published on prosecutions by the Judicial Department of the Russian Federation Supreme Court showed a jump of 32%, from 328 cases in 2013 to 432 in 2014. However, the same data showed a doubling of cases "terminated on other grounds" and only a 10% increase in those receiving fines (Table 1).

As noted above, cases suggest that the majority are not VIP poachers, but violators among rank-and-file hunters. This reflects a tendency to criminalize the practices of the working class over those of the elite in the context of law generally (Ferrell, 2013) and poaching in particular (MacDonald, 2005). A rigorous assessment of the effectiveness of the new laws remains to be conducted in order to test assumptions of organizations such as Worldwide Fund for Nature-Russia, often in close cooperation with MNR, that the new legal regime is effective in reducing poaching incidents (WWF-Russia, 2014). In contrast, Yuriy Sokolov, writing for *Politicheskaya Rossiya*, noted: "According to the Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation under Article 258 of the Criminal Code for illegal hunting 247 people have been

convicted, with real prison sentences only for two, and suspended sentences for six” (Sokolov, 2015).

Sporadic information on poaching cases may be gleaned from press reports. In Altay kray in 2012, 1,070 citations were issued for poaching according to Yakov Ishutin, deputy governor of the region. Six people received sentences and fines, while fifty-four criminal cases were brought to trial (Ryzhkov, 2013). The government Committee for Environmental Protection of the Republic of Khakassia noted in its annual report 741 violations of hunting laws in 2013, indicating a reduction in cases by ten percent over 2012. Officials of the agency wrote that a reduction in poaching had occurred after the adoption of the new hunting laws (Khakassia Regional Government, 2013). The online *Zhurnal IHunter* blog (2015) passed along data from two regions for violations in 2014: officials in the Jewish Autonomous Oblast’ reported 320 cases of law enforcement officers apprehending poachers in 2014, but, “members of the hunting management council also noted that, notwithstanding the strengthened measures for poaching responsibilities, the number of illegal hunting cases in the oblast’ did not decrease.” Also in the report, officials in the greater Moscow region by September 2014 had “brought to justice” 513 illegal hunters who paid fines totaling 576,000 rubles. The data would therefore indicate an average penalty of approximately 1,000 rubles, or less than €20 at September, 2014 exchange rate, *assuming* all cases involved fines.

Thus, in the absence of a systematic accounting of poaching convictions, accounts in the press and on hunting websites continue to demonstrate a wide range of data by region. Sergey Matveytchuk (2015) of the Zhitkov Russian Scientific Research Institute on Game Management and Fur Farming, has suggested that journalists reporting data may conflate general criminal activity or other environmental crime with illegal hunting; therefore, obtaining accurate data on criminal poaching cases alone is problematic and a rigorous examination of offense and conviction data to verify effectiveness of new laws throughout all regions of Russia still remains to be accomplished.

Responsible Officials

It is understandable that the Russian public perceives that much of the poaching is done by those responsible for combatting the crime. The fines put into place for violations require higher amounts for “responsible officials”- game inspectors, rangers, or police. Declining budget shares for protected areas, low salaries, and a general shortage of inspectors all have put increased pressure on low-level officials to poach their own charges. For example, in the Nizhny Novgorod region, despite the police announcement of success noted above, poaching was reported to be widespread and often conducted by visiting VIPs or by local officials. Vladimir Chernigin, a hunting guide in the region, told a local reporter that in winter of 2013, a large scale illegal hunt of moose occurred in the Vorsma area and the perpetrators were not “poor local folks, but a technically equipped team, consisting of local officials” (Gusev, 2014).

Harassers of Law Enforcement Agents

When hunting inspectors do not cooperate with corruption and in particular, attempt to apprehend and arrest VIP-poachers, they often risk violence or even revenge proceedings in

which they become the accused. These cases of abuse against inspectors are often covered in the media and enhance the cynicism about justice for poachers.

Inspectors may lack sufficient resources to secure evidence for enforcement. A journalist for the Russian news agency, TASS, Anna Semenova (2015), interviewed game manager, Yuriy Nikitin, who had been arrested and accused of threatening to kill poachers in the Tuva area. In the same article, Valeriy Kuzenkov, editor of a hunting journal, told Semenova that attacks and even murders of game wardens were much higher than in the 1990s and that inspectors were more vulnerable because they have less power and ability to be armed, a fact that officials at MNR later disputed.

