



Altai Assistance Project

NEWS

Fall 2006

Welcome to the first Altai Assistance Project Newsletter. As you can see, this has been an exciting year for AAP and our friends. We are continuing to grow and to reach out to more professionals in more fields. This is very gratifying for us and extremely helpful to our Altai colleagues.

The Altai Assistance Project now has four focus areas:

- Strengthening of management and conservation systems of regional Protected Areas (Nature Parks)
- Promotion of sustainable land use (land use planning)
- Demonstration of alternative energy use
- Development of Community based tourism network

October 2005 – A group from the Altai and U.S. spent ten days in **Nepal** trekking along the popular tourist route to the base of Mt. Everest, starting at 9500 feet and finishing at 18,000 feet. The region is like the Altai in that its inhabitants, the Sherpa people, have led subsistence lives based on farming and trading for hundreds of years, and are now having to cope with the



opportunities and problems brought by large numbers of tourists. It's not uncommon for half the buildings in a Sherpa village to be tourist lodges built since Hillary and Norgay's conquest of Everest in 1954. A highlight of the trip was a meeting with the **Khumbu Alpine Conservation Council**. This local group has, with outside help, addressed the major environmental problem of the region, the burning of juniper bushes, the last woody vegetation above tree line, for heating and cooking. Juniper takes a hundred years to regenerate and has been fast disappearing due to use as fuel by large alpine expeditions headed for

Mt. Everest. The Council has banned the cutting of juniper and set up a system to import and distribute kerosene as a substitute. We also learned a great deal about Community Based Tourism and Hospitality, ideas which will help the Altai people cope with their own tourism explosion.

November 2005 – AAP received a valuable grant of ArcMap GIS software from the manufacturer, ESRI, a company well known for its support of conservation.

January 2006 – The Foundation for Sustainable Development of Altai, our sister organization in Gorno Altaisk, moved out of Director Chagat



Almashev's apartment and into a rented office, and also hired two part time staff people. Natalya Yurkova teaches English at Gorno Altaisk University, does translation, and serves as a guide and interpreter for foreign visitors.

Natalya Tokova, a teacher of history at Professional School #84 who speaks Russian and Altaian, serves as office and program manager.



May – From **April 28 to May 12** FSDA organized and AAP partially funded a two week expedition south from Kosh Agach into neighboring areas of **Mongolia**. On the trip, besides Chagat and Natalya Tokova, were two Gorno Altaisk newspaper editors, a scientist, a cultural

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heritage expert, and the Chairman of the Kosh Agach *raion* legislature. An Uazi and a driver were provided by the Altai government.

Local crossborder links were strong in the Soviet time but have lapsed, so the trip had an element of reacquaintance. The group met with local and regional government officials, protected area managers, educators, and citizens. During the trip Altai Nature Park "Ukok" established partnerships with Mongolian NP "Altai Tavan Bogd" (bordering NP "Ukok") and A MANSPAA (Administration for Mongol Altai Nuruu Special Protected Areas). The partners will work together in 2007 to organize joint training on wildlife monitoring in Kosh-Agach *raion* together with the Mongolian rangers with the use of GPS navigators and GIS maps provided by Gorno Altaisk based NGO "Arkhar". In continuation of collaboration with Mongolia a representative of the Mongolian Ministry of Natural Resources and managers of A MANSPAA will be invited to the 7th meeting of the Association of Protected Areas of Altai in 2007.

On **May 19-20**, the **fifth meeting of Altai Nature Parks** (now organized as the Association of Protected Areas of Altai) was held, organized by FSDA and funded by AAP. Forty-five people participated, in contrast to the dozen attendees at the first meeting, just a year before.

The attendees got information about forthcoming World Wildlife Fund and Global Environmental Facility (UN) plans and projects for parks.

The decision was made to consult with administrations of the Onguday and Kosh-Agach *raions* to:

- possibly change the present status of the Shavlinsky *zakaznik* (to NP) and/or give protection authority to NP Argut.
- and also renew of the status of the former the Kosh-Agachsky *zakaznik* under a new name, the Sailugemsky *zakaznik*, and give protection authority to NP Ukok.

The two *zakazniks* were federally established as no hunting zones for wildlife protection but have no staff, so giving oversight responsibility the inspectors (rangers) of the adjacent Altai Nature Parks, Ukok and Argut has been proposed.

