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The Movement for Nature Protection in the Soviet Union

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THE CITIZENS' MOVEMENT THAT WOULD NOT DIE

The Movement for Nature Protection in the Soviet Union,

Douglas R. Weiner

Executive Summary

In earlier works I have argued that the Soviet conservation movement in the 1920s and 1930s represented a means by which a section of educated society tried to moderate, or even halt, the juggernaut of Stalinist industrialization and social change. Armed with (unproved and, indeed, unprovable) holistic ecological doctrines that asserted that pristine nature was composed of geographically bounded closed systems, "biocenoses," which existed in states of equilibrium and harmony, conservationists warned of the dire consequences to the stability of those natural systems as a result of collectivization, industrialization, and other Stalin-era projects. They averred that only they, through their expert study of long-term ecological dynamics of pristine natural communities (biocenoses), could determine appropriate economic activities for specific natural regions of the USSR. They began to conduct this study in specialized protected territories--zapovedniki--which were off-limits to any uses except scientific research on ecological/evolutionary problems. Conservation activists, led by the leading field biologists of the country, sought first to obtain, and then sustain, the right to a veto over unacceptable economic policies through the newly created Interministerial State Committee for Nature Protection. At the same time they struggled to retain control of and to expand the network of zapovedniki. I have described these nature reserves as an "archipelago of freedom," a kind of counter-gulag, representing the last tangible territories of the USSR which had evaded Stalin's "great transformation" and which thereby also acquired an aura of "purity" against the profane and bloody backdrop of the USSR of the 1930s. Zapovedniki also served as literal refuges for those seeking to gain a far remove from the spreading repression, although they were not always successful in this role.

Subsequent research, concluded this year, has confirmed and developed these ideas. The movement, which described itself sociologically as "nauchnaia obschestvennost" or scientific (credentialed, informed, legitimate) public opinion, does not derive its historical importance only from its accomplishments in the areas of species protection, landscape preservation and support for multidisciplinary and, at times, unique ecological research in the zapovedniki. Perhaps its even greater significance for Soviet society resides in its role as an institutionally almost unique "keeper of the flame" of a certain ideal of responsible, activist citizenship independent of the Party's dictates. Activists maintained an atmosphere of internal democracy
and respect within the societies that they controlled—the All-Russian Society for the Protection of Nature (VOOP); the Moscow Society of Naturalists (MOIP); the All-Union Botanical Society (VBO); and the Moscow branch of the Geographical Society of the USSR. The geographical epicenter of this movement was the Zoological Museum of Moscow State University, just down the block from the Manezh and Red Square, where MOIP and the Moscow branch of the Geographical Society were headquartered and where VOOP frequently held its meetings.

My research underscores the resilience and determination of these activists, drawn from the elite ranks of Soviet field biology (laboratory-based biologists and scientists from chemistry and physics were vastly less well represented, although there was a fair contingent of geologists and soil scientists). When, in the period 1953-55, control over VOOP was wrested from them and placed in the hands of Party stalwarts, activists transferred the locus of their activity to MOIP, still under the control of their own people. It also reveals their steadfast and creative efforts to pass on their ethos of "nauchnaia obshchestvennost"—with its connotations of civic activism, broad erudition, scientific autonomy, individual responsibility and collective action—to succeeding generations. The most important vehicles for this were the instructional programs in field biology for children and teenagers run by the Moscow Zoo (KIUBZ), VOOP, and MOIP. Not coincidentally, today’s leading zoologists and botanists, who include some of the most prominent reformist politicians such as Nikolai Vorontsov and Aleksei Yablokov, were molded in these intellectual nonparty youth groups. In Russia, MOIP took the leading role in the creation of the first student brigade for nature protection (druzhina po okhrane prirody) in the Biological Faculty of Moscow State University in 1960 (One emerged a year earlier, independently, in Tartu in Estonia.). Soon, all major universities and elite technical schools boasted their druzhiny, and these served to perpetuate the old prerevolutionary ethos of the "botanical-zoological-geographical intelligentsia." Members of the student brigades engaged in measuring point sources of air and water pollution, monitoring compliance with the laws, detaining poachers, and planning new nature reserves. Seeking idealistically at first to enforce laws that were already on the books, they soon discovered that the system was not interested in their "help"; indeed, their attempts to hold managers and hunters to the law was viewed by the authorities as "oppositionist" and slightly subversive.

In addition to field biologists and this elite tradition, there were other components to the larger coalition around nature protection issues. In the late 1950s, based in the Leningrad Technical Forestry Academy and supported by engineering students around the country as well as by literati, especially from Siberia, there emerged another group with its own social profile.
Less erudite but more practical than the *druzhinniki*, these young forestry engineers sought to create a profitable forestry enterprise based on sustained yield of the endangered Siberian pine ("cedar") forests in the Altai Mountains. All but sanitary logging was to be eschewed, and the farm would confine itself to harvesting pine nuts, mushrooms, and squirrel and other pelts. They named their enterprise "Kedrograd" (Cedar City) and tens moved to the Altai permanently while hundreds joined for the summers, beginning in 1958. However, this experiment undercut the timbering interests and corrupt party bureaucrats, and was hemmed in by 1963 and finally snuffed out entirely in 1975. Apparently linked to their different social backgrounds (far fewer of the forestry and other engineers seemed to come from intelligentsia backgrounds themselves) and significantly divergent educational milieux are the ways in which nature protection resonated politically for the Kedrogradtsy versus the *druzhinniki*. While both groups equally provided opportunities for motivated youth to participate actively in projects that they viewed as providing real value for society (as opposed to wasting time in Young Communist League [Komsomol] talkfests), a disproportionate number of Kedrogradtsy (and their supporters in the press and literary intelligentsia) embraced a nationalist perspective which idealized rural Russia, especially Siberia, and disparaged urban (and urbane) culture. *

*Druzhinniki* by and large developed a more Western- and global-oriented perspective.

In all cases, participation in these student movements was itself a "political university," teaching activists about the real values and power relationships of their society. This later led to a conviction that nature protection goals could only be achieved in connection with a general radical reform of the system, and predisposed many activists and ex-activists to go into politics after 1988.

Involvement of the broader public, beginning with other scientists, such as in Akademgorodok/Novosibirsk, the literary intelligentsia, the press, and finally average citizens, really only began during the mid-1960s, particularly in connection with the threats to Lake Baikal. Even then, leadership rested with the naturalists, who were viewed as most able to advance expert arguments, speaking with the authority of science.

In the non-Russian republics, especially the Baltics (I have closely examined Latvia and Estonia), participation in nature protection embraced broader layers of the population. This owed itself firstly to the Germanic traditions in education, which included highly value-laden attitudes toward the local landscape. The second factor here is that industrialization was correctly perceived as accompanied by a continuing influx of non-indigenous Slavic migrants—Russians and Ukrainians—whom the Estonians and Latvians saw as swamping their small
ethoses. Nature protection was a benign-sounding argument for keeping those factories—and their "foreign" workers—out.

What is common to many of these cases is that nature protection served as a surrogate for politics, as actual political discourse was prohibited and punished. What gave the conservation movement its unique quality was that it was perceived by the regime as a not terribly dangerous trifle, a collection of socially marginal "fool" scientists (chudaki) who were not worth the effort of monitoring, detailing and repressing. By default, it became the only vehicle by which those who desired could somehow express their deep feelings of civic concern. For those who breathed the spirit of "nauchnaia obshchestvennost" especially, conservation activism provided the feeling (and sometimes the fact) that they were tangibly and independently defending the good of the community in the face of a repressive, wasteful and destructive bureaucratic system.

Another interesting political feature brought to light through this investigation is the role of local and republic-level governments in defending the movement and the nature reserves from threats emanating from the "center" (the Kremlin). In 1950-1953, when a Kremlin-based campaign sought to eliminate the nature reserves and the All-Russian Society for the Protection of Nature, too, the Russian Republic and local oblast' (provincial) authorities provided serious resistance, including sending strongly worded telegrams in defense of the inviolable nature preserves to the Kremlin. While many of these bureaucratic politicians did not act out of "liberal" sentiments, they did seek to protect "their own" scientists, territories, and jurisdictional portfolios. Other institutions, such as the Academy of Sciences, also provided resources to continue work on nature protection and even took over some reserves to prevent their conversion to logging plantations. After Stalin's death, the republican governments, often with the support of local authorities, took the lead in reconstituting the disbanded nature reserves. In this way, conservation—because of the relatively low stakes attached by the center to this cause—also served as a relatively safe and fairly unique arena for political struggle between the all-Union government and lower levels of power.

Many of the social dynamics traced here, I believe, are specific to their time and place. The prerevolutionary ethos of the scientific intelligentsia has been watered down by 75 years of "Soviet reality" and by the anarchic conditions of the past half-decade. Most of the original bearers of this ethos are no longer alive, and the institutions that nurtured them (and which they nurtured)—MOIP, the Botanical Society, the Geographical Society—no longer attract younger members and are in some cases on the threshold of extinction as well. There are no longer titans in the disciplines grouped under field biology and geography, individuals of vast
erudition and supreme self-confidence who functioned authoritatively both in the realms of science and civic activism. Today's cadres are better described as "technocrats," without the charisma and authority of previous generations of scientific intelligentsia. This points out the limits to success of the efforts by the older generation to reproduce their own sociological profile. On the other hand, observers must continue to be impressed with the persistence of the ideal of "studenchestvo" or student collective action, embodied in the druzhiny and the Kedrograd experiment, an ideal especially strong among natural science students in the sixty years before the 1917 revolutions.

