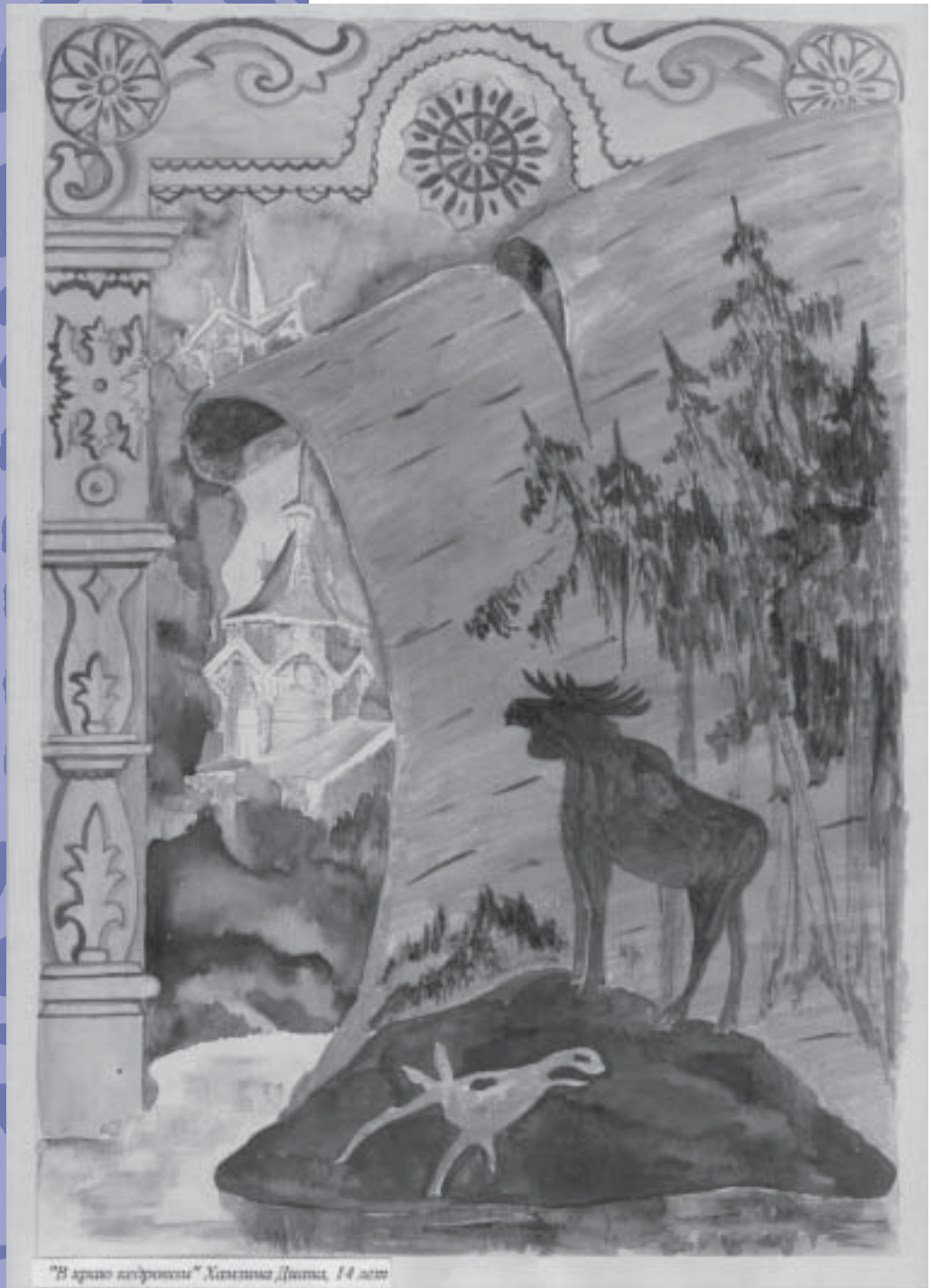


Give & Take

A Journal on Civil Society in Eurasia

Spring 2003
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Siberia's Environmental
Movement

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Mission Statement

ISAR's mission is to strengthen the ability of citizens and social change organizations in Eurasia and their colleagues in the US to influence decision-making, advance social justice and promote environmentally sound stewardship of the earth and its resources. In order to achieve this mission, ISAR brings to bear the resources and experiences of the global community to:

- * support citizen initiatives;
- * acquire and disperse financial support for local grassroots projects;
- * gather, publish and broadly disseminate information;
- * provide consultation and technical assistance;
- * offer training and educational programs, including organizational development and environmental education;
- * initiate and support cooperation among nongovernmental organizations (NGOs);
- * foster dialogue and constructive interaction among citizens, NGOs, business and government;
- * research and analyze policies and issues relevant to NGOs;
- * represent the interests of NGOs on the local, regional, national and international level.

ISAR History

Established in 1983 by Harriett Crosby and Nancy Graham as the Institute for Soviet-American Relations, ISAR originally served as a clearinghouse on US-USSR citizen exchange and published the journal *Surviving Together* until the end of 1997.

Opinions expressed in articles in *Give & Take* do not necessarily reflect ISAR's views. More information about ISAR's programs is available on our web site, www.isar.org.

On the Cover: "In the Land of the Cedars," drawing by Diana Khamzina, age 14, of the nonprofit art studio Obraz in Tomsk.

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On Russia's Cold Frontier, Energy and Ardor Generate Remarkable NGO Accomplishments

Siberia's vast expanses and rich resources have long aroused conflicting reactions. Awe versus callousness; appreciation of nature versus greed and destructiveness; a sense of human limitations versus a desire to conquer and control nature. For many Westerners, Siberia also conjures up images of isolation, prison camps and endless winters.

Unfortunately, greed and carelessness have largely won out. Human beings have extracted mineral wealth, logged the forests, built factories and created toxic accumulations of nuclear and chemical weapons. These practices have led to widespread pollution and severe environmental degradation. However, at the same time, Siberia's system of nature reserves encompasses some of the earth's most pristine wilderness. The wonders of Siberia's landscape combined with the ancient traditions of its native peoples, the intellectual independence of its scientists and writers, and the hardiness of its citizens have inspired continuing efforts to protect the region and publicize its importance to the country and the world.

In this issue of *Give & Take*, ISAR focuses on the threats to Siberia's environment and the efforts of grassroots activists to address them. We lead off with an article by ISAR's Alice Hengesbach that captures the spirit and sketches the activities of the environmental movement in Siberia. We wrap up with a piece by Xenia Soubotin of Pacific Environment that talks about the state of the environmental movement in Russia including some challenges and successes of Siberia's NGOs.

Between these bookend articles we present a broad range of stories by and about the multi-faceted NGO movement in Siberia. The region's rivers, lakes and streams are the focus of the first set of articles. Siberia's two great north-flowing rivers—the Yenisei and the Ob—and the tributaries that feed them have long been used and abused by man. Stories about industrial pollution and radioactive contamination, proposed construction of a dam on the Katun River, and the re-emergence of a cockeyed plan to reverse Siberia's rivers to irrigate Central Asia all illustrate this tendency. However, as in the US and many other countries, the desire to protect vital waterways has galvanized activists throughout Siberia to form a Siberian Rivers Network, part of a nationwide Russian Rivers Network.

Protection of Lake Baikal, the “jewel of Siberia,” has been the rallying point for Russian environmentalism since the 1970s while the battle to block construction of a hydroelectric dam on the Katun River in the Altai region has raged since the 1980s. Ecotourism and environmental education projects described in this issue demonstrate that a new generation of activists has taken up the challenge of raising environmental consciousness in order to protect Siberia's natural treasures. Pieces by NGO members in Tomsk, Kemerovo and Novosibirsk describe the blight created by urban and industrial pollution. As these stories show, in the city as in the country, educating the public about environmental threats is essential to combating them.

Siberian environmental NGOs are doing a great deal on their own. They have also developed ties with local and regional government and business, but like everything in Siberia, the scale of the problems they face is enormous. Access to resources from outside the country can provide a critical boost. As Sergei Kostarev writes, a modicum of money from a Western donor, leveraged with matching funds from the Omsk environmental agency, launched a small grants program that helped revive the dormant environmental movement in that city.

For Westerners seeking for a new frontier where small amounts of money can still go a long, long way, Siberia is an excellent place to look. In a moment when trackless taiga and newly energized activists offer promise of preserving and restoring wilderness, reaching out to Siberian NGOs is a good way to help not only a remarkable part of Russia but also the planet itself.



Eliza K. Klose
Editor in Chief

Tenacity Pays off for Eco-NGOs

Across Eurasia, NGOs have been forming coalitions and organizing to stop environmental destruction. The following struggles—still under way and far from resolved—demonstrate that tenacious, outspoken activists are finding effective ways to challenge bad practices and hold their leaders accountable.

Since 2001, Ukrainian NGOs have been working to block a scheme to build a deep water ship canal in the UNESCO-protected Danube Biosphere Reserve. Ukraine's Transport Ministry claims it can profitably divert at least 65 percent of Romania's international shipping traffic to its planned Bystroye-Black Sea Canal. If the plans go through, the banks of the Bystroye estuary—home to thousands of protected fish, bird, and plant species—would be paved over with concrete and the small channel opened to large shipping vessels.

Opponents worry that oil pollution, destruction of bird habitats and fish spawning grounds, loss of sandbanks, and invasion of non-native species will result from construction and operation of the canal. And even Ukraine's Ministry of Economics expressed skepticism about the project's economic feasibility.

Although the Bystroye Estuary is currently protected by national law from construction projects like this one, the Transport Ministry hopes to persuade President Kuchma to strip the estuary of its special status. After having sent some 30 appeals to Ukraine's president and prime minister and collected thousands of signatures, outraged NGOs under the umbrella of the **Socio-Ecological Union (SEU)** have decided to take their complaints to an international audience. Environmental ministers from 15 European countries will meet in Kiev May 21-23 for the conference "Environment for Europe," just days before authorities meet to discuss the Bystroye-Black Sea Canal project. If officials thought they could escape international scrutiny by putting off their decision about the project until after the Ministerial Conference, they were mistaken. SEU letter campaigns are underway to inform the European environmental ministers of their host country's neglect of its own fragile nature reserve. For more information, see www.seu.ru/projects/eng/dunay.

Cross the border into neighboring Belarus and NGO activists are again organizing to prevent catastrophe—this time in one of Europe's most ancient forests. Like Ukraine's Bystroye Estuary, Belovezhskaya Pushcha—a 250,000-acre old-growth forest and a UNESCO World Heritage Site—has been targeted by government officials desperate for revenue.

