



# Altai Assistance Project

## 2006 Annual Report

### Summary

We're pleased with progress made in 2006, and we hope 2007 will turn out as well. It was a good year for Altai Nature Parks, the Onguday zoning project is moving slowly but steadily, exchanges were hugely productive, and some useful work was done in sustainable energy.

The number of new, and likely continuing, contacts made through the TMU funded exchanges, as detailed below, is particularly promising for future activity.

Educational workshops in use of Global Positioning System receivers (sponsored by AAP) and Leave No Trace wilderness ethics (sponsored by the Altai Project) sparked a movement to institute formal, continuing, courses within the Altai educational system, which will begin in 2007. The fact that both part time staff people at Foundation for Sustainable Development of Altai teach in the higher education system is no doubt helping here.

### Activities

#### **Mongolia**

FSDA Director Chagat Almashev and staffer Natalya Tokova spent two weeks on an expedition to neighboring areas of Mongolia in May, accompanied by two Gorno Altaisk newspaper editors, a scientist, a cultural heritage expert, and the Chairman of the Kosh Agach *raion* legislature. AAP and Altai Republic donors provided funding, a local oil company provided fuel, and the Altai government provided a vehicle.

The purpose was to renew crossborder contacts with Mongolian regional government leaders and protected area managers. Links were strong in the Soviet time but have lapsed. The open steppes and wild places of the regional landscape make transboundary movement of people and animals easy, so the increasing importance of wildlife conservation and protected areas provides an impetus for cooperation between area governments. The visit was quite successful, an important factor being the presence of a person of authority from the Kosh Agach *raion* government.

#### **Forestry**

Forester Bob Burt from the Green Mountain National Forest went to the Altai on a TMU funded trip to consult on reforestation and other problems. Bob has previous experience in the Russian Far East. He toured the Altai in the company of Chagat and forestry managers, part of the time by helicopter. Observations:

- Much high grade timber in Altai forests is being used for low grade uses, such as firewood.
- Reforestation of cut areas can be difficult because the same areas are used for livestock grazing, but techniques have been developed to cope with the problem.
- Some marginal agricultural land could be better utilized as forest.
- Nurseries need capital investment and improved practices.
- More and better forest fire fighting equipment is needed.

All the observations were accompanied by recommendations for future action.

#### **Nature Park meetings**

Two Nature Park meetings (now organized as the Altai Association of Protected Areas) were held, in May and December, both with about four dozen attendees. These meetings have now become well established as forums for discussion, planning, and dissemination of information. Three meetings were originally planned but only two were held; the third meeting was turned into a field training course, an account of which is below under "Exchanges". Two

meetings per year now seem to be sufficient to achieve the purpose, and the work and expense involved in staging the meetings, each of which is held in a different, sometimes remote, location, is considerable.

At the May meeting:

- Presentations were made by World Wildlife Fund and Global Environmental Facility representatives on upcoming projects and funding opportunities for parks.
- A decision was made to consult with the governments of Onguday and Kosh Agach *raions* about bringing Shavlinsky *zakaznik* into the Nature Park system, thereby providing some management and oversight to this large and important wildlife refuge, and also renewing the protected area status of the former Koch Agachsky *zakaznik*. Tourism, hunting, and poaching are all increasing.
- The meeting participants also signed a Letter of Statement to the President and the Government of Russia concerning the proposed construction of a gas pipeline to China through Ukok Nature Park. This Letter of Appeal, signed by 25 environmental organizations of Russia, was published in regional mass media. This was the first time opposition of local and national NGOs to the federal gas project was openly announced in Altai.

At the December meeting:

- UNDP/GEF project's ecological education leader, Elena Repetunova, presented the GEF project and made announcements of small grants (\$1,000) on eco education and bigger (\$8,000) grants on eco tourism, as well as about Global Green Grants Fund (GGF) grants. She also explained how to apply for these grants.
- FSDA discussed details of the project proposal on preparation of eco tourism guides for UNDP/GEF project. At the end of December this application (for \$12,000) was emailed to GEF project.
- It was recommended that in 2007 FSDA should find grants to publish a booklet on Parks, which will contain eco education information.
- It was decided that every December NGO "Lake Guardians" will hold eco education workshops in the Yurtok tourist camp, for which it will seek grant funds.