Conservation activism was a surrogate for the absence of the opportunity to engage in real politics. The current decline in the conservation movement in part is a reflection of the greater freedoms now available in Russia and elsewhere. However, it was also a surrogate for other powerful forms of political expression, such as nationalism, and to the extent that these now have an outlet, they, too, will preempt conservation as a vehicle for civic engagement.

Nevertheless, the environmental situation in the former Soviet Union poses real threats to the health of a great many individuals. Once the fever of nationalism subsides, I believe that we will again witness a renewed period of public concern over environmental issues. However, it is far from certain that such a future movement will be defined by the contours pictured in this study. For the present, it seems, the continuity of this movement has finally been ruptured.
THE CITIZENS' MOVEMENT THAT WOULD NOT DIE

The Movement for Nature Protection in the Soviet Union

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A Word About the Study

As a result of liberalization within the Soviet Union and its successor states I was fortunate to be able to use a vastly larger range of sources than I could have (and did) ten years ago. Thanks to my friendship with the then Soviet Minister for Environmental Protection, Dr. Nikolai Nikolaevich Vorontsov, I became the first foreigner to use the archives of the Council of Ministers of the Russian Republic, housed in the former TsGA RSFSR (Central State Archives of the RSFSR). I am glad to report that it seems to be open to all researchers in the past two years. Additional archival sources include: GARF (State Archives of the Russian Federation, formerly TsGAOR), GAER (State Archives of the Russian Economy, formerly TsGANKh), TsKhDMO (Center for the Preservation of Documents of Youth Organizations, formerly the Komsomol Archive), ARAN (Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences, both the Moscow and St. Petersburg branches), TsKhIDNI (Center for the Preservation and Study of Documents of Recent History, formerly the CPSU Archives), TsKhSD (Center for the Preservation of Contemporary Documentation, formerly the Central Committee CPSU Archives), the Archives and Library of the Moscow Society of Naturalists, the Ukrainian Central State Archives, the Library of the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, the Russian State Library (Saltykov-Shchedrin), the Russian Federation Library (formerly the Lenin Library), and the Library of the Russian Geographical Society.

Documentation was supplemented by numerous interviews with veterans of the movement conducted in Russia. Ukraine, and Estonia. Some of these were conducted in zapovedniki, or nature reserves (Prioksko-Terrasnyi, Tsentral'no-Lesnoi, Askania-Nova).

The Report

Below is an outline of the most important conclusions and findings of my research. The organization of the report will follow the chapter outline for the book I am currently writing and essentially represents the book in miniature. The only portion of the research thus far
published concerns the "Bochkarev Affair" (see p. 23 below); the remainder is set out here for
distribution for the first time.

I. A TRADITION PRESERVED: VOOP AND ZAPovedniki IN THE 1930s

One claim I make is that the activists in the nature protection movement represented a
specific ethos or social identity, "nauchnaia obshchestvennost"--or credentialed scientific
public opinion. This is reflected vividly in the historical, and especially the archival, record.

Perhaps unmatched in its time as a call for norms of decency in political discussions was
a letter sent in 1931 by the de facto leader of the Russian conservation movement, Vasilii
Nikitich Makarov, to the Scientific Sector of People's Commissariat of Education and to its
Communist Party cell. While Makarov conceded that "Marxist-Leninist criticism" prodded
"many stagnant areas of science to come alive" and succeeded in getting academics to descend
from their ivory towers and to begin to meet society's "legitimate expectations" of them
[sotsial'nyi zakaz], "that was not so in all cases." Sometimes, he observed, "comrades offering
critical comments have acted too hastily and made superficial judgements, not possessing the
requisite erudition for a proper consideration of the problems addressed. At times, "bolshevik"
critics behaved even more irresponsibly, driven by "the preconceived aim--whatever it takes--to
identify an enemy, reveal a [political] deviation, and to unmask sabotage and counterrevolution
in science; they have 'twisted and distorted' critical material, turning healthy bolshevik
criticism into the dubious weapon of polemics and even denunciation. This unfortunate
criticism, purveyed in the mass media and distracting the masses from the substance of the
issue, has been harmful."

Amazingly, the concrete example Makarov chose to exemplify his charges was the recent
article "Sabotage in Science" by Arnost Kol'man in the party's theoretical journal Bolshevik
(1931 no. 2). Kol'man was no less than one of the party's key curators over science, even
serving as vigilant watchdog over such illustrious figures as Nikolai I. Vavilov and Nikolai
Bukharin during their 1931 visit to Britain. In strong language Makarov contested what he
argued were Kol'man's false claims -- that the conservation movement sought to "undermine
our socialist construction and engineer a restoration of capitalism." (list 3. quoted from p. 75
of his article). "Pointing out to comrade Kol'man the error of his views in the given case
elicited no effect. He evidently continued to remain convinced that the protection of woodlands
in "sparsely wooded areas and on nonarable lands" is a land mine under socialist agriculture." Similarly, Makarov accused Kol'man of failing to understand the value of the protection of
unplowed steppe as a reservoir for genetic material, especially in developing drought-resistant
varieties of agricultural plants, as demonstrated by Vavilov.
Additionally, the conservation leader cited an equally vicious article by two other authors also directed against his movement, and concluded:

"These [articles] also force us to consider the following questions: Is THIS KIND OF DEFENSE of the great cause of socialist construction of the five-year plan from putative sabotage useful? Is it permissible to purvey gross distortions, as comrade Kol’man and others have done, in full public voice? Doesn’t this gladden the genuine enemies of socialist construction both here and abroad, enemies who will snatch at any opportunity to demonstrate, on the basis of isolated examples, how science is profaned in the USSR and how thoughtlessly and wantonly scientific ideas and the people selflessly serving science are trashed? . . . The Council of the [All-Russian] Society [for Conservation of Nature] insists that the Scientific Sector and the party cell . . . rap the knuckles and head of those adepts of "leftish" witchhunting and "distortion" of the authentic character of the activity of our society and the content of its journal. Criticism, merciless bolshevik criticism of the entire press is an essential fact of life, but, in the opinion of the Council of the society, the 'obflisticating' tactics of [our] critics has nothing in common with that."²

The conservation movement’s defense not only of free nature but of free science, and, to an extent, of civic freedoms, was as risky as it was valorous. The above paragraph illustrates not only those values but also hints at the broader strategy of "protective coloration" pursued by the movement, as it lavished its public pronouncements with professions of loyalty to "socialist construction."

As mentioned in my previous work and now adumbrated by a host of newly available archival documents, repression did indeed strike Russian environmentalists hard during the early to mid-1930s. While it should be emphasized that not all environmentalist victims of Stalinist repression suffered because they were environmentalists and that a large majority of the most committed activists emerged relatively unscathed from the terror, a definite climate of intimidation enveloped the conservation cause during the dark decades of the 1930s and 1940s.

The most dramatic episode without doubt was the massive purge of Askania-Nova, engineered by Trofim D. Lysenko and Isaak I. Prezent during the fall of 1933. While documents do not permit us irrefutably to determine the cause or causes of the purge,³ it seems probable that a good part of the reason for the mass arrests of V. V. Stanchinskii and his colleagues at the Ukrainian nature reserve rests with their resistance to Stalinists’ plans for a "great transformation" of Soviet nature.

Not long after the purge of Askania the conservation movement lost its most devoted patron from among high-ranking members of the regime. In April 1935 Petr Germogenovich Smidovich died at the age of 65; to this day suspicions still exist among family members (son...
and grandson) as to whether Smidovich died a fully natural death (per interview conducted with the family). Smidovich the year before had saved the zapovedniki from fatally falling into the hostile hands of the economic commissariats, bringing them instead under his direct care as head of the newly established Committee for Zapovedniki of the Presidium of the RSFSR Central Executive Committee.

Now, as Stalin built his paranoiac case against much of the elite of the Bolshevik party, the atmosphere of terror and suspicion took on a life of its own. Political vigilantism and denunciations were uncontestable; those who tried to mitigate the terror were ipso facto guilty of protecting counterrevolutionaries, and were themselves carted off. In the deep of the night, every night, thousands were dragged from their apartments to the dungeons of Stalin’s secret police. Even the army general staff was not immune from this seeming madness, and were liquidated in June 1937. Recent figures suggest that it is likely that as many as two million people were arrested in 1937-38 alone.