Two cases near Moscow in particular of such retaliatory threats received widespread coverage in social media and hunting blog outlets. In both situations, the inspectors attempted to detain and arrest VIP poachers. The first involved inspector Andrey Grigor'iev, who apprehended a party of local officials hunting from snowmobiles with unregistered vehicles in 2011. No charges were brought against them, but Grigor'iev was put on trial for "exceeding his authority" and firing at the snowmobiles. He received a three years' probation sentence from the municipal court (Ivanova, 2011). Likewise, inspector Aleksandr Dovydenko attempted in 2010 to detain officials from the corporation "Gazprom" for poaching in the Dmitrov district near Moscow and complained to local officials when only one of the party was held responsible. Local prosecutors were pressured to indict Dovydenko for exceeding his authority, but resisted. When a change of staff occurred in the office, charges were brought against Dovydenko, with the local police department claiming the party had not been poaching at all but had just found the dead moose in the woods (Shvarev, 2013). Dovydenko was convicted in 2014 and received a sentence of three years' probation.

While I have outlined above four categories of actors who engage in or are connected with game poaching, the high profile press and social media accounts that spotlight VIP poachers, aberrant officials, or revenge actions against wildlife agents suggest an impact on public perception potentially greater than the actual percent of poaching cases attributable to Russia's power class.

Given the arguments presented above on cynicism among ordinary hunters, would outcomes be improved via a stronger legal regime? Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russian Duma made several attempts to update and strengthen laws on illegal taking of natural resources, so-called "Ecological Crime". But there has also been a diminished share of the national budget toward environmental amelioration, a decrease in numbers of game inspectors, increased privatization of hunting grounds previously open to the public, and a downgrading of the management agencies responsible for nature protection in Russia.

Citizens groups and environmental non-governmental organizations such as the WWF-Russia and Greenpeace campaigned for more stringent laws on illegal hunting under the rubric of Article 258 of the Criminal Code of Russia, dating from 1996, with subsequent modifications in 2009 and 2011 (Consul'tantPlus, 2015). While bigger fines for trafficking in high-profile endangered species received most notice, financial penalties were likewise greatly increased for game animals (Table 2), as was the potential to have a hunting license revoked for up to two years, weapons confiscated, and the prospect of serving jail time (State Duma of Russian

Federation, 2013; WWF-Russia, 2014; Smol'yakova, 2013). Fines were set at much higher levels for repeat violations. Proposed tightening of national laws continued in September of 2014 with respect to limitations on the spring bird hunt and use of hunting dogs, in part to protect species of game birds, such as the grey goose, that were rapidly disappearing (MNR, 2014a).

Flaws in the laws were identified rather quickly by hunters, environmental activists, and some research professionals (Matveytchuk, 2012). For example, the legislation neglected to continue the ban on hunting from vehicles such as helicopters, snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles, or motorcycles, although this portion of regulations was restored after a protest by environmental groups (Chizhova, 2012). The laws covered the time and place of the violation and measured the “economic harm” to wildlife by a formula based on species in each region, a model worked out in earlier years under the Ministry of Agriculture (Netsvetsova, 2014). Stronger rules were set forth for re-licensing of weapons, use of dogs for hunting, and access to hunting grounds across private lands. Fines are *ostensibly* set at much higher levels for officials caught poaching. State inspectors have more defined rights with respect to asking for identity, inspecting vehicles, and using recording devices during stops and searches (Braden, 2014, 466-467).

The profession of game inspector in Russia is dangerous, low-paying, and often thankless (Braden, 2008). The average wage for similar work in the United States is eleven times higher than in Russia and in 2012-2013, although Russia has almost 80% more territory than the U.S., it had 53% as many inspectors, as calculated from United States Department of Labor 2013 and statistics reported by Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, Sergey Donskoy (United States Department of Labor, 2013; Smol'yakova, 2013). The shortage of personnel in Russia continues despite the fact that President Vladimir Putin signed an order under the long term hunting development strategy that called for a minimum of three state hunting inspectors by the year 2016 for each municipality that contained hunting grounds (Grudnev, 2015).

