
Report from Moscow:

A New Environmental Education Center for Russian Protected Areas

[Ed. note: In late August 1996 we received via e-mail the following brief report on a new organization in Moscow, the Environmental Education Centre “Zapovedniks.” (“Zapovednik” is the Russian term for State Nature Reserve.) The writer, Natalia Danilina, is the director of the Centre as well as the regional representative to IUCN’s Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas.]

The Environmental Education Centre “Zapovedniks” was established by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) to carry out a project entitled “Environmental Education and Public Awareness in Protected Areas,” which is being funded by the Swiss Government. The major goals of the Centre are the following: to facilitate cooperation by Russian Zapovedniks (State Nature Reserves) and National Parks with the public, to enhance the prestige of protected areas in the public eye, and to help the public appreciate the great significance of protected areas in preserving Russian nature. It is also necessary to attract the attention and support the Russian Government has promised in many official documents.

Unfortunately, decision makers, protected areas managers, and environmentalists have only recently come to understand the importance of such work. And the lack of sufficient experience and professional skills, as well as the scant methodological literature and inadequate funding of protected area activities, does not allow Zapovedniks and National Parks to take on these tasks. To overcome these difficulties is the mission of the Environmental Education Centre “Zapovedniks.”

Taking into consideration Russian and foreign experience, and working together with media at the national and local levels, the Centre has actively started to fill the information vacuum with respect to protected areas. Organizing exhibitions and expositions devoted to protected areas, both in Moscow and outlying regions; publishing colorful booklets and other informational and educational materials; conducting promotional campaigns, conferences and competitions—all of these are part of the Centre’s work.

An integral part of the Centre’s activity is working with potential donors to help realize educational projects in Zapovedniks and National Parks. So too is a planned series of training seminars for specialists from protected areas, as

well as from regional and local Environmental Committees. In the seminars, experts work directly with local residents, visitors, and neighborhood schoolchildren—a cross-section of the local population. Most of these specialists have advanced biological education, but many of them are new to environmental education. That is why there is such a keen need for training in communication and cooperation with average citizens.

To this end, the Centre created two-week (100-hour) original training programmes, whose development is continuing. The programmes focus on two issues: “The Psychological Basis of Effective Communication” and “Methods in Environmental Education.” The programme includes issues such as “Legislative Support for Protected Areas Activities,” “International Conventions and Agreements in the Field of Biodiversity Conservation,” “International NGOs and Nature Conservation,” and others. Besides the traditional forms of educational, such as lectures, the Programme uses interactive forms, such as various games, discussions, excursions, and conferences. Every day is a combination of three related components:

- Study hours (lectures, seminars, training sessions, educational games, etc.), organized by teaching staff concerning the problems embraced by the programme;
- Reflection on the day’s events, which help participants develop their own approaches to communication, while also offering feedback to the teacher; and
- “Creative workshops,” “round tables,” and “expert classes”—which give the participants a chance to exchange their views on various issues in environmental education.

The efficiency of the programme is evaluated by means of “incoming” and “outgoing” diagnostics, or feedback; every day is assessed through reflection, various tests, participants’ suggestions, interviews, and by other means. The final stage of the programme is an analysis in which project participants are connected with the content of the programme and also reflect on problems of environmental education and how they might be treated in protected areas.

The programme described above was tested in June 1996, when 19 specialists on environmental education from protected areas took part. The programme was highly regarded by the participants as well as by the Ministry for Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of the Russian Federation.

The Centre began work in April 1996. It consists of 4 full-time staff and 28 consultants, including protected areas managers; environmentalists from state, nongovernmental, and scientific institutions; and teachers, psychologists, sociologists, artists, and designers. The Centre maintains contact with all 93 Zapovedniks and 31 National Parks in Russia. More than 30 specialists from

protected areas who are engaged in environmental education have already taken part in the Centre's programme and other activities.

In connection with a hearing in the State Duma [the Russian national representative body] on protected areas issues, the Centre arranged a photo exhibition called "The Natural World of Zapovedniks" and an exhibition of children's drawings called "Zapovedniks through Children's Eyes," both of which were well-received by deputies of and visitors to the Duma. In addition, the Centre has prepared proposals to facilitate promotion of public awareness about Zapovedniks and National Parks. Some of these were included in the Duma's recommendations to the Government.

Educational and training materials for environmental education in Protected Areas have been completed, and two television programs devoted to last spring's "March for Parks" were produced and aired. And, in honor of 60th anniversary of Zapovednik "Teberdinsky," one of the oldest in Russia, a colorful booklet was published in Russian and English.

This list includes only the most important actions of the Centre.

The Centre "Zapovedniks" works closely with the Department for Protected Areas Management of the Ministry for Environmental Protection and Natural Resources, the Russian Forest Service, the Ecological Committee of the Russian State Duma, and with many nongovernmental organizations.

The Environmental Education Centre "Zapovedniks" looks forward to cooperating with all organizations interested in the development and conservation of the unique network of Russian Zapovedniks, National Parks, and other protected areas, and in promoting public awareness about them. We are also interested in facilitating the exchange of information and experience concerning environmental education in protected areas in Russia, other countries of the former Soviet Union, and the world in general.

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