Against this backdrop the All-Russian Society for the Protection of Nature on June 10, 1937 drafted a letter to A. A. Andreev, one of Stalin’s colleagues among the Secretaries of the Central Committee. If the great purge then raging was madness, this letter could only be described as heroic lunacy. Noting that “progressive minds of all eras and peoples, alarmed at the impoverishment of natural resources . . . that they have noticed, began seriously to occupy themselves with the problem of protection of the entire complex of natural treasures,” the drafters of the letter then used contemporary international efforts in that area to buttress their case for more party support for conservation. “In lands both large and small, on the basis of weighty scientific, work governmental and nongovernmental movements for conservation have expanded. Everywhere there are hundreds of scientific and citizen’s mass societies, state committees, and entire departments attached to ministries, as well as special legislation, tens of nature preserves (zapovedniki) and a rich literature (especially in the USA).” In conjunction with that, the All-Russian Society for the Protection of Nature’s Executive Council, they wrote, composed a delegation, including President of the USSR Academy of Sciences Vladimir Leontievich Komarov, Academician N. M. Kulagin, deputy president of VOOP A. P. Protopopov, Presidium of VOOP member V. N. Makarov, VOOP secretary S. N. Fridman, and VOOP Council member V. N. Fofanov, which they proposed should meet with Andreev. They sought to raise four issues: (1) expansion of the society from all-Russian to all-Soviet status, with direct patronage from the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR; (2)
nomination of Andrei Matveevich Lezhava\(^1\) as president of this all-Union society; (3) permission to enter the International Center for Conservation and to attend the [forthcoming, 1938] Vienna conference; and (4) assistance from the party to the cause of conservation, including issuance of directives. The typed draft of the letter was then emended in pencil. Deleted was the nomination of Lezhava, who had become another victim of the purges, but added was the request for the opportunity for VOOP to resume publication activities and for an increment in governmental subsidies to the society. One has to know what Moscow was like in those bone-chilling days of June 1937 in order to appreciate the incalculable courage involved even in drafting this letter. Regrettably, the relatively disorganized and incomplete condition of the Central Committee archives do not permit us at this time to follow up and confirm whether this letter was sent, or received. But this draft nevertheless stands as a document testifying to the endurance of the conservation community in its defense of their vision of civic dignity.

Also in 1937 the Society started up its second commission devoted to the study of regional environmental problems. On the model of the Crimean Commission, the Caucasus Commission convened for the first time on February 26 with veteran Society leader Aleksandr Petrovich Protopopov presiding. The growing political chill did not seem to cool the fervor of the Commission members. Frants Frantsevich Shillinger, a founder of the Society, urged that the Commission not restrict its purview to the zapovedniki of the Caucasus. "The question [of conservation] must be posed more broadly," he continued. And while nature transformer Kh. S. Veitsman tried, circuitously, to deflect such a broad mandate as beyond the Commission's capacities, Protopopov quickly injected that "The Commission has nothing to fear by conceiving its tasks broadly. V. M. Fofanov [another Commission member] is absolutely right when he states that the Commission must not restrict itself only to collecting facts," he continued, "but must evaluate the economy of the Caucasus region as well." The lionhearts carried the day, and the resolution of the meeting pledged to address conservation problems "in their entirety," although work would begin immediately on the more limited problems of forest depletion and water quality.\(^4\)

It is unclear whether the conservation movement was aware of just how close to the edge of danger it had strayed. In the archival recesses of the Academy of Sciences, dating from, it is thought, November 1937, an ominous report over one hundred pages in length assembled the case against the nature preserves and the conservation movement. Entitled "Report to the

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\(^1\) Andrei Matveevich Lezhava (1870-1937) was a longtime member of the Bolshevik Party, People’s Commissar for Domestic Trade and deputy chairman of the RSFSR Council of People’s Commissars during the 1920s. From 1930 to his arrest in 1937 he was chief of the Main Administration for Subtropical Plant Breeding of the USSR People’s Commissariat of Agriculture. He died on October 8, 1937 in confinement.
Science Department of the Central Committee of the All-Russian Communist Party on the Results of an Investigation of the Zapovedniki of the RSFSR," this document was still in the form of Ol'ga Borisovna Lepeshinskaia's notes intended for circulation among the other members of the investigation team. Whether this report was ever edited and sent is unknown, but the very fact of the investigation presumes a certain level of interest on the part of the Party leaders, interest perhaps augmented by the nature protection society's own appeal to the Party Secretariat.

Reflecting what movement scientists told the investigators about the distinctive purposes of Soviet reserves, Lepeshinskaia noted that while foreign protected territories were directed toward tourism and other forms of profit-making activities (dlia izvlecheniia vygod i ekspluatatsii), Soviet reserves were created to "preserve gene pools, for scientific study, to enable humans to master nature, and for educational purposes." However, it would have been awkward to include this dubious claim to superiority on the basis of a largely traditional program defined by scientists -- the Party rather more sympathized with the capitalists' approach of exploiting the reserves for revenue -- and this section was crossed out.

What remained in the report was an almost unrelieved portrait of the reserves and their scientists as refuges for anti-Soviet politics, values and ideas. It was bad enough that nature reserves were established on the basis of private or citizens' initiative; worse was that some of these activists, as, for example, Frants Frantsovich Shillinger, "son of an emigre White Guard," deviously arranged for the creation of zapovedniki (e.g. Altaiskii, Crimean) on the very frontiers of the Soviet republic, the better to facilitate hostile subversion, she alleged.

Commenting first on the personnel of the zapovedniki, Lepeshinskaia remarked on the "absence of a firm Communist nucleus" and offered that, in general, the "SELECTION OF PERSONNEL HAS BEEN UNHEALTHY. IN THE MAJORITY OF CASES," she continued, "THEY HAVE BEEN POLITICALLY UNRELIABLE TYPES, RECOMMENDED BY THE OLD-LINE PROFESSORS. AS A RESULT ALMOST IN EVERY ZAPOVEDNIK THERE IS A GREAT INFESTATION [zasorennost'] BY ANTI-SOVIET ELEMENTS, those exiled by the Soviet regime, those arrested previously, those [class enemies] deprived of their civil rights, and even disguised bandits."

Partly at fault were those in the Party elite that afforded the conservation movement patronage and protection. Lepeshinskaia even fingered Lenin's science adviser N. P. Gorbunov.

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2This is the same Olga Lepeshinskaia who in the late 1940's and early 1950's became one of the most notorious scientific cranks with her claim that she could produce living beings from albumin.
and Prosecutor-General Krylenko—both shot in 1937—for their support in the hiring of "byvshie liudi" — class enemies — for the nature reserve system.

The investigation revealed the penury of the zapovedniki better than any scientists' petition; there were only two cars for the entire, thirty-one-reserve, 8,457,436 hectare network, an absence of furniture, tableware, scientific instruments, work clothing and shoes. There were no radios or telephones, and no electricity. One reserve staffer, Vvedenskii, even died of hunger. Security was deficient; abandoned mud or wooden shelters testified to the trespassing of poachers or even smugglers. Although such conditions could well be regarded as evidence of the central government's neglect of conservation, the report implied that they were the result of negligent and deficient leadership by the Committee for Zapovedniki Affairs of VTsIK, an agency with no independent funding source.

More weighty were arguments made against the scientific research conducted by the reserves. At once eclectic and unsystematic, overly descriptive and unrealistic, and without links to the world of practice or to outside institutions, the reserves' scientific work was also ideologically highly suspect. The crucial problem of acclimatization, for example, was largely neglected, with the exception of work on beavers and muskrat at the Laplandskii zapovednik and on raccoon dogs at Buzulukskii bor. Information provided by Petr Aleksandrovich Manteifel' and cited by Lepeshinskaia denounced a number of Committee and zapovednik staffers as believing in "the existence of harmony and equilibrium" in nature and in the idea of "nonintervention by humans in the life of nature." Specifically named were Buturlin, Zhitkov and Alekhin, although these names seem to reflect more the quirks of Manteifel's personal animus than an exhaustive list of unreformed "bourgeois professors." As Manteifel' emphasized, even now all was not well on the ideological front.

Indeed, in addition to the ideological heresies of the nature protectors there was the imprecation of actual political unreliability, if not outright disloyalty. Lepeshinskaia saw a political cover-up in the decision of the conservationist community, including Communists, to delete the names of individuals from a conference resolution condemning erroneous "class positions." Within the Committee on Zapovedniki, the staff of 31 was named by Petr Smidovich on the recommendation of Vasilii Nikitich Makarov. Lepeshinskaia was clearly unimpressed. Fifty per cent were "dead souls," while some, such as the aforementioned Alekhin, Zhitkov and Buturlin were active, but philosophical "idealists." holding to "reactionary" views on nature reserves. Buturlin, a prominent ornithologist, was additionally mocked as a "walking encyclopedia" and a positivist (how that was reconciled with his idealism remains a puzzle). On the ground in the zapovedniki themselves there seemed to be a veritable swarm of suspect
I. I. Puzanov's dedication to conservation won him the label of "fanatic." The deputy director of the Pechoro-Ilychskii zapovednik, one Pirogov, was a nonparty of noble origin with higher education! Another was the wife of a colonel in one of the White armies who had emigrated abroad. A third was exiled from Moscow in 1933 for his harmful ideological influence on students.