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 NGOs of Russia was published in regional mass media. Opposing opinion of local and national NGOs to the federal gas project was openly announced for the first time in Altai.

The meeting was well covered by Altai Republic newspapers.

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

- Much high grade timber in Altai forest 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.

Late June-early July – A U.S. group consisting of Alton Byers (Director of Research and Education, The Mountain Institute), Steve Gulick (expert in remote sensing for wildlife protection, www.wildlandsecurity.org), and Matt Foley traveled to the Altai, where they met Ang Rita Sherpa (Senior Program Manager, TMI) from Nepal.

They soon separated into two parties for field expeditions, one in the southwest and one in the southeast:

- Alton and Ang Rita went to Belukha Nature Park for a horseback familiarization and evaluation tour accompanied by Natalya Yurkova.



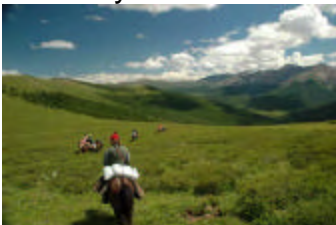
- Steve, Matt, and Chagat went to Ulagan raion, where they spent five days based at the Kok-Taman ("Blue Flower") summer camp for the region's schoolchildren. The camp is in a high valley, remote from the electrical grid. While there they did survey work for the possible construction of a small



hydroelectric plant capable of supplying the camp, and will produce a feasibility study this winter. 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.

When the group rejoined they spent time working out the concept of an application to USAID for a large grant to fund ecotourism education for local people living in and near Altai Nature Parks. Such education, teaching small farmers and herders who need better incomes to provide services such as food and lodging to tourists, has been very successful in Nepal and other alpine areas of the world.

Late July - As Alton and Ang Rita were leaving the Altai, Dr. James Gibbs of SUNY ESF at Syracuse arrived, for 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. The expedition brought together inspectors from the various parks for training in the use of the receivers, conducted by local GIS and wildlife expert Mikhail Paltsyn.



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. NP inspectors usually have post-secondary education, but not for the jobs they do, because there is no place to get such training.



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. We are now seeking funding to install systems in four selected locations in time for the January-February 2007 poaching season.

On returning to Gorno Altaisk, discussions on land use planning/zoning in Onguday *raion* were held with Danil Mamyev, Chair of the governmental land use committee, who has been working on the issue for the last two years with financial support from AAP. Onguday is now ready to accept bids from consulting firms to do resource assessment and prepare GIS base maps for the raion's approximate three million acre area, with emphasis on the preservation of areas of environmental, cultural, and spiritual importance. The expectation is that regulations will follow.

August – Chagat spent a week as guide and consultant in the remote grasslands of Kosh Agach *raion*, near the Mongolian border, with UK based **Biosphere Expeditions** (<http://www.biosphere-expeditions.org/>), which takes paying customers on summer scientific expeditions to remote locations.



September – 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 **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.

The USAID application discussed in the Altai was submitted. Written by Alton Byers with participation from Chagat and Matt, it proposes a three year educational program to improve livelihoods through the development of sustainable mountain tourism.

November 7 –21 – Chagat, Ermen Surkashev, and Igor Saylankin, Directors of Argut and Belukha Nature Parks, will be in the U.S. Most of the time will be spent in Oregon and California visiting National Parks and other protected areas. They will be in the Adirondacks from the 17th to the 19th.

December 8-9 – Sixth Altai Nature Parks meeting, organized by FSDA.

AAP and FSDA have accomplished quite a bit in the three years since our partnership started. We are grateful to our generous donors, Trust for Mutual Understanding and the Weeden

Foundation for their continued financial and moral support. We are at a critical time in our growth, as is the Altai itself. Never has the work of Chagat and his colleagues been more urgent.

Our donors have suggested we seek funding from other sources, and we are doing that. The bulk of our money is spent on exchanges, technical assistance, and administrative costs in the Altai. We would like to do so much more than we are, but we need money. If you would consider helping us, send a donation to Altai Assistance Project, 2351 County Route 10, Wadhams, NY 12993. Checks should be made out to our 501c3 partner, Adirondack Sustainable Communities, Inc.