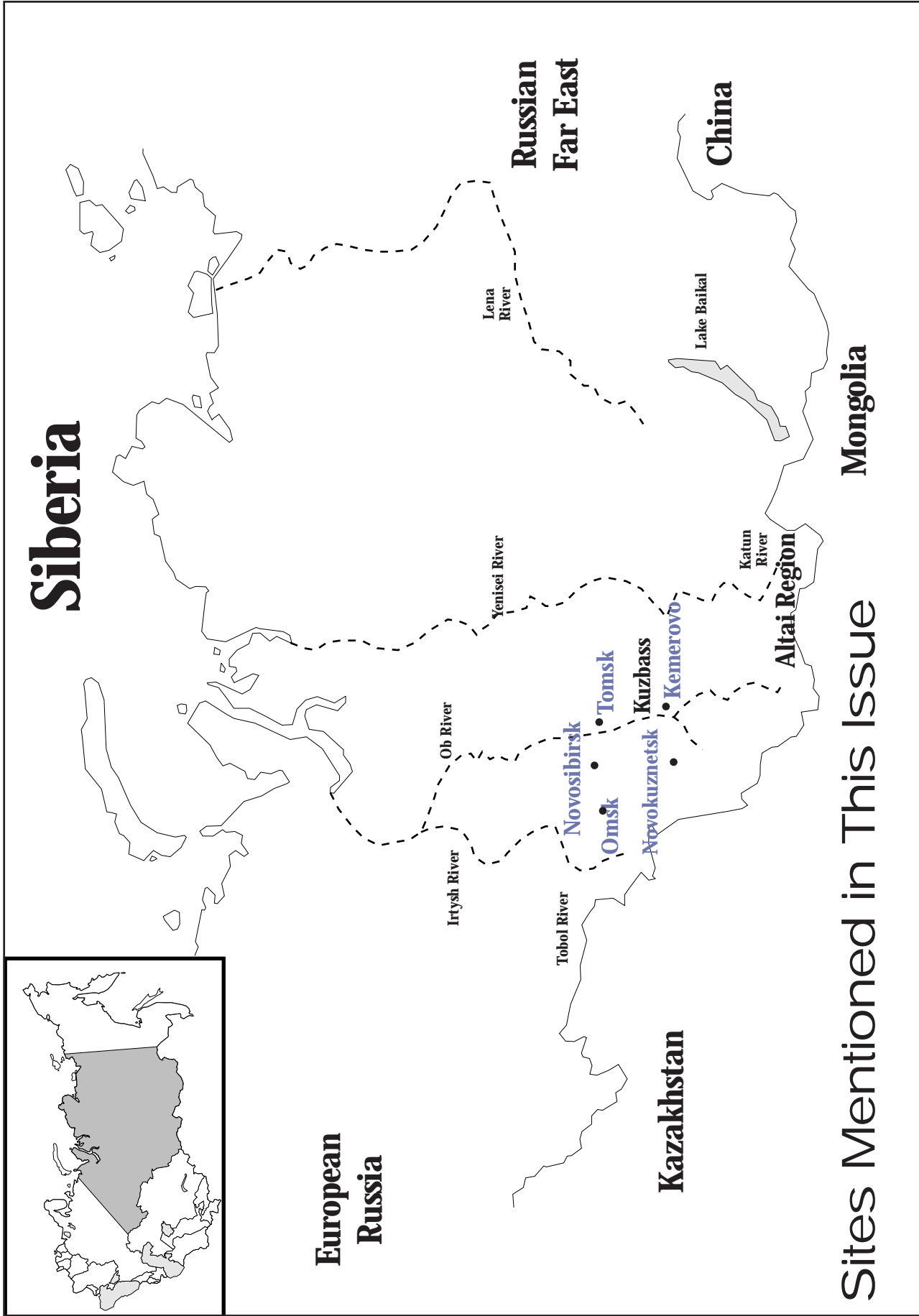
In 1994, Belarus' centuries-old record of protection of this venerable natural reserve was set aside in the face of economic opportunity. Hunting restrictions in place since the fourteenth century to protect bison and other rare species were summarily lifted and commercial hunting operations approved. In just six months, nearly 800 acres of trees were logged and processed in the government's \$1.5 million sawmill, located deep in the reserve's conifer forests. Logging for export was begun in order to pay off debt on the German-made sawmill originally purchased to process only diseased and fallen trees.

Belarusian NGOs—including Pechenegi, Kiev Cultural and Ecological Center, and the public initiative group Terra-Kanvencyay—sought to publicize the plight of the Pushcha, and the SEU launched a fax campaign to stop the logging. An international ecotourism workshop in the reserve led to a small victory in 2001. NGOs and journalists gained support from the international gathering and the Ministry of the Environment was shamed into temporarily suspending some logging operations.

Unfortunately, the mill is now operating again. This time, secrecy veils the reserve's business and economic activities, preventing NGOs from getting straight answers on the number and types of trees being harvested. But, the NGOs are continuing their campaign to limit commercial activities in Belovezhskaya. More on the effort to stop logging in Belovezhskaya Puscha is at www.seu.ru/projects/eng/belovezha.

Such NGO campaigns can require years. But well-organized groups, if they persist, have already demonstrated that they can have a dramatic effect. For example, after two years of hard work, NGOs in Kazakhstan have stopped nuclear waste at the country's borders.

(Continued on page 30)



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Siberia: Discovering a Russia within Russia

by Alice Hengesbach

IN A CRAMPED ONE-ROOM APARTMENT Sergei Pashenko lives with his wife, son, dog, cat and an array of scientific equipment. While many would marvel at the number of people and animals living in this small space, what is most notable is the extensive collection of equipment and books that line the walls of the apartment. Sergei is a physicist living in Akademgorodok, not far from the Siberian capital of Novosibirsk. Akademgorodok is one of several research cities Stalin established in Siberia in the 1930s. The idea was to concentrate the scientific community by creating cities dominated by universities where the best scientific minds could develop their ideas and work together to make the Soviet Union a world leader in science and technology. In many ways it was a success; the system produced great scientists who developed important theories and technologies.

The system also produced a group of people who, despite their geographic isolation, were interested in making the world a better place. Sergei Pashenko represents that way of thinking. He is a teacher and an activist, mentoring his university students and encouraging them to explore the world around them to its fullest, while serving as the director of an NGO, **Siberian Scientists for Global Respon-**

sibility. His apartment is a small laboratory where he monitors air quality and conducts experiments on water, plant, and soil samples collected on field expeditions. He invites students to his home to participate in his work and, in the process, he challenges them to look critically at the world and the effects of pollution on the local environment and health.

Sergei not only challenges his students and himself, he also challenges his government. His city is home to the Siberian Chemical Combine. In the 54 years it has been in operation, the facility was thought to be, just as its name implies, a chemical plant. In fact, it is a nuclear facility, a place where nuclear weapons are developed and nuclear research conducted. In 1999, Sergei discovered a leak in the manmade lake used at the facility as a dumping site for nuclear waste. Radioactive water was leaking out of the lake into a stream that flowed through

several small communities, and, ultimately, into the Ob River. Sergei made a film illustrating the problem and he invited two American colleagues from the Government Accountability Project to visit the area and conduct tests. Sergei also discovered that there was easy access to radioactive metal scraps discarded at the facility; community members were able to pick through the trash and take it home. With a \$500 grant from ISAR's Moscow office, Sergei led a public awareness campaign to highlight the problem and forced the local authorities to secure the compound. The government decided to invest nearly \$1 million to build a concrete wall around the facility and prevent people from entering the contaminated area.

Sergei's story is not unique. When Siberia is mentioned, most think of long cold winters and vast areas of desolate wilderness. But what many do not know is that the region is also home to a strong civil society driven by activists like Sergei. Siberian communities experience the natural world in a profound way—they appreciate its riches, respect its power, and recognize how interconnected the world is environmentally. While to an outside observer Siberia might seem to be a place of isolation, the region is, in fact, vitally linked to the larger global ecosystem and plays a crucial role in protecting the health of this planet.

Siberia's natural resources are great—gold, oil, gas and a host of other valuable minerals can be found throughout the region. Siberia's forests are also impressive in scope and comparable to the South American rainforests in terms of impact on the global climate, serving as another set of lungs for the planet. The Ob River and its tributaries that run from Altai to the Arctic Ocean make up Asia's largest river system, stretching more than 4,000 km. The region is home as well to an astonishing variety of plants and animals, from the gray wolf to rare species of birds and bats.

The greatest environmental threat to the region is the uncompromising drive to exploit Siberia's vast natural resources at any cost. Against this trend, many concerned Siberians are working to ensure that the region's natural wealth is valued, protected, and sensibly managed. Siberia's environmental movement is



Alice Hengesbach

made up of scientists, NGO coalitions, initiative groups and citizens who understand the region's connection to the world and the importance of preserving that connection.

Within these ranks, indigenous people have a strong presence and voice. One of many native activists making her voice heard is Raisa Tevlina, leader of the Khanty—an indigenous group that lives in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug in the northwestern region of Siberia. The Khanty are reindeer herders, moving from place to place, following the migration of their herds. They believe that the land is sacred and make every effort to leave each place as they found it—pristine.

Raisa's home happens to be located in one of the richest oil regions in all of Russia. Much of the region is already covered by oil fields under the oil consortium led by Surgutneftgas. But Raisa has been successful in standing up to the oil oligarchs. Her opposition to the most recent plans to start exploration and drilling led to the creation of an advisory council that includes the native populations of the area. Under her leadership, the Khanty have had a say in the development process and have been able to delay projects and push for compensation. Though she and her people face an unbalanced fight with the oil developers, their fortitude and belief in the sacredness of the land give them the strength to fight and be heard.

For communities like Raisa's, the environment offers more than resources to be exploited or beauty to be admired. The native way of life and view of the world is based on a deep, spiritual connection to nature. Truly, indigenous peoples add an important dimension to the environmental movement in Siberia.

The efforts of individuals like Sergei and Raisa provide the foundation for broader regional efforts. Coalitions of NGOs and communities are key components of Siberia's environmental movement. The **Russian Rivers Network**, for instance, links NGOs working on issues of river conservation and preservation throughout the country as well as with international organizations. Within Siberia, there is a regional network focusing specifically on the many rivers and streams of this region. Since 2000, this network has organized two international conferences to draw attention to the importance of Siberia's rivers. At the April 2002 conference, the participants highlighted the

Luis Ortiz



Evenk festival honoring Lake Baikal's indigenous peoples.

threatening nature of a proposed plan to construct a dam on the Katun River in Altai.

This project began in the early 1980s when the government proposed to dam the Katun, a tributary of the Ob River, and build a hydroelectric station. Activists and scientists alike expressed concern about the project because of the enormous damage it would do to the wildlife and forest near the station, the potential effects of the dam on the flow of the Katun (and, in turn, the Ob), and the possibility of seismic activity in the area. At the time, the environmental community was successful in opposing the construction of the dam and the station. However, the growing Russian demand for energy and the potential for selling electricity to China has aroused new interest in the project on the part of Moscow officials.

Some might consider Siberia an empty expanse between the onion domes of Moscow and the salmon runs of the Russian Far East, but it is an important region in its own right. It has its own unique character and spirit—a combination of the intellectual influence of transplanted scientists, the spiritual connection of its indigenous communities, and an understanding of the need to address challenges by working together. Many of the individuals and groups in Siberia's environmental movement work locally with minimal financial support and material resources, but they use these resources effectively and efficiently. Indeed, the potential power of these activists and citizens is great. What they need now is increased attention and support from the international community. ●

Alice Hengesbach is ISAR's Russia Program Officer.

NGOs Form Alliances To Save Siberia's Rivers

by Irina Zherelina

PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION OF THE Katun Dam and Hydroelectric Station in Gorno-Altai—a pristine area known as the “Russian Alps” and “the Pearl of Siberia”—has greatly concerned environmentalists in Siberia since the early 1980s. Public opposition to the dam helped halt construction by 1992, along with a shortage of funding for the project and objections of several Soviet ministries.

Today, however, the Katun Dam project has been revived. Proponents claim hydropower from the dam would solve the region's energy and socioeconomic problems. The first stage of construction would result in a small hydroelectric station able to produce 200 megawatts of power, and the second stage would be a full-fledged 1600-megawatt hydroelectric plant that would bring the region almost 7 billion kilowatts of electric energy per year. But the Katun River is one of the most wild and unpolluted rivers in Russia. Serving as the primary watershed for the whole Altai Republic, the Katun feeds the Ob and is crucial to innumerable communities and ecosystems downstream.

Over 20 Siberian environmental NGOs gathered in Novosibirsk in 2001 for the first international conference on “Siberia's Rivers: Civil Society and Citizen Activism,” and mobilized to take action. The conference was the first large-scale NGO meeting designed to organize river protection efforts. Activists made plans to oppose the construction of the Katun Dam, and then throughout that year sent out protest letters, conducted meetings and pickets, and attended public hearings. NGOs quickly recognized that to protect Siberia's giant river systems—the Ob, Yenisei, and Lena—and to combat large government projects like the Katun Dam, NGOs would need to form broad alliances across the region, the country, and internationally.