The director of the Tsentral'no-Lesnoi zapovednik, Grigorii Leonidovich Grave, was of the landowner class who had attended classical gymnasium. Now, complained Lepenshinskaia, Grave's hereditary class instincts led him to treat the reserve as his own baronial estate. More ominous still was Grave's friendly association with Professor V. V. Stanchinskii, who had been arrested as a counterrevolutionary in the autumn of 1933; indeed, it was to Stanchinskii that Grave owed his own appointment to Smolensk University's Zoology Department. Longtime conservation leader Frants Frantsevich Shillinger was faulted for the alleged emigration in 1924 of his son (the family claimed that he had died), while Lepeshinskaia further accused Shillinger of himself becoming a German citizen in 1935. Foreigners visited the Committee on Zapovedniki, which maintained ties overseas. The zapovednik system was indeed veritably aswarm with "alien elements" and alien values.

For Lepeshinskaia, it was not surprising that the Committee was such a swamp. Makarov, after all, was a former Socialist Revolutionary, and while "personally honest and devoted to his cause," he was also a "rotten liberal who makes a show of party loyalty" and a "man of weak character, without principles, and too mild." An example of this was his failure to press the accusation of extortion against [Caucasus zapovednik director] Krasnobryzhev to its logical conclusion. Makarov also failed to achieve a "firm Bolshevik line" in the literature of his committee. The "Bolshevik spirit was undetectable" in the training of new staff members. While her conclusions did not call for the elimination of the nature reserves, "which give us nothing at the present time," and while she did not call for the removal of Makarov, indeed giving him credit for at least being selfless and informed, she did demand a strict housecleaning. Miraculously, Lepeshinskaia's report seems to have been filed away without being acted on.

On April 20, 1938 the First Congress of the All-Russian Society for the Protection of Nature opened in Moscow. Makarov, formally vice-president but really in charge, presented the first major substantive address. One striking note repeated by Makarov (recall his letter to A. A. Andreev) was his assertion that the Soviet conservation movement remained a part of "a larger international movement" at a time when Stalin's regime was slamming shut all the windows between the Soviet arts and sciences and the outside world. He was, however, mindful enough (and probably sincere in this) to emphasize that capitalism and private property
were systemically bound to plunder the environment. "If capitalists could assert a right to the air, they would," he said. "Luckily, air cannot be appropriated as private property by individual entrepreneurs" because of its ambient nature. Nevertheless, great enough damage to the environment had already been done, he argued; by the late eighteenth century most of Western Europe had already become deforested, and "with every passing year the faunal web has become thinner and thinner."

Interestingly, Makarov, in his thumbnail sketch of the emergence of conservationism worldwide, reserved his strongest praise for Americans, who now regard conservation as "a national ideal." Indeed, he noted, "the Americans were right when they advance the rule of thumb that a nation's culture may be judged by its treatment of natural resources" although he was quick to add that "it must be said in advance that capitalist countries will scarcely be able to resolve their internal contradictions that flow from the nature of the capitalist system."

Despite the purges and disruptions of the mid-1930s, VOOP refused to allow itself to be frightened or diverted from pursuing its bold goals. In conjunction with the Committee it continued to sponsor expeditions to promote the creation of new zapovedniki (Barents Sea, Teberda, Kazakhstan) and persisted in its studies of the ecology of such endangered species as dolphins in the Black Sea. Submission by VOOP to the government of a huge amount of research data on deforestation led to a law on headwaters protection, and the society's special study of the Crimea, long a focus of special interest among conservationists, while failing to get comprehensive action from the government, did result in a disbursement of 400,000 rubles for some improvements. VOOP's Far Eastern Branch asked the State Committee on Procurements to cut target quotas on sea lions by half, which was done [!], and VOOP also successfully secured the creation of a 25-kilometer-wide green belt around Moscow [which was built over in the 1950s].

Despite the Party's refusal to allow VOOP delegates to attend the international conference, Makarov emphasized that ties with similar foreign organizations were continuing to be maintained. With 5000 volumes in 16 foreign languages, all acquired through exchanges with foreign conservation societies, the VOOP library was one of the best in the world and was unique within the USSR. Sadly, the volumes were languishing in boxes; the Moscow Soviet had dispossessed VOOP of its office space, and the society was hanging by its fingernails -- processing its not inconsiderable paperwork on one desk in a corner of the office of the Committee on Zapovedniki. Academician Komarov had even paid a call on the president of the Moscow Soviet to try to straighten out the matter, but was also unsuccessful. "If the Society is acting improperly, then it must be eliminated," Makarov stoutly challenged; "if not,
and it contributes to the general good, then it is to the shame of the Moscow Soviet that the society lacks its own office space. "26 The Moscow Soviet "should think about its outrageous attitude toward social organizations," admonished Makarov with some bitterness.27

At the evening session on April 22, 1938 the Society elected its Executive Council. Testifying to the continuing, fiercely independent spirit of this society, members rejected the candidacy of S. V. Turshu, considered more friendly to Stalinist tempos of resource exploitation, giving him only seven votes.28 Perhaps Turshu's somewhat hostile criticism of the congress as too dominated by academics had something to do with the result.29

Indeed, with the election of the honorary presidium, comprised of prominent members of the Soviet scientific and cultural elite, there was also a display of nonconformity. Academicians Obruchev and Kulagin, plus a number of others including Papanin, whose aviatorial efforts rescued the crew of the icebreaker Cheliuskin, all received unanimous support. Ironically, Otto Iul'evich Schmidt, cosmologist and the man Papanin rescued, was elected with the surprisingly large number of eight abstentions. Noting that the election of honorary members was "a serious political act," one member asked that those who abstained justify their positions. One who abstained, Lukashevich, then explained that his abstention was not occasioned by a lack of respect for Otto Iul'evich, but rather because he thought that others were closer to the movement's ideals. "Why was it necessary precisely for our society precisely now to advance the name of Otto Iul'evich," he challenged? Lukashevich earlier had exhibited the same fierce spirit of independence regarding the question of press access; the press had shut out issues involving conservation. "We must not view ourselves as poor relations," thumped Lukashevich; "rather, we are Soviet citizens... imbued with passion to assist our government and people. And since that is the case, we can certainly demand space in the pages of Pravda and not simply timidly beg for it through intermediaries."10 It was not always easy for VOOP to walk the fine line between political accommodation and its own robust grass-roots traditions of fierce scientific and political autonomy.31

Although after mid-1938 the "Black Maria" police sedans no longer swarmed nightly through Russia's cities in their terrifying early morning feeding frenzies, it is inappropriate, to say the least, to speak of a return to "normalcy," let alone liberalization. Nevertheless, until the Nazi invasion of the USSR on June 22, 1941 Soviet society began a slow recovery from the trauma of the Great Purge. VOOP, too, reflected this upsurge of civic energy. It successfully gained protection for polar bears from Glavsevmorput', the administration that organized expeditions, transport and supply for the Soviet Arctic Ocean and its coastal zone.32 In the spring of 1941 a section of the society devoted to Marine and Waterway Protection was inaugurated under Professor Lev Zenkevich of Moscow University.33
Records for the society’s activities during 1939 support this picture of heightened activity. While the 16,000 membership figure bandied about at the 1938 sadly turned out to be ludicrously overinflated -- membership stood at only 2,553 on January 1, 1940 -- that figure did reflect a growth by 696 new members. Indicatively, there were almost as many academician members (7) as peasants (10), or professors and docents (55) as workers (95). Communists (127) and Komsomolites (97) were still underrepresented in this largely nonparty milieu.

A new branch was organized in Astrakhan, which quickly attracted 300 new members, while in Moscow a new section on Protection of the Earth’s Crust was established by the noted geologist A. E. Fersman, a close colleague of Vernadskii. A seed bank, herbarium for rare steppe plants, and a photo gallery of conservation figures were all established, too. The Mammalogical and Ornithological Sections compiled lists of endangered species, which were delivered to the Main Administration for Zapovedniki, along with a proposal to publish a series of monographs of these interesting and threatened life forms. Indeed, a special Species Commission was organized within the Mammalogical Section to organize this initiative.

One of the USSR’s most successful efforts to rescue an endangered species was begun at the close of the war. The zubr, or European bison (Wisent, in German), had been the Russian Empire’s largest land mammal, its range then limited to two widely separated and geographically disparate protected tsarist game preserves: the Belovezhskaya pushcha in western Belorussia, and the Kubanskaia tsar’skaia okhota in the north Caucasus. Winter forage had become inadequate for the herds in both ranges, however, and special winter feeding (podkormka) by game warders had become the rule from the mid-nineteenth century. Even so, by spring, the animals were thin, and were able to bear calves in the best case every two years, and often only once every five. Birthing came in May, and the calves were nursed with their mother’s milk until the following June; winter feeding was critical for insuring the survival of mother and calf.

Under this regime, the population of bison in the pushcha remained largely stable up until World War I, when hostilities and poaching snuffed out the entire herd there. The Caucasus bison lingered on a bit longer, until 1927, when the general climate of weak respect for the law contributed to the extinction of that geographical race.

Thus, on January 1, 1927, there were 48 European bison individuals left in the world -- in Swedish, Polish, German, Austrian and Belgian zoos. There was a small herd kept by an
English aristocrat, but these were hybrids with the North American bison and was not included in the world list of pure lines.