The Russian federal hunting laws differentiate the rights and responsibilities of state inspectors (*gosudarstvenniy okhotinspektor*) from that of a “hunter”, perhaps better translated as a “gamekeeper” (*yeger*). The *yegery* in state reserves or other protected territories carry out management tasks, oversee compliance with hunting laws, and may use force to detain suspected violators. Outside state reserves, a new category of worker was introduced in 2013 under article 41 of the hunting law “industrial (commercial) hunting inspector” and this new category has created some resentment by those who wish to access non-state hunting grounds of various legal enterprises (S. Matveytchuk, 2015; MNR, 2014b). The issue of whether *yegery* have the right to conduct searches, especially inside vehicles, is controversial and, although Russian law codes allow them to do so, hunting and fishing blog sites abound with questions from outraged readers who challenge such actions as unlawful, indicating deep-seated suspicion of law enforcement. Matveytchuk (2012) has referred to the “fragmentation of services” with respect to specifying duties of various inspectors and game officers at differing regional levels.

When poachers are apprehended, taking the case to a successful prosecution is problematic; and this fact is due not only to impunity by elite violators, but also elements of the law that hamstring inspectors who bear the burden of proof, the need for witnesses, and the challenge of demonstrating that offenders did not merely “find” a dead animal. Russian legal scholars and environmental activists have agreed that increasing the numbers of inspectors is important, but so

are structural improvements, such as forensic support to handle and transmit evidence (Vaysman, 2012; Netsvetsova, 2014).

The size of territory in Russia where hunting occurs, policed by an inadequate number of fish and game inspectors and containing a diversity of cultures and traditions, makes consistent enforcement of laws challenging. Standards are unclear as to what powers local inspectors possess vi-a-vis those delegated only to federal inspectors. Aleksey Vaysman called for a unified national system and noted that establishment of regional forensic laboratories, improved coordination between federal and local inspectors, and specialized training for agents who understand the particularities of endangered species trafficking would all be positive steps (Vaysman, 56-60). Significant gaps in laws remain and frequent changes in structure confuse both enforcement agents and allow violators to claim ignorance on matters such as what constitutes an educational purpose for trapping animals, how scientific norms for quotas are set, or merely what is required to obtain a hunting license.

Managers of nature parks and *zapovedniki* (reserves) are sometimes accused of budgetary peculiarities and embezzlement. Protected territories are becoming open for business as types of privatized hunting grounds, despite the higher fines noted in Table 2 for violations in these areas. A former employee of the national park, Samarskaya Bend along the Volga River, Aleksey I. Kochetov, took his complaint to social media after being fired and physically assaulted when he attempted to expose rampant poaching operations and bribery. He maintained that even though hunting is illegal in national parks, bribes to the management resulted in commercialized poaching and furthermore, in a Gogol-like fashion, administrators received additional funds by keeping “dead souls” on the payroll (Kochetov, 2014). As of late 2015, the case for his reinstatement was still not resolved by the courts. The tradition of VIP poaching on protected territories dates back to Soviet time (Komarov, 1980) and, while the size of the protected territories network has been expanded in Russia, the necessary budget allocations to actually manage the reserves is often lacking. Laws passed in December of 2013 (30.11.2011 № 365-F3) allow for more commercial development and tourist activities in protected areas, thus further weakening their role as nature sanctuaries.

During the Soviet period, *Glavokhota* (Main Administration for Hunting and *Zapovedniki*-Reserves) was the agency that regulated hunters, hunting lands, and nature reserves. But *Glavokhota* was eliminated as a victim of the general reorganization of nature protection in the post-Soviet era as the State Committee for Environmental Protection was abolished in the year 2000. The Ministry of Natural Resources (or MNR, renamed the Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology) took over most functions of protection even though it is the same department that must extract profits from the country’s natural resources. *Gosokhotnadzor*, the agency responsible for legal oversight of hunting, then was separated from other parts of game management in the MNR, moved to the Ministry of Agriculture, but subsequently moved back to MNR by decree in 2010.

Despite the 2030 goals established by the long term strategy for hunting management in Russia, the budget announced in 2015 to distribute funds for hunting supervision to various regions was cut by 1.3 billion rubles and regional authorities complained about shortfalls in subventions they were expecting (Grudnev, 2015). However, it should be noted that the overall budget for all

services of the Russian federal government contracted by 81 billion rubles in 2015, and a reduction of 10% in state programs was envisioned through 2018 (Milyukova, 2015). When new laws on hunting were adopted, it had been promised that financial resources would follow to support enforcement by provincial authorities. As the multi-layered bureaucracies began to cause confusion among hunters and law officials, some experts called for the reestablishment of the *Glavokhota* or a new agency with a similar, cohesive set of national powers, sufficient funding, and training in modern law enforcement methods (Perovskiy, 2011; Vaysman, 76-77).