Siberian NGOs are now drawing on expertise and support from the **International Rivers Network** (IRN), an umbrella group that supports local communities working to protect their rivers and watersheds. IRN works to halt destructive river development projects, encourage equitable and sustainable methods of meeting needs for water and energy, and find reason-

ISAR-Siberia



Sasha Arbachakov, an experienced activist, at the Russian Rivers Conference.

able strategies for flood management. Russian NGOs joining IRN formed the Russian Rivers Network, a powerful alliance of diverse groups that take action to save Russia's many endangered river systems. Such interactive cooperation was needed in Siberia, and in 2002 the Siberian Rivers Network (SRN) was created to contribute to the protection of Russia's rivers.

SRN draws on the collective strength of many environmental NGOs. Its most important activities have been protecting rivers from pollution and developing an anti-dam movement. The alliance has already succeeded in preventing the construction of the Krapivinskiy Hydropower Station on the Tom River and—for now—the Katun Hydroelectric Station. Each member organization of SRN contributes its own particular methods and strengths: working with government, carrying out environmental monitoring, providing environmental education materials, organizing protests, and so on. Many NGOs were already members of the NGO Network of Southern Siberia, a coalition

devoted to protecting rivers in the Novosibirsk, Tomsk, and Altai regions.

Last year SRN drafted a new plan of action to fight construction of the Katun Dam. Since the Katun River and the Biy River flow together into the most powerful river in Siberia—the Ob—this work was carried out by organizations from all across the Ob-Irtysh basin. NGOs researched alternative energy sources and presented their findings to the government of the Altai Republic. In June 2003, a conference involving scientists, project managers, government officials, NGOs, and media representatives will be held in the town of Chermal, where the Katun hydroelectric plant is scheduled to be built.

This spring marked SRN's one-year anniversary. In one year, SRN has carried out several successful projects. Every year, the Russian River Network holds demonstrations for the protection of rivers. These events vary considerably by region, although they share the goal of lobbying for clean rivers, lakes and other sources of water "close to home." SRN, with its experience organizing demonstrations, was able to take "younger" organizations under its wing and offer consulting and organizational help in the course of preparations. As a result of this collaboration, actions were held not only within large cities such as Novosibirsk, Barnaul, and Kemerovo, but also in smaller cities that had never hosted such events before.

Another important project has been an effort to win protected status for certain watersheds. Many of Siberia's riverbanks are in poor condition due to careless use of land: overgrazing, excessive clearing of undergrowth, housing construction, and industrial and agricultural development. Riverbanks near cities are often littered, their waters polluted with municipal, industrial, and animal waste. Regional governments have been slow to regulate land use along rivers. In most regions, no watershed protection zones have been established, and the standards set by Russia's water laws are poorly enforced. SRN is persuading legislators to secure protected status for watershed zones and to draft stricter regulations for land use. The network has acted on the local and regional levels and achieved concrete results.

On the local level, SRN members targeted rivers needing special attention, usually those flowing through cities or those with very severe pollution. The NGOs arranged cleanups along the rivers with help from local volunteers, published information in news-

papers and prepared television spots, and organized round tables with local officials to discuss river pollution. For example, eco-NGOs in Novosibirsk worked with city officials to protect Yeltsovka-2, a water reservoir within city limits. Likewise, student environmental organizations in Tomsk developed a working plan together with the directorate of the Siberian Group of Chemical Enterprises to prevent further pollution of the Romashka River, which flows past the plant and then merges with the Tom River. NGOs in Barnaul completed a project in December 2002 that evaluated watershed protection zones around the Ob, Barnaulka, Pivovarka, and Vlasikh Rivers, ultimately turning their research over to the administration of the Altai regional government. NGOs now participate in water advisory councils and offer independent environmental expert monitoring to help decision-makers plan wisely on water-related projects. Finally, SRN consulted to help shape "Russia's Water—The Twenty-First Century," a national program implemented in 2003 that will run until 2015.

The Siberian Rivers Network is still young and just starting out, but it faces a number of serious issues. The proposal to reverse the flow of Siberia's rivers, for example, has been culled from the junkyard of scrapped official plans (see page 10). The project would be on a grand scale, its consequences surely devastating. Debate over several hydroelectric stations has not ended, despite the problems they could pose to Lake Baikal. Much work remains, and SRN's members must be up to the challenge.

Siberia has always seemed to be "God's forgotten corner of Earth"—its natural wealth seemingly endless, its people taciturn and accepting. Perhaps for this reason, Siberia's land and people have suffered the consequences of a great many environmental experiments. Today, however, the public environmental movement in Siberia has moved from being an uncoordinated sector of activists to a well-organized network that continues to grow. By working together, NGOs are demonstrating that they can stand as a bulwark against the ill-conceived and harmful actions of industry and government. ●

Irina Zherelina is an expert at the Institute for Water and Environmental Problems, Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and a member of the Altai Regional Branch of the Russian Geographic Society. Translated by Mieka Erley.

In a Turn to the Past, Moscow Proposes To Reverse Siberia's Rivers

by *Irina Zherelina*

THE FANTASY OF SOMEHOW TURNING Siberia's northward-flowing rivers toward the south to water the dry, drought-ridden steppe of Central Asia has tempted officials for decades. Until just recently, most environmentalists and scientists were assured that such a gargantuan, unpredictable project had been relegated to history. Siberian river reversal was rejected in the 1980s when the most senior scientists of the day, as well as the public and other officials, realized the folly of such an unwise, grandiose attempt to bend nature to human will. Yet no matter how reasonable we consider ourselves, human fancy and greed are limitless. Again and again, such dusty and scientifically untenable projects as this are reanimated.

Ever since the late 1960s, when Soviet officials introduced a plan to shift the direction of Siberia's rivers, the tempting scheme has captivated the imagination of engineers and bureaucrats. Theoretical papers proposed turning back the Tobol, Ishim, Irtysh, and Ob Rivers toward arid Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Soviet leaders promised water not only to irrigate Central Asian cotton and wheat crops but to save the Aral Sea.

One such plan to divert the Pechora and Kama Rivers toward the Volga and the Caspian Sea was even begun in the 1970s in western Russia. A canal was to be dug using 250 nuclear explosions. The first explosion in 1973 formed a radioactive body of water 720 meters long and 300 meters wide and although the project was immediately brought to a halt, the area surrounding this pond is still radioactive.

Despite such failures, Moscow's mayor, Yuri Luzhkov, has recently managed to revive the idea of turning Siberian rivers back toward Asia, claiming that his particular plan for a 2500-kilometer canal is somehow new. Luzhkov attributes the 1986 rejection of the project to "weak and indecisive leadership" and to "disinformation by pseudopatriots and pseudoenvironmentalists"—the president of the Siberian branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, a leading proponent of sustainable development in Russia, being one such "pseudoenvironmentalist." Luzhkov claims that his plans are new, but critics still have doubts.

Many respected ecologists and NGO activists remain firmly opposed to any Siberian river reversal. "The Ob River does not have the kind of excess flow that Luzhkov has claimed," said Aleksey Yablokov, president of the NGO **Center for Russian Environmental Policy**. "Redirecting even five to seven percent of the Ob's water could lead to terrible, long-lasting changes, including the destruction of fishing, harm to the delicate Arctic, and more." Yablokov said the plan, which would cost \$30 billion at a minimum, might change the climate in the Arctic and elsewhere in Russia, destroy many of the Ob's downstream ecosystems, and ruin thousands of acres of fertile land. "Rivers are Earth's blood vessels," Yablokov added. "To disturb them is dangerous. We have learned from many examples all across the world that massive plans to alter our environment may be attractive at first glance, but—without exception!—they always do more harm than good."

Mikhail Krendlin, a former Natural Resources Ministry official and now an environmental lawyer with Greenpeace, told the *Moscow Times* that, "The social and technical benefits are a complete myth. [The plan] was rejected as a pointless and dangerous project by very senior people in the Soviet Union. I hope our government has the sense to avoid it."

Southern Russia and Central Asia are feeling sharply the pains of very limited water resources. Many areas are not only unable to irrigate, but lack adequate drinking water. Last November, when NATO officials met in 2002 in Almaty to discuss water shortages as a security issue, they acknowledged that something had to be done soon to stave off imminent disaster. Even with the international community involved, no solutions to the water crisis have been forthcoming. In August 2003, the Association of the Academy of Sciences of Asia will hold a conference to discuss this issue. One proposal is to deliver water to thirsty, drought-stricken regions through a closed pipeline, rather than a massive canal.

A water diversion plan should be examined in economic terms. Will this be profitable for Russia? If so, will a project that seems profitable today create an eco-

conomic drain on future generations? Detailed studies are sorely needed, for today we are not informed enough to categorically say yes or no to the project.

But even local politicians have already pointed out the likelihood that residents themselves would not see any of the potential benefits of Siberian river reversal. “Money from the project will go straight to Moscow, while the provinces scrape by,” said Yaroslav Ishutin, director of the Altai Krai Regional Department of Natural Resources and the Environment. “We already know that the Ob has no water to spare. We know the ecological situation in Siberia quite well. Our forests have already been threatened and now our water resources as well. We won’t give our land over to outside officials and we know how to manage our own resources. Our department has come out publicly against Luzhkov’s harmful plan.”

“Whoever controls water, controls lives,” said Tatyana Artamonova, a journalist who has been documenting how Siberian water is becoming an international commodity. “Decision-makers must take into account everyone’s opinion, including those of inde-

pendent scientists and community members. We all must defend our region.”

The NGO community can predict many potential hazards, but a lack of definitive scientific data prevents its recommendations from carrying weight. Truly, such a complex question demands detailed research weighing not only environmental factors, but also geopolitical, technological, and legal issues.

What is certain is that to meddle with mother nature is to alter a delicate balance. Large-scale environmental projects like the Siberian river reversal scheme exemplify mankind’s anthropocentrism in using natural resources. Experience has shown how that belief system has always entailed drastic environmental, economic, and moral costs. ●

Irina Zherelina is an expert at the Institute for Water and Environmental Problems, Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and a member of the Altai Regional Branch of the Russian Geographic Society. Translated by Mieka Erley.

Toxic Overload in Tomsk: Siberian Region Faces Variety of Environmental Hazards

by Oleg Kotikov

TOMSK IS JUST ONE OF SIBERIA’S heavily populated and isolated large cities, but its environmental conditions—and the interaction of multiple health threats that affect Tomsk residents—are typical of the toxic menace many Siberians must cope with in their daily lives. Environmental problems—some well-known, others less so—are being addressed by NGOs, but much work remains before Tomsk and its surrounding oblast [province] will ever be considered a clean place to live.

The Tomsk Oblast, in the center of Western Siberia, lies equidistant from Russia’s western and eastern borders. Crossing the region from south to north is the Ob River, whose tributaries fan out across the Oblast. Of the more than one million people who live in Tomsk Oblast, 800,000 inhabit the city of Tomsk and its suburbs. With six universities, five scientific centers, and a solid scientific reputation, Tomsk can boast of a population that is highly educated, and well above average for Russia (itself a country that is very highly

educated by world standards). Some of these scientists use their skills to contribute to Tomsk’s independent NGO movement—an essential contribution if the region’s complex problems are ever to be solved.

Radiation: An Invisible Threat

The first and foremost threat to the people and environment of Tomsk is SGCE, the Siberian Group of Chemical Enterprises (also known as the Siberian Chemical Combine). SGCE is the world’s largest nuclear production complex. Located in Tomsk’s suburbs, its active nuclear reactors lie a mere 10 kilometers from downtown Tomsk. From time to time, residents are unknowingly exposed to radioactive clouds emitted from the plant.