Unlike the American bison, which subsisted on huge quantities of grass, the European bison also required forest nutrients: bark, oak twigs and aspen. Curiously, two generations could survive on a diet of grass, but the third would die off, the victim of nutritional deficiencies. Owing to the rarity as well as the survival requirements of these colossal bovines, captive breeding seemed to be the most prudent first step toward a recovery of their numbers. Eventually, Soviet zoologists hoped to restore 1,500 zubry back to the wild.

A note was sent to Foreign Minister Viacheslav Molotov alerting him to the urgency of restoring the European bison to viability, now that the USSR would officially recover half of the Belovezhskaya Puscha nature reserve with the setting of a new frontier with Poland. On November 12, 1946, Mikhail Aleksandrovich Zablotskii, a zoologist, proposed to establish a breeding farm for zubry or European bison near Serpukhov, south of Moscow on the Oka, and gained the VOOP’s support for a Bison Commission to approach the Russian Republic’s Council of Ministers for funding and support. Simultaneously Zablotskii had been conducting his own private diplomacy, involving officials of the Belorussian foreign ministry, Polish zoologists, and Makarov in his capacity as deputy director of the RSFSR Committee on Zapovedniki, and the eventual result was the transfer from Poland of a number of pure-line bison cows—the genetic basis for today’s herds.

Contrasting with the seemingly benignly neutral attitude of the central USSR government was the active support and patronage accorded conservation by the government of the Russian Federation and by individual oblasts. A local initiative, supported by a resolution of the Primorski krai Executive Committee on October 23, 1945, sought to more than double the area of the Sudzukhinskii zapovednik. and Russian premier Aleksei Kosygin speedily signed the change into law on January 4, 1946. More dramatic support by the Russian Federation for its Main Administration for Zapovedniki came three months later, following a letter of April 30, 1946 from Ivan P. Bardin, prominent metallurgical engineer and leading member of the Academy of Sciences, to Lavrentii P. Beria. In his note, Bardin sought the return of the Il’menski zapovednik, hard by the crucial Cheliabinsk-Kyshtym facilities of Beria’s nuclear empire, to the Academy, even though it had been under that institution’s aegis for all of one year, 1935. The request for transfer worked its way through the USSR Council of Ministers and back to the Russian Republic, where Mikhail I. Rodionov had just succeeded Kosygin as premier. In his response to A. A. Andreev, Rodionov agreeably offered any assistance to the Academy in its research in the zapovednik, but firmly refused to approve the transfer. Perhaps
because the dispute was one between a scientific institution, albeit an all-USSR one, on the one hand, and a lower level of administration, on the other, the central authorities did not feel particularly invested in the outcome, and did not seek to overturn Rodionov's decision.\textsuperscript{39}

One important feature of the postwar period was the cultivation of at least limited personal contact by the conservation movement's leadership with that of the Russian and other republics. In a draft of a proposed law for nature protection, accompanied by a longer brief, VOOP activists Makarov, Giller, Geptner, Dement'ev and Protopopov daringly provided a "political education" for the RSFSR political leadership. A short history of the conservation movement in Russia underscored the great promise of the late Tsarist and Lenin periods left unfulfilled in the Stalin era. Rodionov and his colleagues were reminded that Tsarist Russia was a participant in the first international conservation congress in 1913 and that the cause had been endorsed by such luminaries of Bolshevism as N. K. Krupskaia and Lunacharskii in their day. But "not only among the population at-large but among the leaders of the economic apparat as well attitudes toward nature here at best are based on primitive utilitarian positions." VOOP had succeeded in uniting within its ranks "all of the leading naturalists of the USSR," but their scientific understanding of the issues had not penetrated the general public and political leadership, whose "superficial and untutored observation" continued to regard natural resources as limitless.\textsuperscript{40}

Three days later Makarov addressed a session of the Council of Ministers of the Russian Republic itself, making a strong case for increased political and financial support for VOOP, the zapovedniki, and conservation generally.\textsuperscript{41} Claiming only 5,183 members in VOOP, Makarov urged the Council of Ministers to require local governments to provide support to VOOP branches. Additionally, he requested that conservation matters be raised routinely at all levels of government in the RSFSR as well as in the press, that an institute for the study of problems of conservation and nature protection be established, called for a new RSFSR statute on nature protection, and asked that conservation be included at all educational levels in all programs of study. More specifically, Makarov requested permission to resume publication of Okhrana prirody, the release by Gosplan RSFSR of 2 tons of paper, a subvention of 150,000 rubles from the RSFSR Council of Ministers' reserve fund, a dependable printing plant from the system controlled by the State Publishers (OGIZ), and the convocation of a congress of the society in December 1946. Perhaps Makarov's most controversial proposal, which, along with that to resume publication of VOOP's journal elicited a question mark in the margins by the premier's aide, was to replace the Main Administration for Zapovedniki with one that would also be responsible for questions of nature protection generally.\textsuperscript{42}
One result of his appearance was the promulgation of a decree on September 25, which, while among other things, called broadly for more scrupulous observance of conservation laws and principles, awarded VOOP a 100,000 subsidy for expenses, and delegated the society together with the Main Administration for Zapovedniki the responsibility of drafting a law for nature protection in the RSFSR to be submitted to the Council of Ministers in January 1947.43

VOOP continued to be dogged by the pull of contrary aims: retaining its ethos as the country’s perhaps sole remaining, intact defender of obshchestvennost’, or civic autonomy, and becoming an influential mass organization that would be well connected within the system. The ideal of obshchestvennost’, it must be emphasized, was not a fully democratic one, for it regarded the educated elite as the truly authentic and enlightened representative of all of society. Nor was it an all-out oppositional stance vis-a-vis the regime; the scientist-leaders of VOOP tried to stay well within the bounds of acceptable dissent, a threshold that was itself in continual flux. Dissent, then, became transformed into an elaborate theater of identity, where scientists could defend the ideal of obshchestvennost’ symbolically while avoiding the GULAG.

Yet, the scientist-leaders of VOOP also cared about nature and wanted to be effective. A draft of a letter from Makarov and D. V. Zaretskii, scholarly secretary of VOOP, to Andrei A. Zhdanov in 1947 illuminates this quandary. In it, Makarov and Zaretskii announced that VOOP was embarking on a new stage in its history, becoming a truly mass organization, but “while conserving its scientific base.” For this, they sought a candidate for the society’s presidency who would enjoy broad public authority [the following phrase “as in some other countries” was stricken from the text; here we can see the desire on the one hand of Soviet scientists to live like their foreign colleagues, to shame their political leaders into making conditions more like those abroad, and the fear of stepping over the line of permissible political discourse.]. Three political figures were proposed as candidates—I. A. Vlasov, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR; S. V. Kaftanov, RSFSR Minister of Higher Education and prominent supporter of Lysenko; and A. V. Gritsenko, a Deputy Premier of the RSFSR. However, in conversation with each of the candidates it turned out that they refused to allow their names to be considered without express agreement from the Central Committee of the party. Hence the letter to Central Committee secretary Zhdanov.44

The long-awaited delegate congress -- nine years after the previous one -- was brought to order by Makarov on April 26, 1947. Delegates elected a working presidium and an honorary one (the Politburo) and, after a greeting by Old Bolshevik F. N. Petrov, commenced its real work. One noteworthy address was given by Professor Rodionov of Kursk oblast, an agricultural pest control specialist, who warned against the new generation of pesticides. whose
high toxicity was much more long-lasting than previous varieties and were capable of poisoning mammals as well as insects. Rodionov pointed out that the indiscriminate spraying of such broad gauge poisons could well kill off bees, insectivorous birds, and other economically valuable fauna. Rodionov recalled the fable by O'Henry, in which the protagonist was initially given the power to realize his desires by simply uttering a wish. One day, late for work and fearing that he would be fired, he commanded the earth to stop revolving so that he could arrive on time. After he was nearly killed by a collapsing building, the result of his previous command, he ordered the world to return to normal and renounced his power over nature, which he saw he was liable to abuse. Analogously, Rodionov called on his society to renounce the use of the new, earth-transforming chemicals until adequate knowledge about their further effects was available.  

Susanna N. Fridman, the longtime secretary of VOOP from its founding through the 1930s, followed with an equally powerful presentation. "We," she paused. "are the generation already exiting from life." She noted that for many, the talks at the congress might have seemed overladen with details. However, she continued, in conservation the devil is in the details. But there was, all the same, a bigger question: "Is nature protection, or, more correctly, the survival of wild nature and its blossoming, compatible or incompatible with our quickly changing culture and civilization?" "Science," she continued, "has answered that it is compatible, and, I would go further, that if that is not the case our science is worthless, empty and, as theory, holds no water. We know a great deal, but if we cannot [make the survival of wild nature compatible with culture], then that which we know wasn't worth knowing."  

Fridman raised the call for a more effective organ than the Main Administration for Zapovedniki, which she characterized as, after all, another economic agency, to handle conservation policy questions. "Nature protection is an enormous question," she averred, "not only of international but of planetary importance." but it has become "not only unpopular, but, in fact, odious. And that is our failure."  

"I must declare that in our Union we much engage in nature protection with pure and burning hearts and with passion," for, among the broad masses, "no one has any conception of the sweeping scope of this cause or its crucial importance for the whole world. We must enter the international arena. Life itself urges us that way. . . . It is not necessary for us to wage a struggle with the world of private property over those specific problems which those societies have already successfully tackled."  