## Energy

Chagat Almashev, Matt Foley, and electrical engineer/remote sensing expert Steve Gulick went to Ulagan *raion* on the first exchange of the year in early July, where they spent five days based at the Kok-Taman ("Blue Flower") summer camp for the region's schoolchildren. The camp is in a high valley, remote from the electrical grid. While there they did survey work for the design and construction of a small hydroelectric plant capable of supplying the camp year round. A good electrical supply is hardly needed during the long days of summer, but the camp's owner, the local government, thinks the camp could attract cross country skiers if it could stay open in the winter. The camp has a defunct hydro unit, too small for winter use, and a quantity of steel pipe capable of supplying a plant large enough for winter use if moved to a steeper location along the creek running through the camp.

AAP has in the past purchased Glowstar solar powered lanterns for Altai distribution. This year, we applied to the manufacturer, Sollatek (<http://www.glowstar.net/>) for a grant and received two more lanterns without charge.

## Exchanges

Our exchanges are primarily funded by TMU. Plans were rather vague at the time we applied last year, but the season turned out very well. Exchanges were immediately useful to the participants, old contacts were renewed, and a number of promising new contacts were made.

TMU funded travel to the Altai in July by Matt Foley (US Coordinator, AAP), Steve Gulick (Wildland Security, [www.wildlandsecurity.org](http://www.wildlandsecurity.org)), Bob Burt (Forest Silviculturalist, USFS), Dr. James Gibbs (Associate Professor, SUNY ESF at Syracuse), and Dr. Alton Byers (Director of Research

and Education, The Mountain Institute). November visitors to the US were Chagat Almashev (Director, Foundation for Sustainable Development of Altai), Ermen Surkashev (Director, Argut Nature Park), and Igor Saylankin (Director, Belukha Nature Park).

The Weeden Foundation funded a trip to the Altai by Ang Rita Sherpa (Senior Program Manager, Nepal, The Mountain Institute).

We originally budgeted \$20,000 for exchanges, received less, and spent about \$25,000. The difference was made up by late contributions from the Weeden Foundation and Mr. Foley's business. A copy of the 2006 as-spent budget is attached.

### **US-Altai**

At the same time Chagat, Matt, and Steve were at the children's camp, Alton Byers and Ang Rita Sherpa from Nepal were in the Belukha Nature Park, horse trekking into the base of the mountain accompanied by FSDA guide/interpreter Natalya Yurkova and Park Director Igor Saylankin, for the purpose of gaining understanding of the problems of this increasingly heavily touristed area and dispensing advice. Ang Rita is a native of the Khumbu region of Nepal, on the approaches to Mt. Everest, and Alton lived there for some years, so they both have considerable experience in the environmental and social consequences of tourism in traditional areas.

Everyone met up on returning to civilization and, joined by James Gibbs, spent time working out the concept of an application to USAID for a three year \$200,000 grant to fund ecotourism education for local people living in and near Altai Nature Parks. (On returning to the US, the full application was prepared and submitted by TMI with FSDA and AAP in supporting roles. Copy available on request.)

After Alton and Ang Rita returned home, the next activity was a **training expedition** on horseback into the vast Shavlinsky *Zakaznik*/Argut Nature Park area in the south central Altai. Dr. Gibbs had donated half a dozen Garmin eTrex GPS receivers for use by Nature Parks, and this field expedition, a substitute for the third Nature Park meeting, was to train at least one inspector (ranger) from each park in their use, conducted by local GIS and wildlife expert Mikhail Paltsyn (Director, NGO 'Arkhar', now also Endangered Species Group Leader, UNDP/GEF Project "Biodiversity Conservation in the Russian Portion of Altai-Sayan Ecoregion").

The inspectors easily mastered the receivers' menus and commands (even though some of the receivers were in Russian and some in English). Inspectors from different parks never meet each other in the normal course of their duties, so the training also proved to have tremendous value just in getting them together for a few days. The group training experience sparked much discussion of how to institute regular future education, in the field and classroom.

The expedition also familiarized the U.S. visitors with the geography and problems of Shavlinsky/Argut preserves, established as no-hunting wildlife refuges to protect the largest snow leopard concentration in the Republic. Lying between the icy ten to fifteen thousand foot alpine summits of Belukha NP to the south and lower hills to the north, it's an area of steep meadowy hills cut by deep forested valleys, with relief of about a vertical mile between the 8000' summits and valley bottoms. There is little snow in winter, which makes the extensive grasslands excellent habitat for wild ungulates such as ibex, maral, and deer species, as well as their predators, wolves and snow leopards. Poaching is common: by poor locals who come on horseback in the winter, and tourist trophy hunters who are more likely to arrive in helicopters.