Liquid radioactive wastes have been dumped into the Tom River, which joins the Ob and ultimately empties into the Arctic Ocean. Active discharges into the Tom have significantly decreased following recent reactor closures, but accumulated radioactive elements in

the riverbed have left the river horribly polluted. Radiation from the riverwater still is absorbed by vegetation and then by any animal that feeds along the banks. In 2000, Russian scientists from the NGO Siberian Scientists for Global Responsibility, along with American colleagues from the Government Accountability Project, found cesium and strontium-90 in concentrations many times the norm in the Tom and Romashka Rivers. They also detected phosphorus-32—an element with a half-life of 14.26 days, meaning that it had to have been discharged very recently. Fish purchased at a Tomsk market had 20 times the maximum allowable levels of radioactive contamination. (For more information, visit www.bellona.no/ru.) The rivers in Tomsk are the most radioactive in the world.

Liquid radioactive waste is also pumped into the soil under SGCE. That waste has now leaked into the underground water table. The Tomsk-based Environmental Law Center, led by NGO activist Konstantin Lebedev, has fought SGCE's practice, noting that pumping liquid radioactive wastes into the ground violates Russia's environmental protection laws.

Moreover, Russia's Ministry of Nuclear Energy (Minatom) has begun to accumulate spent materials from dismantled nuclear weapons, including massive amounts of weapons-grade plutonium that remains

piled on unsuitable premises at SGCE, right in the suburbs of Tomsk. NGOs and citizens have demanded that these dangerous materials be moved to a more suitable location or, if that is not possible, that a safer storage facility be constructed. Even moving the waste, however, will be hazardous, because the rail lines through the city of Tomsk include some of the Russian railroad system's most dangerous and accident-prone stretches. Due to the steep slope, cars are constantly breaking free from trains.

Nuclear accidents pose another environmental threat to the people of Tomsk. On April 6, 1993, as a result of four consecutive operator mistakes, a chemical reactor exploded, discharging a significant amount of the toxic solvent tributylphosphate into the atmosphere. Luckily for Tomsk residents, the wind that day blew away from the city and past major towns, supposedly settling outside the city. Yet independent NGO monitors found traces of tributylphosphate in the city's soil. SGCE authorities and government officials have not said a word in explanation. Such accidents remain likely even today. The most recent major accident happened on June 14, 1999, when the facility was contaminated—again due to operator error. This time two employees were exposed to radiation levels equivalent to the dose permissible over a three-year period.

Planning for Change in a Closed City

A closed city like Seversk, with the world's largest nuclear facility, is by nature not going to be the most open, transparent place in Russia. The high level of security around the Siberian Chemical Combine means limited access to information. Public involvement in decision-making in Seversk—and nearby Tomsk—has been a complicated affair. Yet the movement to increase transparency and participation in Seversk government is strong. Almost twenty years after glasnost broke open the secrecy of the Soviet state, citizens of closed cities are still pushing for access to basic information about the top-secret facilities near their homes and the effects they might have on local health and environment. Today citizens hope to end their dependence on a single enterprise and to take decisions about their city out of the hands of distant Moscow officials.

The NGO Ecologia has sponsored projects to encourage democratic participa-

tion in Seversk and has made some headway in dispelling the secrecy that has surrounded Seversk for decades and shut its people out of the halls of government. In 1999, Ecologia began its program "Sustainable Development in Nuclear Regions," by working with local government officials, business groups, and NGOs to integrate Seversk city planning into a broader regional agenda. Closed cities are still federally administered, and decision-making to this day takes place in a political vacuum, with little or no citizen input. Tomsk district, for example, has had little contact with Seversk, despite shared economic and environmental concerns.

Promoting dialogue in and outside of closed cities is important, when information about environmental hazards is so limited and misunderstandings rife. Ecologia is trying to repair this fractured administrative arrangement by holding "multi-stakeholder"

The 1993 SGCE accident demonstrated that the oblast and city of Tomsk are not prepared to act in the event of a radioactive emergency. After NGOs and citizens demanded that better preparation measures be taken, the Tomsk Oblast government was given funding to help it prepare for future radioactive accidents and to recover from them. But village residents whose homes fell within the area of the radioactive trail were not resettled and never received compensation. And the problem of inadequate preparation was not solved: the chief of the regional environmental protection department has admitted publicly that there are no contingency plans in place should a catastrophe at SGCE require full evacuation of the city.

Many of these problems might be mitigated if decisions about SGCE's practices were made with public input. NGOs today are working hard to call attention to nuclear-related environmental problems in the region and to hold the plant and the government accountable to Russian law, but much remains to be done.

Oil, Gas, and Other Industry

Tomsk is also rich in petroleum resources. Nearly 11 million tons of oil are extracted from the Tomsk Oblast each year, and approximately 40 percent of the

oblast government's budget is derived directly from tax returns from oil extraction. Naturally this creates a situation ripe for governmental abuse, such as overlooking industry's harm to the region's environment.

Much of Tomsk Oblast is precious wetlands—the largest intact wetlands in the world. Yet oil pipelines crisscross the region haphazardly. Pipelines laid through marshes tend to rust through quickly, and Tomsk Oblast is cursed by regular spills over large areas. Beyond their importance as a unique ecosystem, these wetlands are important to the climate of the planet. Tomsk's wetlands extract an enormous quantity of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, an essential curb to global warming. Destruction of these wetlands simply hastens global climate change.

One oil-related environmental problem unique to drilling operations in northern climates is the introduction of the strong toxic chemical methanol into the wells. Methanol reduces oil's viscosity, making extraction easier. But the methanol-contaminated mud is simply left behind, and wherever it has been dumped, living matter is destroyed. These dead zones remain long after the oil in a given area has been extracted.

Another industry-related effect on Tomsk's environment is the gas flares that burn day and night at most oil wells. Warming the northern sky, these flares

public meetings, including trainings, seminars, and round tables for regional and municipal officials, the business community, NGOs and community representatives. Minatom, the federal nuclear agency, has been included as well. Economic and environmental progress must begin with plans for opening up the city and creating links with the rest of Russia. Using a participatory sustainable development planning process enables this region's transition to be as environmentally sound and balanced as possible. Integrating Seversk into the surrounding region could lay the groundwork for integrating this closed nuclear city into today's Russia.

Perhaps the most important result of Ecologia's seminars is that public participa-



Olga Deryabina leads a workshop in Seversk.

tion in Seversk has gained a new dimension of strategy, for citizens are proposing their own creative solutions to the region's environmental problems. For example, locals have created a summer camp that brings children from the closed city together with their peers from Tomsk.

Secrecy and central control of Russia's closed cities—like the legacy of the Cold War itself—are unlikely to dissipate overnight. But democratic participation in Seversk is growing, and hope remains that someday the

citizens of all Russia's closed cities will be fully involved in making the decisions that affect their lives.

—Olga Deryabina,
Russia project coordinator, Ecologia,
and Marina Khotouleva, director, Ecoline.

burn gas at a rate equivalent in value to the entire annual budget of Tomsk Oblast. Attempts by NGOs to legally force oil extraction companies to conserve natural resources are rarely successful, given industry's connections to the local government.

Finally, pollution from heavy industry in other regions hurts Tomsk's environment as well. Upstream from the Tomsk Oblast lies the Kuzbass—the greatest concentration of heavy industry in Siberia. Kuzbass industry has so polluted the Tom and Ob Rivers that now even groundwater wells in the Tomsk region test positive for chemicals that originated in the upstream smelters and factories. A French scientific study found the quality of Tomsk's rivers too poor to be used for drinking water. Now, Tomsk and its suburbs draw water from an as-yet unpolluted underground water table south of the city between the Ob and Tom rivers. NGOs have sought special protected status for this watershed, and have successfully started a project to establish it as a national park. However, agriculture, logging, and other new industries have so far prevented local business and government authorities from agreeing on the specifics of the project. Obviously, the water supply problem must be resolved. An excellent first step

would be to reduce the water pollution in streams and rivers. So far, unfortunately, local NGOs have not identified any legal mechanisms to hold polluters accountable.

Some of the environmental problems facing the Tomsk Oblast touch the residents of this region alone, and some concern all of Earth's inhabitants. All of the problems described above are in need of serious scientific research, but NGOs in Siberia lack the financial resources to undertake this work, and the authorities seem to lack the desire to do so. Nevertheless, as scientists and independent environmental activists, we are resolved to begin addressing these problems, hopefully before the damage is irreversible. Working together with like-minded individuals, we can change some of the destructive behaviors of the past. Siberian NGOs are always looking for partners in our struggle for a cleaner, healthier world. ●

*Oleg Kotikov is chair of the NGO **Obereg**. From 1989 to 1993, Kotikov led the Commission for Natural Resource Management and Environmental Protection for the Tomsk Oblast Peoples' Deputy Board. Translated by Michelle Kinman.*

Kuzbass Environmental NGO Promotes Public Awareness and Participation

by *E.F. Telgerekov*

THE REGION OF SIBERIA CALLED “Kuzbass,” or Kuznetsky Basin, has long been infamous for environmental damage caused by Soviet heavy industry. The region, which includes much of the coal-rich Kemerovo Oblast, remains one of great importance to Russia for its natural resources. The Kuzbass economy—dependent on the area's coal mines, iron and steel foundries, machine building, and chemical production—is so tied to natural resource use that environmental concerns almost always take a back seat to economic needs. Yet some groups are working to demonstrate that environmentally unsound development always creates long-term economic problems.

In 1995, several young people founded a local NGO designed to increase public access to environmental information called **INECA** (Environmental

Information Agency). For over seven years, INECA's *Environmental Information Bulletin* has offered specialists and Kemerovo citizens reliable information about the environmental problems in the city, the region, the country and the whole world. The award-winning journal, which also explores sustainable development and social action, is now read in more than 90 cities across Russia. Later titled *EcoBulletin*, it is still the only regular publication on the environment in the whole Kuzbass region.

Incorporating Public Input

Thanks to its dedication to distributing information about environmental and health threats, INECA was invited to participate in a contest run by the Novokuznetsk affiliate of the **Siberian Civic Initiatives Support Center**. The project, initially quite small, de-

veloped very dynamically until the agency found itself providing local NGOs with a whole range of services. These separate, independent programs have a direct effect on the growth of civil society in Siberia and Russia as a whole, as they enable NGOs to carry out public initiatives.

“Through numerous programs and grants, we have run more than a dozen large projects,” said INECA director Elena Perfileva.

For example, in 2000 as part of a Russian-British project designed to increase interaction between the government, business, and the public, INECA helped develop a plan for environmental policy in Kemerovo Oblast that included a robust degree of public input. The program aimed to change the attitude not only of individuals and government officials, but of society at large toward environmental problems by seeing that environmental issues are given a higher political priority. This type of project was the first of its kind in all of Russia—all the more remarkable given environmental conditions in the Kuzbass. Unprecedented collaboration among the three sectors of society was possible thanks to INECA’s solid image as an experienced, professional environmental NGO that could serve as a go-between in developing public policy.

A coordinating council of regional officials—including a deputy to the Kemerovo Oblast governor, local elected representatives, and the director of the regional committee on natural resources—cooperated with the NGO. That broad representation helped the plan find support at the highest levels from several branches of government. INECA’s part was in seeing to it that the resulting environmental policy was the real brainchild of all sectors of society, not simply a product of the regional administration. Because Perfileva was well-known in the region as an open, objective, and fair, she was able to help officials and scientific specialists cooperate.

Vladimir Medvedev, *The Land of Siberia*



Heavy industry is an economic force in Kuzbass—and a major source of pollution.

The Plan on Environmental Policy received wide coverage in the press, which was extremely important in rallying public support. Public surveys acted as a gauge for measuring the ability of the region and its population to jointly solve environmental problems. A majority (50.28 percent) of those surveyed in 2001 felt that the most important environmental problem in Kemerovo Oblast was “industrial pollution in the air, water, and soil.” To the question, “Would you like to participate in public hearings to discuss the Plan for Environmental Policy in Kemerovo Oblast?” over 58 percent answered “yes.”

Thus, public hearings were held in four regional cities—Novokuznetsk, Kemerovo, Leninsk-Kuznetski, and Mezhdurechensk—to evaluate the rough draft of the plan. INECA did not have much experience in holding such an event, so the NGO prepared carefully. More than 600 people participated in the public hearings and around 200 suggestions were recorded. Kuzbass residents felt the most important issue was creating a legal structure to protect public health and enforce compliance with environmental laws. Many attendees signed up on a mailing list and were later updated about how their personal contributions were included in the final document.