Krivoshapov was equally blunt in his critique of Soviet economic and ideological rigidity. "We have a planned economic system," he stated, "but there is no sense to it. We write laws, focus our attention on delineated issues, but things never get further than producing
a document." The only way out, said Krivoshapov, was to expand VOOP's status to an all-
Union level and in general to elevate the level of culture of young adults, focusing on the
middle schools.\textsuperscript{48}

M. P. Rozanov spoke on the catastrophic thinning of the southern Crimean alpine
forests, leading to flooding, mudslides, and increasing economic losses. Economic institutions
have been sited in places where they threaten the remaining woodlands. In particular, there are
about 10-15,000 goats, both privately owned and belonging to sovkhozes, in areas where
forests are regenerating.\textsuperscript{49}

Mikhail Aleksandrovich Zablotskii spoke about the need to gain final governmental
approval for the creation of a special European bison fenced breeding farm and range within
the proposed Moskovskii zapovednik.\textsuperscript{50}

On the morning of April 28 the Congress held its final session to hear the concluding
remarks of V. N. Makarov. First, Makarov concentrated on the questions of education and
youth, urging the adoption of a prewar Estonian statute, which required those seeking
certification as teachers to pass a special exam in problems of nature protection and natural
history. "We, of course, have had nothing like this in memory," he lamented. There was a
note of worry in his remarks about the age demographics of the society, for there had been no
great influx of young people in the two years after the war, and "the old guard is little by little
leaving its posts . . . and our ranks are thinning."\textsuperscript{51}

Finally, Makarov touched on aesthetic questions of nature protection, which were
ideologically among the most sensitive for Soviet conservation. "I here would like to fully
associate myself with the comments of Comrade Bogdanov of the Bashkirian ASSR and
consider that the aesthetic importance of nature protection must not be sidelined from VOOP's
field of action. We must care for and protect not only the paintings of Kuindzhi, Shishkin, and
Levitan, which we treasure as works of great aesthetic value, but those natural scapes that
inspired Kuindzhi, Shishkin and Levitan."\textsuperscript{52} "I have always been amazed," he continued.
"why people are conscious of the value of these products of human creativity but find it
impossible to perceive the beauty of nature and protect the actual nature [that inspired these
paintings]."\textsuperscript{53}

Makarov then shared a personal recollection. "I sometimes recall a particular time in my
life when I was in the Crimea; there I used to be terribly struck and upset by the following
picture: a few lonely pines standing on a high precipice. That scene had always upset me, and
I was travelling once with a friend with whom I would frequently talk about things, and he
was perplexed by the power of a devastated forest to upset me. 'Why does that scene touch
you so,' he asked? 'It would be nice to build a beautiful palace where those pines now stand.'
I answered him that the palace might indeed be beautiful and that it might captivate me for the moment, but that I might not pay it any attention the next time. But I could see pines ten times and they would still stir me, because they tell much . . . because they are more valuable to me than a palace built in their place. It seems to me that we love nature through its specific examples, and, loving nature, we also love our homeland. For that reason, it is in the interests of the homeland and of cultivating love for it that we must care for the preservation of the most ancient examples of our own land's nature. This quote illustrates the interpenetration of the scientific justification for nature protection with elements of aesthetic sensibility and even a certain kind of patriotism which characterized the stance of many of the activists.

Shortly after the conference, in late July 1948, already in a tension-fraught atmosphere of growing cold war, the conservation activists took on the state security apparatus head on. Addressed to the RSFSR Council of Ministers, the letter from the Presidium of VOOP's Central Executive Council complained that it had received reports from its Crimean branch that units of the Ministry of State Security in the Crimea had been systematically chopping down cypress trees on the southern shore of the peninsula. VOOP itself had tried to get information directly from the Ministry of State Security but was unsuccessful in this, and so requested the intervention of the RSFSR government. If anything testifies to the compelling sense of civic activism and political responsibility of these scientists, it is this letter. Once again, we must revise our picture of a totally passive society in light of this small counterculture's bold "dance" with the regime.

One of the most dramatic periods in the history of this movement was the five-year period following the sinister August 1948 session of the Lenin All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences, where Lysenko established a dictatorship over biology in the USSR with Stalin's blessing. Beginning in 1948, apparently as a result of the USSR Minister of Forestry Bovin's desire to acquire the protected mature forests of the zapovedniki together with their convenient rudimentary infrastructure, pressure on the conservation movement and its institutions steadily mounted. Archival documents do not conclusively reveal the ultimate initiators and promoters of a comprehensive plan to eliminate the nature reserves and the conservation movement or, indeed, whether such a plan existed at all. But by 1950 Beria ally Merkulov, USSR Minister of State Control had dispatched 200 inspectors (agents) to dig up incriminating evidence against those targets. We learn from the archives that by July 1951 Stalin had apparently personally decided to allow only 15% of protected territory in the USSR to remain, this over the vehement opposition of local and republican-level authorities, who sought to protect the reserves and their scientists. When these authorities were polled in late
In 1950 about plans to eliminate the reserves, the Azerbaidzhan party and republican leadership, for example, argued against eliminating the two major zapovedniki in that republic, noting that only 2,000 of the 95,000 ha. of Kzyl-Agach zapovednik were suitable for agriculture. The most vivid protest was a telegram from the Velikoluzhskii oblast executive committee (or governor's office) which noted:

The Main Administration for Zapovedniki . . . for unknown reasons has introduced a proposal to the Council of Ministers to eliminate [the Central-Forest] zapovednik. Meanwhile, this proposal was never cleared with the oblast' authorities nor with other oblast' organizations that had a stake in the existence of the reserve. In connection with the above, the Velikie Luki Oblast' Soviet . . . decisively protests against this proposal . . . to eliminate the zapovednik and requests that it be mooted, as the Central-Forest zapovednik is the only scientific research institution not only in Velikoluzhskaya oblast', but in a whole number of oblasts of the northwestern part of Russia.56

Another telegram from the deputy chair of the Sverdlovsk oblast government noted that "all the scientific society and scientists of the oblast' have spoken out against destruction of the integrity of the territory of the [Denezhkin kamen] reserve" while Khabarovsk and Kamchatka authorities sent a joint "categorical protest" against the liquidation of the Kronotskii reserve.57

In their continuing, and, at long last, successful efforts to engineer a merger with the All-Union Society of Friends of Greening (June 1953), the new leaders of VOOP were still practicing the politics of "protective coloration." Stalin's "Plan" for the "Great Transformation of Nature" was still a watchword in June 1953, and the society sought to finally link itself to a political agenda endorsed by the state power. However, protective coloration was a strategy that was fraught with peril for the integrity of a social movement such as the Russian conservation movement. It required a convincing outward display of loyalty in some key areas so that a certain internal freedom as well as political freedom of action could be maintained in other areas. It required the movement to project the appearance of a group of quaint, even slightly irrelevant (from a utilitarian Soviet perspective) old-line scientists, more interested in discussing questions of faunal distribution than challenging economic decisions, while quietly defending and expanding their "state within a state" -- the zapovedniki -- or taking aim at select individual policies. Such a strategy was hard enough to work during times of "normal" Stalinism, but even its greatest practitioner, Makarov, was powerless in the climate of terror of Stalin's last years.
If it took as mastermind such as the late Makarov (d. 1953) to make "protective coloration" work in the best of times, what could be expected of his far less gifted immediate successors. Only the genius of Makarov and the old generation of biologists held the line, preventing protective coloration's conformist and trivializing means from vitiating its visionary ends. Under the new president, Gurgen A. Avetisian, the strategy inexorably began to overwhelm what it was supposed to protect.

Suzanna Fridman's Letter

Viewed in retrospect, the period of 1953 to 1955, was an interregnum for VOOP, paralleling trends in the larger society. In contrast, however, to the thrust of the liberalizing changes of that larger society, the interregnum in VOOP ultimately led to the suppression of the oppositional ethos of civic dignity within the society and to its take-over by corrupt Communist time-servers. For the old-timers, this new period posed an even greater challenge than the perilous period immediately preceding, when the society was threatened with elimination. Indications mounted that the old traditions were being supplanted by a new approach to doing business. Lush, secretive bureaucratization quickly created a high barrier between the new bosses and the old stalwarts. Emblematic of these developments was the way that the All-Union Congress of VOOP was convened in August 1955.

Eight years had passed since the previous congress, and VOOP was in severe violation of its charter requirements. Actually, this was yet another Party-engineered Catch-22, as the society had repeatedly petitioned the Party to give permission for it to hold a congress, only to be repeatedly rejected. This then served as fodder for Party accusations that the society was delinquent in upholding its charter provisions.

Almost furtively, without publicity, the VOOP Congress was convened on August 15. The old-timers were not invited. One remarkable document illuminating the episode is a pained letter from Suzanna Fridman, VOOP secretary from the society's inception until 1949, to interim VOOP president Gurgen Artashesovich Avetisian.