Von Essen and co-authors have argued that a normative perspective to understand what drives illegal hunting may be more productive than a deterrence model. The experience with the revised hunting laws in Russia thus far suggests this conclusion is correct. The researchers noted that defiance poaching may occur especially by groups that perceive themselves as marginalized: “According to the normative perspective, an individual complies with game regulations to the degree that the law is perceived as appropriate in a general sense, legitimate in the procedural sense, and consistent with their internalized norms” (Von Essen, et. al., 2014, 636). Such defiance acts seem to correspond to what is termed in Russia “protest poaching” (Vaysman, 2012, 72).

The damage caused by VIP poachers is but one element in an unfortunate social structure called “the system” (*sistema*). Basing their conclusion on survey data, Kofanova and Petukhov hold that people in Russia have become accustomed to the prevalence of corruption and feel it is useless to attempt to combat it. They sum up perhaps the most salient factor impacting lawlessness in Russian society: “...a kind of closed circle in which the system of law enforcement is thought to be the most susceptible to corruption, but at the same time it is the agency that has been assigned the job of fighting this social evil” (Kofanova and Petukhov, 2006, 34). Since everyone assumes corruption is rampant, every person to a greater or lesser extent takes part in it, even if just by way of tacit acceptance that nothing will improve.

One mechanism that facilitates impunity among Russian political VIP poachers is parliamentary immunity. Under Article 98 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation (Administration of the President of the Russian Federation 1993):

members of the Federation Council and the State Duma shall have immunity throughout their term of office. They cannot be detained, arrested, or searched except ‘in flagrante delicto’ cases or personally inspected except when the safety of others is involved. Removing immunity rests with the prosecutor general of the Russian Federation and corresponding chamber of the Federal Assembly.

Faced with the *sistema* that favors the powerful, do law-abiding hunters have any hope for change? The Russian public may yet have a significant asset to help stem elite poaching: the promulgation of social shame. Newspaper and broadcast media outlets, as well as social media blogs, show that, despite a fatalistic attitude about corruption, Russians are often outraged at abuse of hunting privileges and uncontrolled killing of wildlife. Indeed, in other countries, “naming and shaming” has been shown to be an effective strategy of enforcement by NGOs and private individuals who act as whistleblowers in the context of illegal harvest of natural resources where state watchdogs are inadequate (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2014, 350).

An attempt at public shaming occurred in the city of Tomsk when, in February of 2015, Sergey Zhabin, head of the ecological NGO “Strizh”, called a press conference, covered by local print and broadcast media, to directly accuse the wealthy elite of violating hunting laws. Zhabin stated that “influential people” from other regions were allowed to come in and poach elk, deer, birds, and local fish stocks but rarely apprehended or prosecuted (Sedov, 2015). Another example was created in the Volodarskiy district near Astrakhan when a citizen hotline was established to report on poachers who violated fishing laws and a similar system was set up by WWF-Russia in Kamchatka. Muscovites have been able to call a hotline and report illegal harvest of trees in nearby parks since 2005. Anti-poaching brigades have been funded by outside agencies such as the United Nations Development Program and the World Bank Global Environmental Facility in the Altay-Sayan Ecoregion project in cooperation with the citizens’ Sosnovka Coalition.

Citizen discontent toward poaching is sometimes manifested in letters to officials that are then publicized by local media outlets. The advent of Change.org and other online petition services (often in concert with animal rights activists), make expression of concern easier. Despite such avenues for protest by citizens, Matveytchuk has questioned whether the new hunting laws in essence “remove the public” from participation, partially due to the fact that procedures for citizen input are established at the federal level, but not necessarily in each region. He concludes, “provisions of the Hunting Act [of 2009] represent a significant diminution of rights of citizens and their associations to participate in governance and management of game animals, compared to other ecological laws” (Matveytchuk, 2012, 3).