INECA also organized contests to engage the public in environmental protection issues. A poster contest called “Environmental Policy of the Kuzbass Begins with Me” drew around 1,000 entries. A photography contest, “Ecopolitics—the Search for a Path,” brought in more than 1,500 submissions. The photographs and posters combined to make a moving display that activists used successfully during public hearings. During the two years of the project, more than 200 different print, video, and radio journalism pieces were created. Finally, a \$75,000 small grant round aimed at solving local environmental problems was the first of its kind in the Kuzbass. Initiative groups and organizations of various types participated. The grant competition supported projects on everything from regional environmental politics to landscape gardening and public beautification projects. Grants ranged from \$2,000 to \$10,000, and of the 84 proposals submitted, 13 projects were supported. The competition showed that the people of Kemerovo Oblast are ready to unite their efforts to solve complex environmental problems. As a result of the contest, littered areas were cleaned up, illegal dumps were identified and dealt with, indicators for the sustainable development of a particular city were drafted, and a public environmental inspectorate was created.

The project’s final document, which included unprecedented direct participation of the public in cooperation with governmental bodies, was at last signed into law; on November 10, 2002 the Plan for the Development of Environmental Policy in Kemerovo Oblast was ratified by the local administration. Resulting policy has become the basis for regional environmental legislation, strategic programs, and nature protection. Furthermore, industry heads are required to use this plan as a basis for administrative and economic decisions about natural resource use.

Resulting policy has become the basis for regional environmental legislation, strategic programs, and nature protection. Furthermore, industry heads are required to use this plan as a basis for administrative and economic decisions about natural resource use.

Networks and Concrete Action

Another INECA project called “Strengthening the Influence of NGOs in Society through Regional Networks” also highlights the cooperation among the various sectors of society. Funded by the MATRA program of the Dutch government, the project is creating and developing regional networks of NGOs in Karelia, Novgorod, Sverdlovsk, Novosibirsk, and Kemerov oblasts. Representatives from 16 active environmental NGOs from Kemerovo Oblast gathered in Mezhdurechensk on May 4, 2001 for the first meeting.

INECA served as one of the five regional coordinators for the project. The task before the group was to find ways to support local communities and enter into dialogue with the government. A working group was founded by five organizations: the Children and Youth Environmental Parliament, the Foundation for Youth Initiatives, the Children’s Green Organization, Novokuznetsk Society for Nature Protection, and the Agency for Research and Protection of the Taiga.

Choosing a single environmental focus in a region with so many problems wasn’t easy, but the working group selected solid household waste as an issue that could be addressed cooperatively. From June 2001 to May 2002 the group collected and organized information on solid household wastes and compared disposal methods in cities throughout the Kuzbass. A report on “The Problem of Solid Household Wastes in Kemerovo Oblast” was the result of the year-long project. The compilers of the report presented data about solid household wastes as well as their recommendations for responsible disposal practices for industry, the public, and government.

The second year of the project focused on practical work. NGOs cooperated with executive bodies of government in Kuzbass to publicize data collected in the report. Last September and October, INECA conducted an action called “Cleanliness and Order—A Gift for Our Kuzbass” in a half-dozen cities in the region. In February 2003, the first round table discussion on “Cooperation among the Various Sectors of Society to Solve the Problem of Solid Household Waste” drew members of the public as well as business and government leaders.

Serving the Public with Information

INECA’s Resource Center draws people into the decision-making process about environmental issues and strives to provide the information they need to develop their own position on local problems. To this end, monthly informational meetings are held for the public, the mass media, government, business and medical and educational institutions. INECA also contributes to the sustainable development of the NGO sector of Siberia by fostering partnerships and raising the level of professionalism among NGOs. The resource center staff offer informational, consulting, and technical services and administer a new website with information on grant contests, internships, and seminars. The past seven years of INECA’s work have earned it a reputation as a reliable partner. ●

E.F. Telgerekov is a public and media relations officer at INECA (www.ineca.ru). Translated by Amy Taylor.

Finding Local Funding Sources Re-energizes Environmental Movement

by *Sergei Kostarev*

IN THE LATE 1980S, WHEN THE OMSK environmental movement targeted polluters like the city's large printing company and its waste processing plant, environmentalists were active and effective at rallying citizen support. But over the following decade, Omsk activists lost their steam. No more than ten NGOs were active, and many stuck to safer projects such as environmental education, research, and public relations. These activities did bear fruit, such as a project by the Omsk NGO Environmental Center (led by Ludmila Martinova and Aleksandr Stankovsky) that brought thousands of schoolchildren and local scientists together through nature clubs, summer camps, and field trips. But for many years, Omsk environmentalists struggled to find the financial means to continue their work.

Today, however, the Omsk environmental movement has gained new momentum. Activists have become more professional, learned to network more effectively, and have found local resources to sustain their work. In the 1990s, the government of Omsk, including its local environmental agency, became more transparent and well-organized. Officials also began to show an interest in working with local NGOs.

In 1998, ISAR-Siberia, led by Yuri Shirokov, and the State Committee to Protect the Environment of the Omsk Region held a joint small grants competition to fund specific environmental projects. Their goal was to expand and support the local environmental movement, to develop civil society, and, in the process, to finance projects that would have practical benefits for the community. The Omsk grants competition has

steadily expanded since then. In the 2002 grant competition, more than 40 proposals were submitted, 12 of which were financed. Grants supported a wide range of environmental activity: purifying and equipping wells, working with environmental clubs in schools, monitoring populations of rare plants, creating a public environmental information center, and carrying out recycling campaigns. Some NGOs produced publications unique to Omsk, including a wildlife directory called

"Birds of the Omsk Region," and an informational pamphlet titled "Problems of Mercury and Radiation Pollution in the Omsk Region."

In three years of open grant competitions, new organizations have been founded and many young people recruited to the environmental movement. What were once loose associations of environmentalists and scientists are now full-fledged organizations, among them Citizens' Duty, We Are Together, Ash Tree, Environmental Committee, and Protect the People from the Threat of Environmental Disaster. These local Omsk eco-NGOs have successfully attracted resources from both

Russian and foreign foundations for their environmental work. With every grant they receive, people feel a little more hope that they have the power in themselves to solve environmental problems. ●

Sergei Kostarev is deputy director of the State Committee to Protect the Environment of the Omsk Region. Translated by Tamara Kowalski. For more information about the Omsk environmental movement, visit Ash Tree's website at www.omskeco.ru.

ISAR-Siberia



Sergei Kostarev

Baikal Ecotourism—A Responsible Path To Environmental Preservation

by Mariya Moshkina

THE NORTHERN BAIKAL REGION borders on some of Siberia's most pristine natural areas. Before the Baikal-Amur main-line (BAM) railway was built, these areas were virtually inaccessible and remained untouched by industry or modern development. In 1996, UNESCO included Lake Baikal on its list of World Heritage Sites, but five cities on the coast of the lake were specifically excluded from the list because of the damage they had done to the lake's ecosystem. Severobaikalsk, an important population center, was one of the cities singled out for censure due to its pollution.

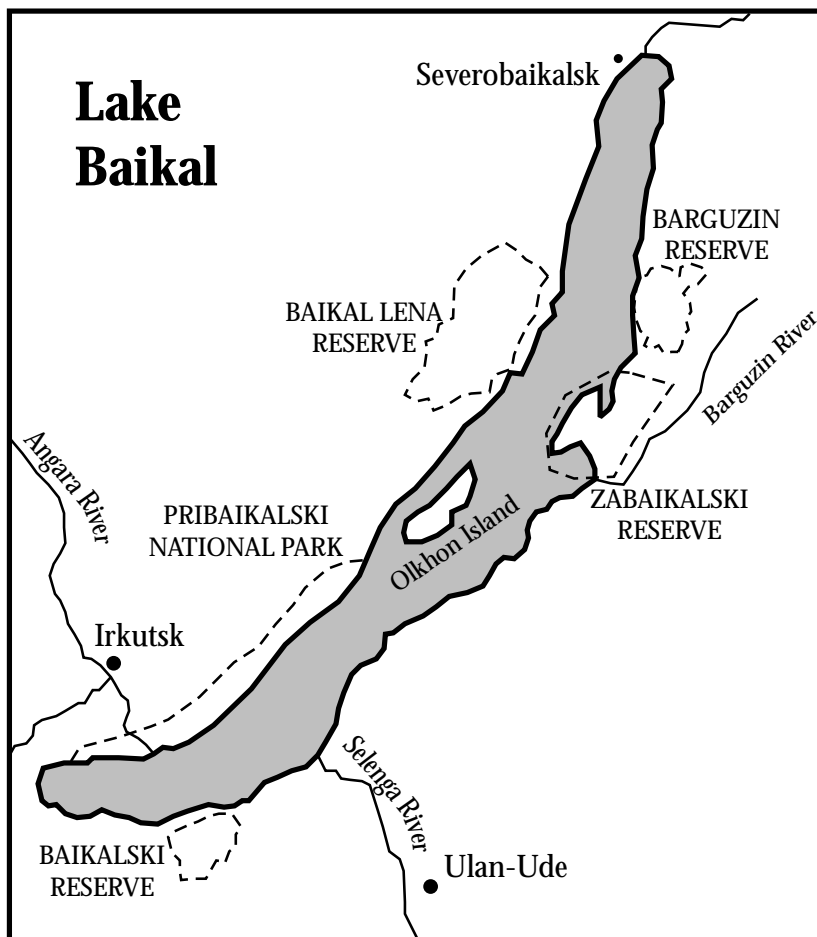
Severobaikalsk is a young city, founded 30 years ago in the taiga along the route of the BAM. Three years

after the city's founding, the **Davan Tourism Club** appeared in Severobaikalsk. At first, this was a club for travel enthusiasts who took camping trips together and organized outdoor sporting events. Over time, the club's activities expanded; it advocated for a healthy lifestyle, promoted environmental awareness, and organized environmental demonstrations and protests.

Beginning in the early 1990s, club activists led information campaigns to promote tourism as a positive means of economic development for Baikal. This was more than just propaganda: they did research and proposed and built several ski trails that are now enjoyed by people throughout the region. Davan Tourism Club was the first (and for a long time, the only) post-Soviet organization which brought large groups of tourists, including some foreign groups, to Baikal for trekking and rafting vacations. The club's recreation facilities and network of trails and ski routes have been transformed into an ecotourism and environmental education center. We believe that to preserve Baikal for future generations, we must discourage the growth of heavy industry and look to ecotourism as a source of economic development in the region. New tourist organizations appearing all over Severobaikalsk are demonstrating that this young industry offers real economic benefits to local communities.

If in the mid-1990s tourism fell to the bottom of the city's list of plans for socioeconomic development, then today the picture has changed significantly. In Severobaikalsk and the region, new government agencies are supporting the growth of the tourism industry by developing infrastructure and monitoring the activity of private tourism companies. The new attention from government administrators yielded the "Baikal Law," which established zoning restrictions designed to protect the Lake Baikal area.

Since 1999, the region has observed "Baikal Day," a holiday held on the last Sunday of August. Many local organizations contribute time and effort to organizing events for this holiday. Responsibilities are shared by several local groups. The 1999 celebration was held in Irkutsk and organized by the Baikal Environmental Wave; 2000 events were organized by Fern in Ulan Ude; and Dauria planned 2001 festivities in Chita.



Baikal Day is not just a one-day holiday for environmentalists—it culminates in a wide range of public environmental actions. We organize “green” hiking trips, gather teams to pick up trash from the banks of the lake, and hold art contests. A friendly competition between Baikal’s cities offers awards for progress in curtailing emissions and cleaning up polluted areas. These events usually receive a great deal of press coverage, spreading our message to a wide audience.