"I was completely shocked by your totally accidental mention of the convocation of the congress...," she opened, charging that she most likely never would have heard about it at all were it not for her unrelated request of other information from Avetisian. Fridman was as much saddened as she was outraged by the slight:

We old veterans of the conservation cause have been waiting for some years now impatiently for just this congress. We dreamed of meeting one more time, discussing many issues of concern to us, summing things up and, perhaps, gripping each other's hands for one last time. Most importantly, we hoped to pass on our passionate commitment to conservation to the young generation.58
However, the congress was called in mid-August, observed Fridman, exactly at the time when "all scientific researchers are on vacation or on expeditions." To Avetisian's excuse (in his letter to her) that it had been decided not to invite many activists so as to keep costs down, Fridman replied that it was wrong to have slighted veterans and even founders of the society, many of whom would have paid their own way in any case. Fridman reminded Avetisian of her own decision to turn down a 1000 ruble award from the Presidium for her work organizing the society's archive, a decision motivated by her concern for the society's rickety finances.

Now, five founder-members found themselves "thrown overboard" after devoting thirty years of passionate service to the cause. Fridman was especially concerned that her exclusion from the society's Executive Council would deprive her of an indispensable credential in her continuing efforts to propagandize conservation in the media and in society; indeed, she feared that she would be thrown on the defensive, having to explain why she was no longer a member of the society's governing body.

"Of course," she reproached Avetisian, "had the 'old guard' been present at the congress none of this would have happened. Neither Smidovich, Komarov nor Makarov would have allowed anything like this." On the contrary, they would have proposed that the five living founder-members be granted lifetime honorary membership on the Executive Council.

The snubbing of Fridman and the old guard was cause for yet another disappointment. Urged on the previous year by Professor G. G. Bosse, Fridman was also at work on a major history of conservation, support of which she had hoped the congress would provide. She had counted on the official endorsement of VOOP, but now, "to her great sorrow and humiliation," she felt left out to dry. Unbowed, she vowed that she and a group of veterans would continue the project, and implicitly raised the prospect of unflattering portrayals of such recent scandals as the Kuznetsov affair and the 1955 congress. Further, Fridman promised to write to others returning from field trips to let them know of these developments.59

Although the proceedings of the 1955 Congress of the newly renamed All-Russian Society have not come down to us in any of the available archives, we fortunately do have an important record closely linked to them: the protocol of the first session of the newly elected Executive Committee of VOOP, which met on August 19 at the conclusion of the congress.

In Avetisian's defense, it may well be that the Congress was organized so furtively not at his initiative. Arrestingly, the presiding officer of the session was not a member of the movement at all, but N. N. Bespalov, a deputy prime minister of the RSFSR. That in itself was highly unusual at a meeting of a voluntary society's own administration. Announcing the order of business, which was the election of the society's new president and vice presidents, Bespalov unambiguously let it be known that the society's previous pretensions to autonomy
were now a thing of the past. This was diktat. "Having weighed the various possible candidates," Bespalov solomically pronounced that "we have inescapably decided to recommend as President of the Central Executive Council of the Society G. P. Motovilov." the former minister of forestry. The vote was unanimous.

N. V. Eliseev, a veterinarian by profession and head of the Russian Federation's new Main Administration for Hunting and Zapovedniki, was unanimously elected first vice president. A. N. Volkov, head of the Moscow Plant Protection Station and president of the Moscow Oblast Branch of the Society, was elected the other vice president. In this coronation of bureaucrats there was one small jarring note when I. S. Krivoshapov, one of the few old-timers left on the new council, proposed the candidacy of N. A. Bazilevskaja instead of Volkov, offering that there should be at least one biologist on the Presidium. However, these were new times, and objections from the new claque of careerists forced a hasty withdrawal of the botanist's candidacy. Only N. B. Golovenkov, the previous scholarly secretary of the society, was reelected to his office.

As we seek to understand episodes like these in the absence of full archival documentation, we must always keep in mind the temper of the times. When the republics, in this case the RSFSR, were faced with repeated assaults on their authority under Stalin and raids on their portfolios of responsibilities were common, they tried to defend as much as they could. To a great extent this explains the patronage and solicitude of the Russian Republic's government toward the Russian conservation movement and the Russian zapovedniki when they fell under attack. Although far from being liberals, the leadership of the RSFSR played a crucial role in protecting Russia's version of civil society from obliteration.

With the passing of Joseph Stalin, though, there was an easing up of pressure on the republics from the center. It was time to frame new compromises and to blunt the edges of conflict. Patronage of even a remotely dissident conservation movement became dysfunctional under the new conditions of rapprochement with Khrushchev's team. While the Russian Republic never gave up the goal of restoring its zapovedniki and even maintained a certain continuing respect for the old-line elite biologists that had led the conservation movement, it could not afford to allow them to remain in control of a growing organization such as VOOP. Elite biologists could work in subsidiary roles in the RSFSR's Main Administration for Hunting and Zapovedniki under politically reliable bureaucrats, but they would never again be allowed to occupy such visible positions as in the past. That only attracted the near fatal attention of the center to them and, worse still, to their patrons in the republic's leadership. The Russian Republic leaders would not risk that again.
Of all the indicators that a new ethos had taken hold in VOOP none was more vivid than
the proliferation of a network of profit-oriented commercial outlets -- the "Priroda," or Nature.
stores. This chain of stores, in turn, required a large amount of start-up capital from the parent
society, as provincial conservation-entrepreneurs all tried to get in on the act. In July 1956 the
Leningrad City Branch of VOOP asked the central leadership for a loan of 100,000 rubles to
be repaid by January 1, 1957. It was approved.60

Another emblem of the new approach was an indiscriminate campaign to recruit new
members. This increasingly involved the induction of so-called "juridical members," entire
factories or schools, for example, that joined as institutions. During the discussions of the
budget for VOOP for the coming year at a Presidium meeting of January 19, 1956, vice
president Volkov proposed a cut in the publishing expenditures of the society and a
membership drive. Egorov, seconding this, proposed no less than a 100,000 increase in
membership, to 300,000.61 President Motovilov concurred, adding only that the society
should further recruit 200,000 additional Young Naturalists, for a grand total of 500,000.62
One proposed method of quickly expanded membership was the promotion of contests with
cash prizes or other awards.

The ensuing defection of the old timers to the Moscow Society of Naturalists (MOIP),
however, posed a perceptible threat to VOOP’s claim to represent conservationism, despite the
relatively small number of individuals involved. Juxtaposition of the two groups provided a
case where quality and quantity were in a distinctly inverse relation.

Although the defection of the Makarov-era activists was almost inevitable, given the
changes in VOOP from 1952, the new VOOP leadership had strategically underestimated their
mettle; it was difficult for hacks to grasp the intensity of the old-timers’ commitment to their
values or, more to the point, their capacity for autonomous organization. "It is entirely
incomprehensible to me," admitted one VOOP leader, Volkov, "how conservation work has
been going recently. I don’t like the intrusions of MOIP [into our area]," he continued.

The Moscow Society of Naturalists is a respected organization, but MOIP is
convening a conference on zapovednik problems, has called a conference on
conservation problems generally, that is, MOIP has gotten involved in those issues
which are the province of our society. And we are not concerning ourselves with
those issues that we should concern ourselves with. [Conservation] is not the
prerogative of MOIP, but a group of activists has appeared there and they are not
performing badly."

At that point, a voice from the hall dared to state the obvious: "Those are our former
activists!" "Right you are!" concurred Volkov, who added wistfully that "they are moving
ahead while we are standing on the sidelines, . . . not only not initiating [these conferences] but not even taking part." That left the field open to the elite biologists, who, "at these conferences, dump on us, as a society, without compunction."63 Notable among the conferences jointly organized by MOIP, the Moscow branch of the Geographical Society of the USSR, and the Academy’s Moscow House of Scholars were the 1954 Conference on Zapovedniki, where biologists angrily confronted government bureaucrats who had carried out the dismemberment of the reserve system, the 1957 Conference on the Protection of Rare and Endangered Species of Animals and Plants and of Unique Geological Objects, which attracted 600 leading scientists and whose proceedings were so outspoken that they were stopped from publication at the stage of galley proofs,64 and the 1958 Conference on Zapovedniki, where Academician Evgenii Mikhailovich Lavrenko outlined an ambitious plan for the restoration and significant expansion of protected territories in the Soviet Union. These cumulatively had an enormous effect not only in revitalizing authentic environmental activism but as symbolic public demonstrations by "nauchnaia obshchestvennost" as it asserted its perceived right to participate in the formulation of public policy. By comparison, VOOP’s central organs languished in bureaucratic stagnation.