But naming and shaming as an act of sociopolitical pressure can be a dangerous activity in Russia. In their exploration of state shaming by environmental INGOs, Murdie and Urpelainen (2015) ask how target states are selected, noting that autocracies that lack an environmental ministry seem to be favored and that international organizations try to step in when indigenous groups cannot gain access to political power. But as is often the case, Russia defies categorization. It is not a weak state that lacks an environmental governance system, nor is it totally autocratic, and yet support by INGOs for indigenous environmentalists is discouraged due to political pressure. For example, Suren Gazaryan, of Environmental Watch on the North Caucasus, left the country for the safety of Estonia after his group criticized the impact of the winter Olympics in Sochi. Organizations that are affiliated with or receive support from external sources are particularly discouraged and must register as foreign agents, a government action that suggests the fate of wildlife and a just system in Russia for legitimate hunters are not matters of concern for people worldwide. The list of organizations put on warning to register or to cease political activities includes Baikal Wave in Irkutsk, the Yaroslavl regional Hunters and Fishermen Society, the Amur branch of the Russian Socio-Ecological Union, Amur Environmental Club Ulukitkan, Kirov Oblast’ Society of Hunters and Fishermen, Siberian Environmental Center in Novosibirsk, Kola Center for Wildlife Defense, and the Protected Natural Areas Association of the Altay Republic, and Sakhalin Environmental Watch. On the other hand, there is sometimes a relationship between government agencies, businesses, and favored environmental NGOs, as evidenced by the December 15, 2015 naming of Igor Chestin of WWF-Russia to the public council of the Ministry of Natural Resources, a body that also includes a representative from the Russian Chamber of Commerce and the Gazprom corporation.

I have argued here that poaching cases by VIPs in Russia are a form of power crime, but atypical in that concealment is not a goal. Instead, overt displays of impunity confer a type of social standing that is perceived by the public negatively, but nonetheless is effective in differentiating an elite. Additionally, I have maintained that new hunting laws are flawed, enforcement measures sporadic and under-funded, and that lower level violators seem to be bearing the brunt of prosecutions. The outcome is a public that remains cynical about the legitimacy of regulations. Vaysman (2012, 12) precisely summarized the peril of a continued public cynicism:

A situation is shaping up in which on one hand, because of the rather high cost of living and the strength of administrative reasons, there is little access to licenses, and it is almost impossible for rural people to hunt legally. On the other hand, there are regular, well-worn teams of poachers and the power elite, both at the regional and federal levels, or simply rich people, who endlessly hunt ‘everything that moves’, not at all fearing hunting regulations or any other forms of law. For such hunters, there is a ‘green light’ everywhere and prosecutorial powers, regulatory personnel, and the population is remarkably aware of this... In such a situation, the deciding result now and then is ‘why are *they* allowed, but not us? Why are we somehow worse?’

Thus far, the oligarchs of post-Soviet Russia seem to express status via ostentatious displays that include extravagant private hunting lodges (see, for example, Steven Perlberg, 2013). Even when hunting activities are legally conducted on vast tracts of private hunting lands, they reinforce the notion that power and wealth include prime access to game resources. This expression of power may be examined against Jean-Pascal Daloz’s analysis of conspicuous display as a method for defining social position. In fact, Daloz’s discussion of prestigious commodity possession (2010, 61) includes a list of items that might describe the backdrop to cases of elite poaching I previously catalogued (Braden, 2014):

- Ostentatious residences (Daloz, 68-69): the development of new exclusive hunting resorts and lodges
- A service class (Daloz, 105): the cases rarely excluded hunting guides, pilots, and support personnel, who at times took the blame for the poaching activity
- The flaunting of elitist connections (Daloz, 96): in the majority of cases, there was not a single accused perpetrator, but a group of well-connected and powerful individuals acting together
- Expensive vehicles (Daloz, 73-77): the (often illegal) use of snowmobiles, SUVs, helicopters, and other special vehicles were an aspect of the elite poaching incidents that seemed to particularly elicit scorn from rank-and-file hunters

But elite impunity is the ultimate item in the package of prestigious goods, commodities that Daloz (61) suggests are “external signs of superiority”. Further investigation will be fruitful if it can bring in the full sociological and cultural context for motivations of parvenus to disregard Russia’s hunting laws. Two recent articles suggest next steps for research: Oleg Riabov and Tatiana Riabova of Ivanovo State University have described the “re-masculinization” of Russia under the Putin regime and argued a connection between gender discourse, and power, thus explaining in part the constant imagery of Vladimir Putin as an avid outdoorsman (Riabov and Riabova, 2014, 32). At least in terms of his public messaging, Putin has urged respect for hunting

and fishing laws in the country. If the elite class perceives obedience to hunting laws as part of this revived masculine image, there could be a shift in norms within the group and a redefinition of prestigious goods.