The feasibility of installing remote poacher detection systems was evaluated by Steve Gulick, who has twenty years of experience building such systems in Africa, and found to be possible and desirable. Steve will return to the Altai in February 2007, to install detection systems in four locations, which we hope will be of use during this winter's poaching season. Certain remote cabins are known to be used by poachers; the problem lies in knowing when they

are there so enforcement personnel can be sent. Small electronic sensors designed and built by Steve will be concealed in or near cabins to detect occupancy by heat, motion, magnetic fields of weapons, or wavelengths of light produced by fire. When triggered, these detectors will send a signal to a satellite modem placed in a nearby tree, which in turn will trigger a pager in a distant location, which will probably be the Republic's Game Department Headquarters in Gorno Altaisk as well as the office of Mikhail Paltsyn's NGO 'Arkhar'.

Funds for this project were quickly and recently raised from the Weeden Foundation, Snow Leopard Conservancy and a private donor.

FSDA, together with three U.S. organizations (The Altai Project of the Center for Safe Energy, Adirondack Mountain Club, and Paul Smiths College) organized a very successful **Leave No Trace workshop-training** on outdoor ethics conducted by Susan Cutting of AP and ADK Education Director Jen Kretser, held at a tourist camp at the trailhead to Mt. Belukha. Thirty-five people attended including tour agency guides and staff from four nature parks. For most, the course was a first exposure to contemporary international standards of wilderness ethics, and will have lasting value for future practices.

Instruction included the use of an AAP-donated router in making simple incised wooden signs of the type seen at Adirondack Loj, which were admired by last summer's Altai group.

### **Altai-US**

Chagat Almashev and two Nature Park directors came to the US for two weeks in November. Igor Saylankin's Park, Belukha, is about 300,000 acres, has the highest mountain in Siberia, 15,000 foot Belukha, and is becoming a major tourist destination. Just to its north in the 8,000 foot foothills is 40,000 acre Argut Nature Park, a no-hunting wildlife preserve not yet much visited by tourists, where Ermen Surkashev is Director. Argut staff also has increasing responsibility for the contiguous and much larger wildlife reserve Shavlinsky *Zakaznik*, portions of which are likely to be added to Argut NP in the near future. The parks are quite new, with small and inexperienced staffs whose duties and legal authority are in the process of definition. Visiting long established US protected areas and meeting their staff people is extremely useful to Altai park personnel.

The original hope was to visit protected areas in Alaska, but budgetary limitations and the lateness of the season prohibited this. Exchange activities thus took place in three areas: southeast Oregon, the San Francisco Bay area, and the Adirondacks.

The **Oregon** visit was ably organized and conducted by Zane Smith, retired USFS Regional Forester and former Ecologically Sustainable Development principal. From a base in Klamath Falls, we spent four days visiting various protected areas in the region and meeting with their staffs, as well as tourist industry professionals.

Included were:

- Crater Lake National Park and its Superintendent, Chuck Lundy.
- Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife's Klamath Wildlife Area and adjoining US Fish & Wildlife Service's Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuge, also a local farmer leasing refuge crop land. These refuges are large migratory bird habitats.
- Winema-Fremont National Forest (surrounding Crater Lake NP), Director Karen Shimamoto and staff.
- Dawnn Brown, Great Basin Visitor Association Director and Roe Outfitters principal Jennifer Roe.
- Rogue River National Wild & Scenic River, intensively used for white water sports and closely managed by the Bureau of Land Management, Director Abbie Jossie and staff.

Also visited was Alternative Power & Machine, a manufacturer of micro hydro equipment and vendor of solar equipment.

The **San Francisco** portion of the exchange took place in two stages since we passed through the Bay area on arriving from the east coast and again on leaving.

