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Forging the National Park Concept in the Russian Federation

The national park concept is a relatively new protected area designation in Russia. Until the 1980s protected areas in Russia were composed primarily of strict nature reserves established for scientific purposes *(Zapovedniki)*, and hunting preserves *(Zakosniki)* open only to the aristocracy, or, in later years, to senior government officials (Soloviev 1994). The sudden removal of the centrally controlled Communist form of government and the rapid advent of democratic institutions in Russia has catalyzed a revival of public interest in the environment and in maintaining the unique cultures of the various Russian ethnic groups. This interest has taken the form of increased government agency activity focused on evaluating national conservation and environmental protection needs, a rapid evolution of citizen action groups interested in improving environmental quality and protecting resources, and a revival of ethnic awareness. Many claim that these public concerns and interests have always been present but only recently could they be publicly displayed and pursued (Stepanitsky 1993).

The first Russian national parks were established in 1983 (Knystautas 1987; Soloviev 1993). During the next decade twenty-four parks were created, mostly near urban centers or areas where there already was an interest in some form of outdoor recreation. The design and management of these areas seem to have been based largely on European models of parks, the emphasis being on outdoor recreation. Many parks contain small villages and permit some forms of consumptive use such as subsistence hunting, grazing, selective timber cutting, berry and mushroom picking, and small-scale commercial fishing. The development of visitor facilities is very limited or non-existent. Public-use pressures are still generally light, with most users coming from the local towns within the region. Kurshskaya Kosa Park on the Baltic shore and the two Lake Baikal parks are the only areas receiving noticeable international visitation.

The management of national parks is currently under the jurisdiction of the Federal Forest Service, which, like the U.S. Forest Service, was established as a multiple-use resource extraction agency. In contrast, the extensive *Zapovednik* (nature preserve) system is administered by the Ministry for Environmental Protection and Natural Resources, largely a preservation-conservation agency much like the U.S. Department of the Interior. *Zakosniki* are managed by both agencies, their status and purpose being somewhat uncertain (Soloviev 1993, Stepanitsky 1993).

Leading officials of both government bodies have recently received extensive exposure to U.S. models of park management and protection as well as general management concepts of the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service Refuge System, the National Forest System, and the management of The Nature Conservancy's privately owned preserve system. Over the past four years, this exposure has had a definite effect on how leading government agency officials and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) view the future management of parks and preserves in Russia.

Contact with USNPS officials over the past few years has occurred

largely through programs sponsored by the USNPS or American NGOs and by the maintenance of long-term friendships and professional relationships resulting from these programs. Three recent major programs carried out as an official part of the U.S.–Russian Bilateral Agreement on Protection of the Environment have had a dramatic effect on the national park movement in Russia. These included a park management seminar conducted jointly by USNPS and Parks Canada for invited Russian park and preserve directors and departmental level officials. This three-week seminar was carried out in several U.S. and Canadian parks during June 1993. In September of the same year the USNPS sent two agency professionals to Pribaikalskiy National Park in central Russia to conduct a week-long ranger skills and interpretation training course. In 1994, the USNPS sponsored a joint park and preserve management seminar in the city of Petrozavodsk and at Vodlozerskiy National Park in the Karelian region of Russia. This event was attended by Russian departmental officials, park and preserve directors, regional government officials, and representatives of Russian NGO groups. Three USNPS professionals attended and presented nine different sessions on a broad range of park and conservation issues. Also in 1994, several USNPS representatives participated in a park and protected area conference in Vladivostok on the Pacific Rim of Russia.

These programs, in conjunction with the personal efforts of individuals within the USNPS, have had a noticeable effect on the development and refinement of national park and preserve management concepts in Russia (Stepanitsky 1993; Soloviev 1994; Williams 1994). An example is the development of Vodlozerskiy National Park as a prototype or model park. Constant USNPS and American NGO attention to this park over the past four years, coupled with the heroic efforts of the park's dynamic young director, Oleg Chervyakov, have resulted in a tenfold increase in the park budget (Soloviev 1994), the subsequent development of basic visitor facilities, an effective and well-equipped staff (by Russian standards) of over 100 people, the construction of a new headquarters complex at the park and an ecological center in Petrozavodsk, and new programs in environmental education and resource inventory.

As a result of the 1994 seminar in Russia, senior Russian park and preserve officials have prepared recommendations for needed changes in legislation, policy, budget processes, and operations based largely on what they had learned from their experiences with the USNPS (Soloviev 1994; Williams 1994). If adopted by the Russian Parliament, these recommendations will result in the creation of a Russian National Park Service, will strengthen the legislative bases for the management of national parks, and will create a line-item budget for the new agency. Although it is uncertain at this time which ministry the prospective new Russian National Park Service will be assigned to, there are firm plans to more than double the number of parks by the end of this decade.

This contact has also been effective in changing individual and collective attitudes regarding park purposes. Agency officials have chosen to model their park system after the American park experience rather than the older European models. Greater emphasis is now given to park values such as biodiversity conservation and the maintenance of ecological processes, environmental education, ecotourism, and the need to preserve historic properties located in the predominantly natural parks. Many of these same concepts are also now being applied to the management of the more than eighty-five *Zapovedniki* (Stepanitsky 1993). Less emphasis is being given to the more damaging consumptive

uses originally allowed in many parks. There is conversation about gaining the support of local citizens, building regional constituencies, and other outreach and partnership activities that will be necessary to operate in their newly evolving democratic society.

The status of the development of the national park idea in Russia is one of a paradigm in transition: a transition from a narrow view of parks as recreation areas to a fuller understanding of the broader range of park and preserve values. It must be emphasized however, that Russia is experiencing just the beginning of this transition among its more educated and enlightened managers and citizens. A great deal more work and progress is needed to assure the long-term survival of a system of national parks in the new Russian Federation. Only a handful of parks are even close to being operated to minimal standards. The current economic situation in Russia makes the future of parks and preserves particularly perilous. Continued international technical and economic support is critical at this time to maintain the momentum.

Recommendations for Future Support of Russian Parks and Preserves

1. The World Wildlife Fund has recently opened an office in Russia. An analysis has been conducted on conserving Russia's biological diversity. A document describing a large array of projects that relates to preserves and some parks was produced by the staff of the WWF office in Washington, D.C. WWF-Russia has been engaged by the World Bank to start work on the implementation of a Russian biodiversity protection strategy. The USNPS should work with WWF and the Russian Biodiversity Conservation Center, operated by the Social Ecological Union (SEU), to determine if the USNPS can contribute effectively to national park projects listed in this document. (This could be a joint effort with the National Biological Service and the USFWS.)
2. The USNPS should continue to provide technical and professional support to both the park and preserve management agencies during this critical period in the transition to democracy and a free-market economy. This can be achieved by continuing the process of exposing additional Russian park professions to advanced concepts of park development, management, protection, and interpretation, focusing particularly on enhancing the contributions of parks to local economies and the use of parks as outdoor classrooms. The concept of pilot or model parks seems to have a great deal of merit as the most reasonable method to enhance the national park system in Russia at this time. The USNPS should pursue the further refinement of this concept in future cooperative efforts.
3. The USNPS should develop and maintain a network of partnerships with other agencies or NGOs with an interest in heritage conservation in Russia so that our collective activities can be focused most effectively on achieving shared goals.
4. The USNPS should sponsor the formation of an official Russian Program Committee made up of agency and NGO professionals that are charged with carrying out a long-term program of international cooperation with their Russian counterparts.
5. To achieve the desired results, the USNPS should seek either an agency or departmental line-item, multi-year budget on the order of $200,000 to provide a core level of support for the work of the Russian Program Committee.

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