Severobaikalsk is far from other cities, so Davan Tourism Club has organized Baikal Day festivities here. One of our chief Baikal Day activities is informing the public about Baikal’s unique and important place in the global ecosystem. Not all local residents understand that they are living on the banks of the world’s largest freshwater lake, or that two-thirds of the plants and animals living around the lake are unique, native species. Baikal Day is a tool for informing the local population about the importance of this World Heritage Site.

In 2000, our organization partnered with the School of Ecotourism and Environmental Education to host a product information fair called “Life without Waste.” Trash is one of Severobaikalsk’s major problems. Currently the city transports waste to a landfill just outside the city, where it is burned and releases particulates in the air. Our goal was to make citizens aware that better recycling and waste disposal options exist. To that end, we prepared brochures for the event with descriptions of various green appliances and facts about waste disposal.

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Children take part in a demonstration to keep Lake Baikal clean.

When Severobaikalsk was excluded from UNESCO’s World Heritage Sites in 1996, it sent a strong message that we, as citizens, needed to take responsibility for the state of our local environment. The changes won’t happen overnight, but with local environmental organizations leading the way, we believe that Severobaikalsk will someday find its place with Lake Baikal on the roster of World Heritage Sites. ●

Mariya Moshkina is the co-chair of Severobaikalsk’s Davan Tourism Club. Translated by Mieka Erley.

The Great Baikal Trail—Ambitious Plan Will Create Unique Hiking Corridor

by Gary Cook

THE RUSSIAN NATIONAL PARK and Nature Reserve system is one of the largest in the world, yet—until now—one of the few lacking in any nationally significant, officially maintained hiking trails. In the Lake Baikal area, informal paths have existed for centuries—haphazardly carved out of the landscape by indigenous Siberians and Russian nature-lovers alike. For years, these traces have suited the ruggedly independent Siberians just fine. But there is a growing problem within Siberia’s national parks: as more and more people are blazing

their own trails, they are permanently altering ecosystems and leaving the parks in disrepair. Tourists are bushwhacking in every direction, leaving trash, causing widespread erosion, trampling plants and scaring away wildlife.

Residents and environmentalists of the Baikal region have formed the Great Baikal Trail Association (GBTA) and teamed up with the Russian Park Service to address the growing threat. The Great Baikal Trail (GBT) will steer nature-lovers onto a single path—one that is properly built and maintained for constant

use—and keep damaging traffic to a minimum in the park. GBTA has just begun (with initial support from the Foundation for Russian American Economic Cooperation) to build around Lake Baikal what will one day be the largest system of nature trails in all of Russia.

A massive undertaking, the GBT will take over a decade to build. When it is completed, the trail will cover a distance of almost 1,450 miles and will form a hiking corridor that will run around the entire lake, linking the six national parks and nature reserves that protect Baikal's shores. The GBT will also connect the eastern steppe of Russia with the Mongolian highlands some 100 miles to the south of Baikal. The first seven sections of this ambitious trail will be completed this summer by local and international volunteers.

Not only nature protection, but recreation, access, and sustainability were foremost concerns in planning for the trail. The GBT is designed to accommodate everyone seeking escape in Baikal's wilderness—even

offering disabled-accessible trails in many places. For those interested in experiencing the lake itself, trails will lead right up to the shore, where kayaking, boat rentals, and tours will be available. Moreover, not only tourists, but the local folks who are behind this program will be served in more ways than one. The GBT will provide a boost to the local economy by attracting enough tourists to keep local ecotourism businesses—including a network of over 500 homestay hosts—in the black.

The GBT will help keep visiting tourists on the trail and out of the more sensitive spots along the lake, safeguarding the most pristine areas within Baikal's nature reserves. ●

*Gary Cook is director of Earth Island Institute's **Baikal Watch** project. For more on the Great Baikal Trail, please see www.baikal.eastsib.ru/gbt/index_en.html.*

NGO “Missions” Spreads Environmental Education in Siberia

by *Natalya Chubykina*

FOLLOWING THE UN CONFERENCE on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, environmental education—both in Russia and abroad—began to find new support in international circles. Until that time, environmental education in Russia had been disorganized and conducted with very little funding by a handful of independent activists and nature enthusiasts. The results of the Rio-92 conference convinced the Russian government to include environmental education in school curricula. Environmental NGOs were swift to join the vanguard in developing, with government support, a completely new approach to environmental education.

The early 1990s saw an increase in the number of environmental NGOs in Russia, but the problems these organizations faced were more diverse and in some ways more complex than those of their predecessor, the Druzhina, an early environmental defense league [see *Give & Take*, Fall 2001]. Although some growth in environmental awareness at the end of the 1980s sprouted from the burgeoning perestroika-era green movement, environmentalists recognized that past approaches to

environmental education had failed to mobilize the public as hoped. NGOs faced the challenge of identifying the gaps in public understanding of environmental policy and closing those gaps through education.

Because environmental education was taught in the past largely by naturalists and activists, it was often based around specific causes and campaigns. This kind of targeted action remains a goal of our work, but we have different priorities today. We consider the development of a personal, emotional connection to nature an important goal in and of itself and want everyone, including city-dwellers (in Russia, more than 70 percent of the population is urban), to feel this connection to nature. For centuries, we've been taught to look upon nature as an inexhaustible source of raw materials, and as an almost adversarial force, opposing man's will. During the Soviet years, this attitude became more pronounced—we were supposed to “triumph over” nature, “tame” her, and put her in the service of mankind. This attitude is still prevalent in Siberia with its great wealth of profitable natural resources. Old textbooks either glorified humanity's triumph over nature

or, conversely, presented the environmental situation as so hopeless that nothing could be done. Environmentalists realized that to present a balanced view of the state of the environment, it was necessary to overhaul existing text-based study programs and to supplement them with extensive fieldwork outside of the classroom.

In the mid-1990s in the Russian Far East a group of young environmentalists and teachers worked together with US graduate students from the University of Anchorage to adapt a new environmental education program for use in Russian schools. The project was recognized throughout the Russian Far East for its contribution to the field of environmental education, and in 1999 the program spread to Siberia. In the West, it is called "Earth Education." Here at ISAR-Siberia, we call our program "Using Interactive Methods of Teaching Environmental Education." We have conducted around 20 seminars and trainings in various cities from Siberia to the Ural Mountains and south to Baikal. We consider it our greatest success that many of the program's hundreds of participants—teachers, professors, students, NGO representatives—have gone on to conduct their own courses. Around 2,000 people have benefited from our educational projects, through this environmental "missioning."

ISAR-Siberia's partner organizations work in the classroom to develop environmental education, but also venture into the field, making practical experience a priority. Lessons from the natural world are most effective in exciting children's curiosity and heightening their awareness about the state of the environment. Many Siberian NGOs have organized camping trips for children and their instructors to study the condition of streams and help clean up trash from the banks of many rivers and lakes, including Lake Baikal.

Teachers have traditionally played a major role in encouraging youth participation in the environmental movement in Russia. Schools do not generally provide extracurricular activities for their students, so teachers themselves have organized ecology clubs or school NGOs to develop environmental consciousness among children and involve them more actively with environmental issues. School-based programs in environmental education have developed over the last decade all across Siberia—in Omsk, Novosibirsk, Irkutsk, Kemerovo, Tyumen, Buryatia, Khakassia, and Altai—with many exciting results. In a village in the Novosibirsk Region, schoolteacher Irina Pozymbkina has recruited young people from rural areas to join her environmental club "Cedar," and for several years now, they have been working to protect a nature sanctuary—a cave which is home to many species of bats,

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Environmental education seminar in Khakassia takes teachers and students into the field.

including several endangered species. New natural parks established in the Novosibirsk and Omsk regions are tended by students and teachers. Students have helped with research on the mountain river Taidon to find an alternative to the Krapivinskiy hydroelectric station planned for the Tom River. In the Baikal region, many environmental clubs are actively working to keep the shores of Lake Baikal and the Baikal's central island, Olkhon, clean.

By encouraging students and citizens to work in teams and to pursue their own projects, environmentalists bring lessons out of the classroom and into the real world. Such was the case when students in the town of Ishim decided to clean up an abandoned lot and make a public park there. Olga Sozinova, an environmental education teacher at a center for young naturalists, advised and helped organize teams of volunteers for the project.

We believe in the importance of environmental education inside and outside the classroom, although it is too early yet to assess its effectiveness in changing attitudes on a broad scale. Every member of society should claim the right to a healthy living environment and take measures to see that public policy supports this right. But first, each citizen must have information. In other words, to put the principles of sustainable development into practice, we need to develop environmental education, civil society, and a firm understanding of the ties between our actions and the state of our environment. ●

Natalya Chubykina is ISAR-Siberia's coordinator for environmental education programs. Translated by Mieka Erley.

Novosibirsk's "Green Telephone" Links Information to Action

by Yulia Chernaya

IMAGINE THE SCENE: SOMEONE IS illegally cutting down trees in a forest near your property. Or say that everyday you walk past an empty lot being used as a dump. Most of us have encountered situations like these, but few know how they can report on the problem or find remedy. "We get calls all the time from people in these situations," says Elena

Dubynina of **Green Telephone**.

"You're an environmental organization: can't you do something?" Many people out there have a real sense of civic duty, but they don't know where to go to make complaints or get information they need. To connect people with government services is not simple: that is what we do here at Green Telephone."

Green Telephone is a free information service with one manager, several 24-hour operators, and a staff of experts and analysts. Operators can access a database with the telephone numbers of independent experts and legal consultants who offer representation and advice to the public.

Independent directory services like these flourished at one time all across Eastern Europe, empowering citizens to report on and resolve environmental problems. Within Russia's borders, Green Telephone services are currently active in Novosibirsk, Nizhny Novgorod, Yekaterinburg, and a few other cities. Dubynina's service responds to inquiries from the people of Novosibirsk, and she is working in Tomsk to create Siberia's second Green Telephone operation.

"Within a large government bureaucracy, officials and agencies often communicate poorly and fail to coordinate their efforts," says Dubynina. "This presents a serious challenge to information agencies charged with keeping the public informed, and to the public, which doesn't know to whom they can turn with a specific problem. Sometimes the lack of coordination gets carried to an absurd extreme; for example, a chief inspector doesn't always know the job responsibilities of his subordinates!" Inquiries and complaints rarely find their way to the proper officials, because there is no government agency to help direct them. "That is how

the idea for Green Telephone came along. On the one hand, Green Telephone helps people who are searching for information about the environment, and on the other it helps the administration by keeping it up to date about problems of concern to the public.

"There was one week when we received a rash of calls about someone burning garbage on the grounds of a local kindergarten," Dubynina relates. "The problem had to do with resources: the city didn't have any money for the schools. There was no money for teachers, daycare workers, school lunch programs, not to mention for trash disposal. So officials at this kindergarten took matters into their own hands and started burning the trash. You can imagine what a terrible situation it was, with children out on the playground while trash was burning right there. Not only was it illegal, it was a serious health hazard and people were concerned about it. They called Green Telephone and we were able to find sponsors who donated money for proper disposal of the trash."

Another problem Green Telephone has encountered concerns old cars, which owners often abandon in natural, wild areas. "Last year, Green Telephone appealed to the people of our district to keep us informed about places where cars were being dropped. We received many calls and had a number of reports of cars being dumped deep within forests. This is a rather serious business, so we turned to the highway police to help us track down the owners and hold them legally responsible for the dumping."

The problems of trash and green space, water quality and protection of nature . . . how can one service take on all of these issues? "From the beginning, we set the limit for ourselves that we would only work with information. To make information open and accessible, to show citizens how to work with government to solve problems—that is our main task," says Dubynina. "Most people feel dependent on others to solve their problems. We say: 'We will teach you, but you have to do the work yourself!' As a rule, it takes people a long time to adjust to that way of thinking." ●

Yulia Chernaya is ISAR-Siberia's information coordinator. Translated by Mieka Erley.