Included were:

- A day at Half Moon Bay with Wendy Lama of KarmaQuest Ecotourism and Adventure Travel ([www.karmaquests.com](http://www.karmaquests.com)), visiting nearby California parks, tourism venues and people, followed by dinner at the home of Wendy and her husband, Karma. Wendy spent years in Nepal as a Mountain Institute staffer. She and her husband now run tours to Himalayan countries and also a highly regarded "Trekking with Nomads" tour in Kyrgyzstan ("Best Trip of the Year, Asia", Outside Magazine, 2004) an area physically and culturally similar to the Altai. She will act as an ecotourism instructor in the Altai if the USAID grant is received.
- Meeting with Toby McLeod, Director, Sacred Lands Film Project ([www.sacredland.org](http://www.sacredland.org)), and staff, makers of the documentary *In Light of Reverence*, about conflicts between American Native sacred sites and various modern trespasses. They now have five year funding to make a film about similar problems worldwide, would like to include the Altai, and expect to travel there in 2007.
- Dinner with Dr. Rodney Jackson and Darla Hillard of the Snow Leopard Conservancy, at the home of Jennifer Castner, formerly Russia Director, Pacific Environment, and now with the Altai Project. Dr. Jackson donated two wildlife camera traps for the Altai visitors to take home and subsequently contributed \$2000, a third of the cost of Steve Gulick's upcoming February antipoaching trip to the Altai.
- Meeting at Pacific Environment with Director David Gordon and staff on common concerns and how to increase cooperation.
- Meeting at the Christensen Fund with Rafique Keshavjee (Asia Program Officer) and Gleb Raygorodetsky (Global Program Officer). We met Gleb last year when he was with the Wildlife Conservation Society in the Russian Far East; Chagat gave him a tour of the Altai and he is now an enthusiast. Christensen has a presence in Central Asia but has not worked in Russia. The Altai people, however, are culturally and linguistically Asian with strong contemporary links to nearby Asian countries. The Christensen staffers were impressed with the progress being made by the parks of the Altai, since they are sponsoring similar efforts in Kyrgyzstan which don't seem to be going as well. As a first step in what may turn out to be a relationship, Chagat will travel to Kyrgyzstan in the first half of 2007 to consult with Christensen staff and grantees.

The **Adirondack** visit was, of necessity, short.

Activities included:

- A day long meeting with New State Department of Environmental Conservation Adirondack staff people including wildlife biologists, rangers, and the head of trail maintenance.
- A visit to the new and technologically sophisticated Museum of Natural History in Tupper Lake, which had featured an Altai exhibit on its opening day earlier in the year on the fourth of July.
- A visit to the Six Nations Museum and a meeting with its proprietors, John and David Fadden.
- Meeting with the Director and staff of the Lake Placid Visitors' Bureau, the taxpayer-funded agency principally responsible for promotion of tourism in the central Adirondack region.
- Meeting with Jen Kretser, Education Director of the Adirondack Mountain Club at the Club's Adirondack Loj, at the trailhead to the high peaks. Jen had been in the Altai earlier in the year giving Leave No Trace training at Belukha Nature Park sponsored by the Altai Project; this was a chance to meet her on home ground.
- A public reception and presentation on the Altai in Lake Placid, hosted by the Mayor.

- A dinner party reunion for Adirondackers who've been to the Altai or previously involved with the Altai visitors, attended by three dozen people, many of whom had never met each other. It was an excellent party.

## **Planning/Zoning Assistance**

In 2006 we budgeted money to assist the Government of Onguday Raion in preparing a zoning plan for the raion's 12,000 square kilometer area. The primary advocate for the plan is Danil Mamyev, founder of Uch-Enmek Nature Park and now Chair of the Land Use Department of the Onguday District Administration. Danil's advocacy of the plan is a direct result of the two TMU sponsored trips he has made to the Adirondack Park and Vermont.

The resource inventory and map work is to be done by consultants. In 2005 and 2006, a considerable amount of time and effort was devoted to preparing specifications and terms of reference, and doing legal research necessary before letting a contract for the work. That phase has recently been completed. Environmentalist Mikhail Shishin's organization from Barnaul has now been engaged to *"Work out and realize a system of regional planning for the optimization of land use with separation of the areas having nature-protection and cultural-historical value for the needs of the Administration of the Municipality of the Ongudai Raion."*

New legal ground will be broken in preparing this plan and passing it into law. Land use is now controlled by different and sometimes overlapping governmental entities, whose functions and place in governmental structure are changing, and most of the land is also being privatized. A local law will have to be carefully fitted into the requirements of the federal legal structure.

Onguday occupies a central position in the Republic's geography and also the culture of the Altai people. Our hope is that a success here could lead to replication elsewhere.

The cost estimate for the completion of work is two million rubles; four hundred thousand are on hand, half from the Onguday Government and half from AAP. We and our partners are in search of additional funding.