A second thread for inquiry is that of Elisabeth Schimpfossi (2014), who has provided a useful sociological examination of Russia's newly rich in terms of a potential evolution from ostentation to refinement. The sartorial signals of an earlier decade that included status markers in fashion, housing, vehicles, and even trophy wives could also include unlimited and illegal access to game resources. Schimpfossi identified some hope for a move toward the Russian virtue of *kul'turnost*, culturedness or good taste, as a process of legitimation. As she noted from her interview material, "ostentatious behavior turned into a more moderate and private affair" (78) because the new Russian upper class wishes to distinguish itself from the "brutish" 1990s. Schimpfossi concluded (78):

Both in historical and contemporary contexts, *kul'turnost* has bestowed attributes of dignity and virtue on material possessions. It has instilled more discerning tastes, 'good manners', and civilized consumption into its holders, thereby acting as a bridge between economic capital and cultural capital. Some of my interviewees aimed to make this bridge more durable and ensured that it reached into the future by passing on *kul'turnost* to their children.

But it is an open question whether game populations in Russia can wait for those in power to rise to a higher moral standard of their own volition. When the elite are among violators who seek to disregard authority and laws, the only recourse may be strengthened social norms and public shaming. Such recourse will require a halt to erosion of rights for citizens, environmental NGOs, the press, and legitimate hunters in Russia to call out those in power for their trespasses.

Russian researchers are asking if the power elite can reform not only their own private choices, but also national political and legal structures. At a 2013 round table discussion of the Urals Juridical Academy, sociology professor V. A. Glazyrin (2013, 85) posed the rhetorical question of whether the elite in power have any reasons to establish the rule of law in Russia. Despite all the arguments for pessimism, he noted that incentives do exist, such as the desire to establish legitimacy, ensure a more stable claim to assets, and provide for the elite's future generations, echoing Schimpfossi's observations. If political barriers for naming and shaming campaigns are reduced and there is indeed a natural evolution by the powerful toward respectability, diminished game poaching by the elite could become a bellwether for improved rule of law in Russia. As members of this REECAS Conference consider the 2016 theme of "perils and opportunities for Russia", the case of illegal hunting by those in power provides a case study of both a peril to the environment, but also an opportunity to establish improvements in respect for social norms and laws.

Table 1. Data on Prosecutions by Judicial Department of Supreme Court of the Russian Federation for Illegal Hunting Under Article 258 of Russian Criminal Code from 2011 to 2014

	2014	2013	2012	2011	change 2013 to 2014
Total Judged	432	328	365	397	131.7%
Prison sentence	15	10	24	2	150.0%
Correctional Work	46	24	11	14	191.7%
Compulsory Work (community service)	89	55	55	51	161.8%
Fined	248	224	250	211	110.7%
Judgment taken by other measures	20	12	17	14	166.7%
Released under amnesty provisions	7	3	7	1	233.3%
Confiscation of property	24	15	15	8	160.0%
Case terminated on other grounds	143	67	118	94	213.4%

Source: Judicial Department of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation. *Dannyye sudebnoi statistiki* (Data on Judgment Statistics). <http://www.cdep.ru/index.php?id=79>. Accessed June 25, 2015

Table 2: Sample Fines for Illegal Hunting in Russian Federation by Species, 2013 (in rubles)			
Species	Violation of limit set for species by day or season	Specific in protected areas or listed in Red Book	Outside protected areas but not Red Book listed or case of exceeding limit for species
male moose	40,000	200,000	120,000
female moose	40,000	280,000	200,000
male wild boar	15,000	75,000	45,000
female wild boar	15,000	105,000	75,000
male deer*	35,000	175,000	105,000
female deer*	35,000	245,000	175,000
male roe deer	20,000	100,000	60,000
female roe deer	20,000	140,000	100,000
male bear	30,000	150,000	90,000
female bear	30,000	210,000	150,000
male hare	250	1,250	750
female hare	250	1,750	1,250
male or female wolf	100	500	300
note: as of 7/5/2015, one ruble=\$US .018			
source: Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology of the Russian Federation No. 948 of December 8, 2011 and modified No. 252 July 22, 2013. http://faolex.fao.org/docs/texts/rus117848.doc . Accessed July 7, 2015.			
* Cervus elaphus xanthopygus			

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