Eco-housing Catches on in Siberia

by *Elena Mityurova*

HOW DID THE IDEA OF ENVIRONMENTALLY friendly housing develop in the capital of Siberia? It all happened in the late 1980s when a young scientist at the Institute of Thermodynamics was looking for a home. Like many in Novosibirsk, Igor Ogorodnikov was struggling with the housing shortage that hit southern Siberia when migrants headed south to escape the harsh climes—and harsh economics—of their icy tundra settlements. Two million people streamed into the area around Novosibirsk searching for housing.

Igor felt an urgent call to act: most homes in Siberia were inefficient, poorly insulated, and thus wasteful of natural resources such as firewood and coal. Moreover, experts were warning that by 2005, 5.4 million people—that's 26 percent of Siberia—would be in need of housing. So the young scientist came up with a project to build better homes, a project that would later be called **Ecodom**, or “Earth house.” These houses would use low-impact and recycled materials, integrate bio-waste treatment into the home to process sewage, and harness Siberia's intense sunshine to power solar cells for electricity and heat.

Municipal services such as running water, sewage systems, heat, gas and electricity are a dream for most rural Siberians. Furthermore, the unreliability of state services, the remote location of many homes, and the severe climate all point to the rationale for “off-the-grid,” self-sustaining homes. The eco-house is designed and constructed to hold heat and produce its own hot water and electricity directly from sunlight or photo-

voltic cells that collect and store solar energy in batteries for later use. Even when solar energy is lacking, the eco-house can still run appliances on renewable fuels, without relying on electricity from municipal power sources.

Biointensive and permaculture methods of raising healthy, organic food are not just an addition to the home, but an integral part of it. About half of Russia's agricultural products are produced by 60 percent of its population from kitchen gardens for their own use. Fundamental to that success is the deep farming and land stewardship tradition of Russians, many of whom subsist on clean, safe food raised on their own land. The eco-house supports this agricultural self-sustainability by using natural biointensive processes to recycle wastes from the home and produce compost that can be used as a rich fertilizer.

Eco-houses are now being built in and around Novosibirsk thanks to Ecodom, founded by Ogorodnikov and his colleagues in 1990. Sixty acres of land on the outskirts of Novosibirsk were donated by the city administration of Novosibirsk for Ecodom to build a pilot village of environmentally friendly housing. Last year, the first demonstration houses were built and will soon be open to the public.

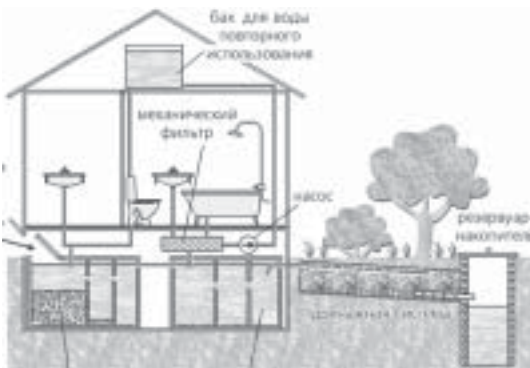
“Ecodom is teaching people that it is possible to use only renewable resources to provide for their needs,” says Ogorodnikov. “Science may not have found all of the answers to sustainable development, but we already have many options for building efficient homes today.” ●

Elena Mityurova is a member of Ecodom. Translated by John Deever.

courtesy of Ecodom



The Ecodom uses solar panels to heat water and generate electricity.



courtesy of Ecodom

Schematic drawing from Ecodom, available in full at <http://ecoclub.nsu.ru/books>.

Altai NGOs Come Together Despite Tremendous Challenges

by *Mikhail Shishin and Irina Fotieva*

ALTAI IS AMONG EARTH'S FORGOTTEN places. Located literally in the "heart of Asia," on the border between the Great Steppe and the mountain regions of Asia, Altai has rightly been called an enormous open-air museum, possessing a rich cultural history and pristine natural sites. The mountain territory of Altai—home to Russians, Kazakhs, Chinese, and Mongolians—is a place where many different national and cultural interests come together. The people of Altai share their love for the land, and a growing civil society movement is helping to protect it.

Many would like to steer Altai down the traditional path of industrial development by selling its natural resources and timber, building large industrial complexes, and so on. Typical of this approach is the Katun hydroelectric plant, which the public has been fighting for over a decade. Such a development approach might lead to a quick infusion of cash into the region, but it might also cause tragic, irreversible damage to the local environment and ecosystems.

Alternatively, tighter environmental laws and better protection of wilderness territory would allow Altai and its indigenous peoples to follow their own unique path of development, involving sustainable, low-impact use of renewable natural resources, the preparation of medicinal products, ecotourism, and centers for the development of environmentally-friendly technology. Of course, this more sustainable approach to the region's development is supported by Altai's NGOs, including the Altai Branch of the Socio-Ecological Union (ASEU), founded in Barnaul in 1989.

ASEU's environmental work began with a campaign against the Katun Hydroelectric Plant—a fight which continues to this day. In the last few years, another tense issue has arisen in Altai, connected with the plans to build a highway into China across the Ukok plateau. UNESCO declared this high-mountain plateau a World Heritage Site in 1998. Our organization, along with Greenpeace Russia, worked to have Altai included on this list, commissioning scientific reports which were then sent to selection committees. Still, neither the unique natural and cultural wealth of the Ukok plateau nor the economic unfeasibility of the highway project has been enough to deter its proponents.

Fortunately, our work consists of more than mere protest and opposition. Our NGO is currently producing a scientific report calling for a nature park in one of Gorno-Altai's most beautiful regions—Chemal. The proposal includes a plan for a center for alternative energy. Gorno-Altai has almost ideal conditions for the development of many types of alternative energy—solar, small-scale hydroelectric, and wind. If used efficiently, alternative energy could solve Altai's internal energy problems. Moreover, Altai could set an example for the world as a testing ground for new alternative energy technologies.

The international association of governments known as "Greater Altai" is a true example of successful cross-border collaboration. Together with the Institute for Water and Environmental Problems, we have held two international conferences titled "Our Home is Altai," covering issues of collaboration between Russia, China, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia. Our second conference gave birth to the interparliamentary Council of Four Countries for the Resolution of Current Environmental, Economic, and Cultural Issues. Scientists and NGO representatives will be included in the council, whose aim is to discuss and solve problems of vital importance to all member countries. Our first task will be to create a legal body overseeing the parliaments of the four member nations.

Despite many challenges, the Third Sector in Altai is making tremendous gains. It is beginning to occur to some government officials that collaboration with NGOs is mutually beneficial, not just an obligatory response to social pressure. Our experience confirms that collaboration among ethnic groups, governments, and ordinary people offers the most fruitful path for development. We hope that these partnerships for change will expand not only in Altai, but in Russia and abroad. There is no other way to stave off the threat of global crises and leave our children not an empty wasteland, but a green, living planet. ●

*Mikhail Shishin and Irina Fotieva are activists in the Altai Branch of the Socio-Ecological Union and the **Fund for 21st Century Altai**. Translated by Mieka Erley.*



courtesy of Tengri

Altaians leave scraps of cloth, each carrying a wish, at sacred sites in the mountains.

Tengri's Deep Ecology Unites Spirituality and Environmentalism

by *Danil Mamyev*

AS A SOCIETY, WE ARE GAINING A more sophisticated understanding of the co-dependency of natural ecosystems and coming around to what indigenous peoples always knew: we must preserve Earth's biodiversity and respect the land on which we live. These are the core tenets of Tengrism, one of the most ancient religions of the indigenous people of Altai, based on folk wisdom about nature and man's relationship to the land. The modern deep ecology movement has much in common with the traditions of the native Altaians and offers the hope of integrating ancient wisdom and modern practice.

The Tengri School of Spiritual Ecology is a 500-member volunteer organization that has served Altai communities since 1996. Tengri's mission is to bring the traditions of Altai's indigenous people into the environmental consciousness of today's citizens through health and educational projects, environmental campaigns, ecotourism retreats and community

awareness-raising events. For Altaians, the environment is implicitly spiritual, and we hope to instill this attitude in others through outreach and education.

The first step in protecting native culture is protecting native land. In 2001, Tengri successfully advocated for native territory in the Ongudaiskiy Raion to be legally established as the "Uch Enmek" Karakol National Park. Now, in order to preserve the historical, cultural, and natural heritage of this valley, Tengri is working to develop a network of research centers in Karakol and other protected native territories to introduce models of sustainable development based on native Altai philosophy and deep ecology. These centers would be affiliated with the Altai Academy of Natural Sciences, one of Tengri's most active partners.

Aside from advocacy work, Tengri's activities generally focus on environmental action and cultural promotion. We conduct folklore classes for children and participate in regional folk festivals in cities as distant as Tomsk. The "Tengri" folk ensemble, with students from

courtesy of Tengri



Altaians on a hiking trip in the mountains.

our School of Spiritual Ecology, has performed throughout the Altai Republic, bringing native song and dance to new audiences. In March 2001, in a performance space of the Gorno-Altai city library, author and Tengri member Antonina Tundinova drew a full house at an event for her new book, *Altai, the Ascending Country*. Interest in Tundinova's work was so great that city administrators were forced to set up an application process for her public workshops. The appeal of native arts is growing and Tengri is playing a large role in fostering Altai's native artists, writers, and performers.

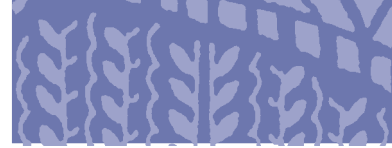
Academic conferences on culture and environment have also been part of our work. Together with the Siberian Center for Support of Public Initiatives and the Institute of Humanitarian Research of the Altai Republic, Tengri held a region-wide seminar in March 2001 on "Spiritual Ecology: Problems and Prospects for Development in the 21st Century." The second conference with the theme of "Spirituality and Culture: Problems and Prospects for Development in the 21st Century" was held in June 2001 with support from the Ministry of Culture of the Altai Republic.

Tengri brings its philosophy down to earth by putting people in touch with their natural environment through hands-on environmental activities. With sup-

port from the city administration, Tengri volunteers launched "Gorno-Altai—City of Springs," a campaign to keep local water sources clean. We have also organized clean-ups of local springs in Chike-Taman, White Bom, and other suburbs of Gorno-Altai. Over the last three years, we have recruited other organizations—including the Environmental and Biological Center of the Altai Republic, the Ak Suu Volunteer Center, and the Children's Fund of the Altai Republic—to collaborate with us on clean water campaigns.

At Tengri, we believe that the Altai region—with its natural, cultural, and historical heritage—can help to promote a new environmentally focused way of thinking based on ancient teachings about man's unity with nature. We should understand that the health of the planet depends on a harmonious relationship between nature and humanity. Tengrism offers answers to the questions that our modern industrial society is facing today. We believe that Altai can set an example to the world by practicing the principles of deep ecology and Tengrist teachings. ●

Danil Mamyev is a member of the Tengri School of Spiritual Ecology.



Twelve Years Later: Building Russian Civil Society through Environmental Advocacy

by Xenia Soubotin

In this issue of Give & Take we have focused on the Siberian environmental movement in an effort to expand the common understanding of this critical region and demonstrate its uniqueness. At the same time, it is essential to see this regional environmental movement in the broader context of Russia as a whole. Individual Siberian activists and regional networks contribute significantly to a national environmental movement that confronts a number of diverse challenges. In the following essay, Xenia Soubotin illustrates that larger picture.

MANY PEOPLE CREDIT THE SUCCESS of democratic reform in Russia to the environmental movement of the late 1980s. Public outrage in response to the Chernobyl disaster, the pollution of Lake Baikal, and the shrinking of the Aral Sea led to public demands for change. Soviet citizens saw these debacles as the result of Soviet mismanagement; their desire to protect their country contributed to the demise of the Soviet system in 1991. Nature protection and saving a healthy environment, therefore, have always been galvanizing issues for Russian people.