Even Nikolai A. Gladkov, an otherwise conformist biologist, admitted that in previous years the society’s Presidium frequently approached the government to take action on one or another conservation issue but that "over the past few years there has been no such lobbying by us."65

On the other hand, the new leadership had put a particular emphasis on building membership. By 1958 membership was up to 242,624, an increase over the previous year of 100,000, but it still only included 80,261 adults.66 A number of strategies were advanced. One emphasis was to attract more institutional members, which now numbered 1,106. VOOPs leaders’ standing as communist insiders now stood them in good stead. Another tack was to draw individual members in with the lure of contests and prizes.67

By 1959 membership had swelled to 915,000 and by 1962 had ballooned to 9 million. VOOP had not only become the largest nature protection society in the world, but also one of the largest "non-state" businesses in the Soviet Union. This was no longer small potatoes. One consequence of the Communist/bureaucratic take-over of VOOP was the spread of corruption and the outbreak of scandal. In a recent article (Soviet and Post-Soviet Review, 20. Nos. 2-3 (1993) 195-212) I have recounted the tragicomic story of how one old activist, leading zoologist Prof. Vladimir Georgievich Heptner, now largely working through MOIP, accidentally encountered the president of VOOP, Mikhail Mikhailovich Bochkarev, conjointly Chairman of
the RSFSR’s Main Forestry Administration, as Bochkarev was poaching on the Oka River. Through an unlikely chain of events, Heptner was able to publish his photograph of Bochkarev holding the illegal net in the leading Soviet humor magazine, *Krokodil*. That, plus mobilized public opinion in the scientific and environmentalist communities, forced Bochkarev’s humiliating resignation from the presidency of the nature protection society, and represents perhaps a unique instance where rank-and-file citizen activism led to the disgrace of a high official.

Concluding Remarks

Subsequent developments included the rise of the student brigades for nature protection (*Druzhiny po okhrane prirody*) under the initial patronage of the older activists, the emergence of geographers as a major new source of leadership in the conservation movement, the evolution of plant and animal ecology worldwide and in the USSR and the effects of changes within those fields on conservation biology and on the scientific justification for specific conservation strategies, debates on predator control, on acclimatization, and on tourism in protected territories.

Environmental causes and movements of the past thirty years, including those concerning Baikal, the Aral Sea and related river diversion questions, hydroelectric dam construction, canal construction, and the earthenwork dam to protect Leningrad from flooding. Increasing members of the literary intelligentsia began to appreciate the links between the construction of megalithic, grand-scale nature-transforming projects on the one hand and the self-perpetuation of the Communist bureaucratic system, on the other. Stalinist-style projects were not simply a frontal attack on existing nature. They were at once a means of keeping society safely regimented and mobilized and a strategy of nonthreatening mass investment for the economy and mass employment for the multimillion member army of the party/state bureaucracy. Conversely, huge projects served to justify the maintenance and expansion of this army of administrators and bosses. These movements were already in play by the 1970s and early 1980s, and were able to mobilize a much broader base of elite public opinion than the original "scientific" movement.

Yet even this broad intelligentsia campaign, which attained its most notable public success with the cancellation of the river diversion projects by Gorbachev and Ryzhkov in 1986, paled in comparison with the genuine popular movement for environmental safety that swept the USSR in the four years following Chernobyl.

To restate some of the major findings of my research: they include the discovery of a major independent social tradition, formally housed within the nature protection movement, that espoused values at variance with those of the "dominant paradigm." This tradition was
upheld foremost by the leading field biologists of the Soviet Union, trained in either prerevolutionary times or having imbibed the prerevolutionary ethos of nauchnaia obshchestvennost'. This self-identification included the idea that the bearer of this identity was entitled to participate in public affairs on the basis of his or her expertise, was entitled to pursue research independent of the purview of the party/state, and possessed a general measure of civic dignity. This "credentialed scientific public opinion" sought to pass these values along to succeeding generations through such independent youth groups under their control as the Club of Young Biologists of the Moscow Zoo (KUuBZ), the VOOP Youth Section, and the Youth Section of MOIP. Later, in 1960, veterans of the movement acted as initial patrons of the Moscow University Student Brigade for Nature Protection (druzhina). These students later played prominent roles in the late 1980s in citizen politics, both as leaders of environmental protests and later as political candidates and representatives.

A second major finding is the way in which nature protection allowed local and republican-level administrations in the USSR to express local patriotism and even to forcefully defend local interests (which included nature reserves and local scientists) against attacks and depredations from the "center." There may well be other examples of this, but environmental issues provide an accessible prism through which these variances may be viewed. This is probably because of the lower risk involved when speaking out on environmental issues, which were perceived as largely trivial by the Kremlin.

1. From V. N. Makarov, letter to the Head of the Scientific Sector of Narkompros RSFSR and to its Party Collective, TsGA RSFSR, fond 404, op. 1, d. 1, listy 9-18.
2. Ibid. listy 9-10.
3. This question will be taken up in detail in a forthcoming biography of Vladimir Vladimirovich Stanchinskii by this author in collaboration with Vladimir Evgen'evich Boreiko.
4. TsGA, f. 404, op. 1, d. 1, listy 24-25 reverse. Protokol No. 1 Zasedania Komissii VOOP po Kavkazu ot 26 fevralia 1937 g.
5. Ol'ga Borisovna Lepeshinskaia, "Dokladaia zapiska nauchnomu otdelul TsK VKP(b) o rezul'takh obsledovaniia zapovednikov v RSFSR. Zamektki. Otpusk." 9 pp. two-sided typed carbons plus longhand, pencilled notes in a small-sized notebook, listy 10-102, in: AAN, f. 1588, op. 1, d. 102, listy 1-102.
6. With apologies to the reader, the state of disorganization of Soviet archives, especially that of the Communist Party, does not permit us to follow through and determine the ultimate fate of many of the documents here presented.
7. Ibid., list 1 reverse.
8. Ibid., list 2 reverse, 4. She implied that in 1922 Shillinger planned the creation of the Crimean reserve to promote a White landing. ("Snaipery. Bloshenko [Shillinger's wife]. Shelinger [sic]. Ideia o sozdaniia zapovednika na beregu Kryma v 22 godu." list 4)
9. Ibid., list 3.
10. Ibid., list 3.
11. Ibid., list 5 and 7 reverse.
12. Ibid., list 5.
13. Ibid., list 27.
14. Ibid., list 26 reverse.
15. Ibid., list 16 reverse. Lepeshinskiaia here blames Gorbunov and Krylenko for recommending these politically suspect individuals.
16. Ibid., list 25. These allegations were totally without evidence and have been denied by Adela Frantsevna Shillinger, the activist’s daughter, who still lives in Moscow.
17. Ibid., list 28 reverse.
18. Ibid., list 7 reverse.
19. Ibid., list 8.
20. Ibid., list 9, 37 reverse, 39.
21. Ibid., list 4.
22. Ibid., list 12
24. Ibid., l. 13
25. Ibid., listy 28-32.
26. TsGA f. 404, op.1, d. 53, list 55
27. Ibid., list 35. Eventually, VOOP President Komarov wrote to Soviet Premier V. M. Molotov, who then apparently remanded the Division of Nonresidential Housing of the Moscow Soviet to provide premises for the society. When Molotov’s injunction was ignored, Komarov wrote again to the premier. Although the letter is undated, we may surmise it was written in 1938 or 1939. TsGA, f. 404, op. 1. f. 1. list 2.
28. TsGA, f. 404, op. 1, d. 52, list 11, in pen, at bottom of typed page.
29. TsGA, fond 404, op. 1, d. 56, list 55.
30. Ibid., list 7.
31. Ibid., list 52.
33. Ibid., p. 44.
34. TsGA, f. 404, op. 1, d. 78, list 1. Otchet TsVOOP o rabote obschestva za 1939 god. 27 listy. Typed. By Suzanna N. Fridman.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., list 7

38. TsGA, f. 404, op. 1, d. 120, list 8.

39. TsGA, f. 259, op. 6, d. 3518, listy 63-66.

40. TsGA f. 404, op. 1, d. 122, listy 27-31.

41. TsGA, f. 404, op. 1, d. 131, list 5 rev.

42. TsGA, f. 404, op. 1, d. 122, listy 24-26.

43. Ibid., listy 6-7. The decree was Postanovlenie SM RSFSR No. 642, "Ob okhrane prirody na territorii RSFSR".

44. TsGA, f. 404, op. 1, d. 36, list 5.

45. TsGA, f. 404, op. 1, d. 125, listy 4-6.

46. Ibid., list 27.

47. Ibid., listy 26-29.

48. Ibid., listy 88-94.

49. Ibid., listy 105-111.

50. Ibid., listy 124-127.

51. Ibid., list 140.

52. Ibid., list 145.

53. Ibid., list 146.

54. Ibid., list 146.

55. TsGA RSFSR 404/1/136a list 51.

56. TsGA RSFSR 259/6/8666 listy 40-41

57. Ibid., list 46.

58. TsGANKh SSSR, f. 3/1/148, listy 82-83.

59. Ibid., list 83. I have been unable to locate the personal papers of Suzanna Fridman or any trace of the history that she had been working on. Such a book was never published.

60. TsGA 404/1/237/listy 208

61. TsGA 404/1/227 list 15

62. Ibid., list 16


64. One lone copy of the galleys was saved and bound and may be consulted in the Archive of MOIP under the title Okhrana i rional'noe ispol'zovanie estevennykh resursov SSSR. Trudy soveshchaniia po voprosam okhrany redkich i ischezaiushchikh vidov rastenii i zhivotnykh i unikal'nykh geologicheskikh ob"ektov (25-30 marta 1957 g.), (Moscow: izd. Moskovskogo universiteta, 1959) [never appeared in print].

65. TsGA 404/1/277/ list 22

66. TsGA 404/1/274 list 13

67. TsGA 404/1/252 listy 245-248, for example.