Today, both Russia's large pristine ecosystems and its citizens' rights are still being threatened—this time, not by Soviet mismanagement but by the intensifying forces of industrial development. While economic development has the potential to benefit both environment and economy, the radical transformation of the Russian Federation has opened Russia's wilderness to unprecedented pressures in the past decade.

However, there's a huge difference between the Soviet Union then and Russia now. Citizens who have become savvy in science, law, politics, and media are again crying out their concerns about their environment. And this time, the public movement striving to assert citizens' rights and implement change has the law, the public, and sometimes the courts behind it.

Experience Gained Through Small Victories

Russia's civil society sector has grown dramatically in capacity and success over the past decade, and environmental issues have been a major rallying point for that growth. Our US NGO, Pacific Environment, has

partnered with many of the leaders of this movement and supports Russian NGOs and citizens with grants and other organizational aid.

"The Russian constitution guarantees citizens' rights to environmental information and to a healthy environment, yet the government is not taking steps to ensure those rights are being implemented," states Olga Yakovleva, founder of the Rodnik Legal Center in Moscow. Indeed, over the past decade the government has become increasingly friendly with big business. In response, local citizens and groups have had to come up to speed to keep up with the tremendous economic, environmental, and social impacts that large development projects have brought.

Since 1991, NGOs have grown in authority; many have achieved remarkable environmental victories. The capacity of today's Russian environmental movement can be largely attributed to local activists' dedication to fostering change. Collaboration of groups through networking, conferences, and regularly maintained email listservs has allowed seemingly isolated groups to connect with others and find support. Local Russian NGOs today know how to assert their legal rights and speak out to claim their role as one of many stakeholders with an interest in how development decisions are made. For example:

- In its offshore oil drilling near Sakhalin Island, the oil giant Exxon discharged toxic wastes into the Pacific in violation of Russian law. Sakhalin Environment Watch—a Russian NGO Pacific Environment has supported since 1997—was one of many environmental groups that protested Exxon's behavior. When Exxon's project failed the environmental impact review process, the Russian

prime minister at the time issued a decree granting Exxon an exception, allowing it to continue polluting. But Sakhalin Watch challenged that federal decree in court, and ultimately won when the Russian Supreme Court, affirming the NGO's position, invalidated the government decree.

- Thanks to NGO advocacy, the Supreme Court also overturned government decrees that would have illegally transferred strictly protected forests to "non forest" lands, to clear the way for construction of luxury houses. Through the Russian court system, NGOs prevented such unwise development.
- NGOs around the Sea of Okhotsk have filed suits to protect endangered gray whales and access to information. An international campaign now underway is drawing attention from around the world to this rare, threatened population.

In Siberia, Engaged Citizens Hold Industry Accountable

In some cases, government officials have turned to NGOs for support. Surprisingly, some NGOs are more closely linked with international partners than the government bodies themselves. Thus, the NGOs can offer ideas and a professional approach to local problems that is sorely needed. For example, the NGO Tomsk

Ecological Student Inspection (TESI) worked with authorities to win certification as volunteer hunting, fishing and ecological inspectors. TESI activists had nearly all the authority of a government inspector and were able to augment meager state inspection staffs by implementing anti-poaching programs. In other words, citizens were recruited to enforce the laws the government itself was unable to enforce. TESI often had the resources for transportation that government officials did not have.



Environmental educators gain new insights from NGO training programs.



Children make significant contributions to the environmental movement in eastern Siberia.

But apparently these public inspectors were too effective, or caught too many poachers with friends in high places. In July 2002 the authority to organize such public inspections, which had always been sanctioned by regional authorities, was cut by the federal government. Student inspectors now must ask authorities to accompany them on anti-poaching campaigns. Siberian NGOs face the frustrating obstacle that even when their local officials support their work, federal interference can put an end to good projects and programs.

Industry has tried to thwart citizen activism as well. As elsewhere in the world, some companies have sought to shape public opinion by forming "astroturf" NGOs—groups that appear to be grassroots organizations, but turn out to be directly or indirectly sponsored in full by commercial interests with deep pockets. In Kemerovo Region, for example, a decade of efforts to create a national park was derailed when the local forest service formed its own NGO to lobby for a local park. The group's proposal to create a park status that is not recognized by Russian law stems mostly from its desire to keep control of land management and the park budget. And at a July public hearing in Angarsk to discuss the proposed Russia-China oil pipeline, the Russian oil company YUKOS based in hundreds of workers from their Angarsk Oil Refinery to participate. At subsequent

hearings, YUKOS protested and blocked attempts by local citizens to express their opposition to construction of the pipeline through a national park. Industry has also challenged environmental NGOs and civil society by dominating media sources and buying out pages of local papers with project-supportive articles as advertisement.

Industry has even taken an active role in blocking the flow of information to local communities. In March of 2002, the road to an Evenk indigenous community, located on the Kovykta gas deposit in Irkutsk Region, was blocked by an alleged accident of a RUSIA-Petroleum truck. This prevented a delegation of local and international experts and environmentalists from meeting with the local community. Russian oil companies are notorious for such tactics.

President Putin naturally maintains that economic development is his first priority, but in reality that has meant creating favorable conditions only for big business—and extractive industries in particular. Such “development” often comes at the expense of the interests of the Russian people. Framing development decisions as a choice between the economy and the environment implies that Russia cannot afford environmental protection. Yet civil society has taken the lead in demanding that development occur only according to Russia law.

One excellent example is the recent public hearings on another proposed pipeline, this one from Angarsk to the port of Nakhodka. The oil company Transneft announced the hearings only three days prior to the meeting—rather than thirty, as required by legislation—announcing on a Friday afternoon that the crucial meeting would be held Monday morning. Such a blatant attempt to avoid public oversight left neither NGOs nor local officials any time to familiarize themselves with the ten volumes of project documents. At the event, space at the large conference table was reserved for key government officials, including the chief traffic policeman; the public filled the room but were forced to stand, lined up along the walls. No project information was presented at the meeting; instead, participants were treated to two twenty-minute PR films about the company. Environmental groups challenged the legality of the hearing at the very beginning, and the outrage at the meeting led the company to host new hearings a month later.

Even the victories of Russian civil society have been threatened. In August 2000, environmental groups launched an effort to collect 2 million signatures to put three issues to a national vote: the banning of importation of foreign nuclear waste, the restoration

of an independent environmental protection agency, and the restoration of the Federal Forest Service. By October 2000, 2.5 million signatures were submitted. However, election officials rejected over 600,000 signatures and the referendum was blocked. Months later, a similar referendum effort in Krasnoyarsk Region was also blocked after a large number of signatures were disqualified. Despite this unprecedented display of public opinion and several opinion polls showing more than 90 percent opposition to the plan, Putin signed the nuclear imports bill in August 2001. In November 2001, a proposal for a new referendum law that will make it much more difficult to conduct a referendum in the future was passed.

Despite so many obstacles, NGOs have tenaciously fought to keep working. When the government required that NGOs re-register in 2001 and again in 2002, NGOs complied. Some NGOs have undergone multiple tax audits in one year. And even in a context where new laws will greatly restrict and hinder groups' ability to fundraise, Russian NGOs continue to hold government, business, and citizens to a high standard of conduct.

The maturing citizens' sector has grown significantly over the past ten years and has measurably altered the course of conservation and resource use for many regions as a result. Growing environmental awareness among local people sets the stage for involving the greater public in natural resource management decisions. This increased involvement will lead ultimately to increased environmental protection and sustainable development, as well as to the defense of human rights, growth of civil society, adherence to the rule of law and decisions being made in the interest of the Russian people. ●

Xenia Soubotin is the Russia program officer at Pacific Environment (www.pacificenvironment.org).

ISAR-Siberia



Environmentalists raise consciousness about Russia's diverse wildlife.

(Continued from page 4)

Kazakhstan long served as a dumping ground and test site for the Soviet nuclear program. The aboveground nuclear test site in Semipalatinsk is infamous for its lingering pollution, and elsewhere uranium mines and radioactive dumps already litter the country. Yet in 2001, officials from KazAtomProm, the state nuclear industry, secretly sought to change the law to permit the import of foreign nuclear waste, in the hope of receiving billions of dollars from abroad. When members of the ecological committee of the Kazakh Parliament leaked information about the KazAtomProm proposal to the environmental newspaper *EcoPravda*, the NGO community was determined to fight the proposal.

Supported by Russian colleagues who had fought unsuccessfully a year earlier to stop the import of waste into Russia, the eco-NGOs publicized the text of the proposed bill, appealed to Parliament describing the dangers of increased radiation, launched a fax attack on members of Parliament, and held protests. Old-fashioned grassroots networking and a sophisticated PR campaign—complete with logo-emblazoned stickers and leaflets reading “Don’t Turn Kazakhstan into a Nuclear Dump”—resonated with the public: surveys of public opinion across Kazakhstan showed that 75 percent of citizens opposed the import scheme.

The NGOs argued that Kazakhstan, rich in oil and gas, doesn’t need to raise money by importing waste. And no one would want to invest in or travel to Kazakhstan if it became known as the radioactive capital of the world. Yet KazAtomProm said the bill’s failure would deny the country huge amounts of money that would improve the lives of the citizens of Kazakhstan. They labelled NGOs who opposed the scheme ignorant and incapable of making such important national decisions.

Three NGO activists—biologists Kaisha Atakhanova and Gulsum Kakimzhanova and lawyer Vadim Nee—spent endless hours buttonholing legislators and ministers, trying to persuade them to vote against the bill. The campaign organized public hearings all over the country, including in rural towns and villages, all the while training local

NGOs to spread the word. Each hearing attracted 200 to 400 citizens.

When a vote on the bill was finally scheduled for January 2003, the NGOs developed a carefully worded New Year’s greeting that reiterated the dangers for Kazakhstan of importing nuclear waste. Local constituents sent the greeting to all parliamentary deputies, asking them to state their positions on import: for or against? Putting the legislators on the spot (with elections due) paid off; almost all responded saying they understood the voters’ concerns and also opposed the bill. The effort was a success. Returning from the holiday break, the Cabinet of Ministers set the bill aside, going so far as to declare that nuclear contamination could threaten the country.

KazAtomProm’s attempt to import nuclear waste is not entirely dead, but the issue of nuclear contamination has been made highly visible all over Kazakhstan. Perhaps even more important, a coordinated grassroots movement has asserted its right and ability to challenge big government and big business interests in a way never seen before in this post-Soviet country.

When credited with igniting the opposition movement, Atakhanova responded, “It wasn’t me or the NGO campaign that created the movement to oppose the import of nuclear waste into Kazakhstan. It was the people themselves.”

Correction

The Winter 2003 issue of *Give & Take*, which went to press in December 2002, included a story about an NGO victory in which activists prevented the parliament of Azerbaijan from passing a law imposing a series of controls on independent civil society groups. However, over a three-day period during the New Year’s holiday, the law in question was indeed secretly signed into effect, with no publicity whatsoever. Despite the efforts of the international NGO coalition, the government of Azerbaijan signed the act, eight months after it had ostensibly been defeated, and thus placed international grantmaking in jeopardy in Azerbaijan. For more information, please contact *Give & Take* at postmaster@isar.org.

Index of Organizations

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International Rivers Network: 1847 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, CA 94703; tel: (510) 848-1155; fax: (510) 848-1008; info@irn.org	8
Obereg: P.O. Box 49, Kislovka, Tomsk Region, Tomsk Raion, 645508 Russia; tel/fax: (3822) 95-38-09; koa@keva.tusur.ru	14
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Russian Rivers Network: ul. Kostina, g. 2, kv. 164, Nizhniy Novgorod, 603134 Russia; tel: (8 8312) 30-28-81, 34-36-79; pomreke@dront.ru	7
Siberian Civic Initiatives Support Center: ul. K. Marxa, 57, office 702, Novosibirsk, 630073 Russia; tel/fax: (3832) 46-45-32/465477; root@cip.nsk.su	14
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