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Freezing the Frontier?
Territories of Traditional Nature Use in the Russian North

Executive Summary

Recent Russian legislation has called for the establishment of "territories of traditional nature use" (TTPs), to benefit northern indigenous people. These territories are to be areas of significant size in which activities other than traditional ones will be limited. This paper summarizes recent Russian Federation legislation on TTPs, then describes how it has been implemented in one area of the North.

Industrial development has increasingly affected traditional activities (hunting, reindeer herding, gathering, etc.), both through displacement of traditional activities from land bases, and through the articulation of traditional activities for the benefit of the industrialization processes (e.g. use of reindeer herding for geological reconnaissance and transport).

Indigenous peoples, arguing that the perpetuation of traditional activities is essential to cultural persistence, have lobbied the federal government to protect the land base for such activities. Federal acts now stipulate the creation of TTPs, to be "the inalienable property of the [Peoples of the North] which, without their agreement, cannot be subject to alienation for industrial or other development which is not tied to traditional economic activities." The legislation leaves a number of issues surrounding the use of these TTPs unspecified:
- Is traditional nature use limited to indigenous peoples in the TTPs?
- Is there any limitation on the technology used to pursue traditional activities in the TTPs?
- Can traditional nature use include commercial harvesting in the TTPs?

The legislation allows areas in TTPs to be opened up to industrial development if indigenous peoples consent to this, but the specific mechanisms for consent are not stipulated.

In Chita Province TTPs have been created in the three northern regions (rayony). These total 26.6% of the area of the three regions. Chita has played down the goal of the TTPs to protect indigenous rights to land, and rather promotes the TTPs as a way of protecting the traditional activities of the indigenous people. In northern Chita, more Russians are engaged in traditional activities than are Evenks (the indigenous people of the area). Chita Province argues that the TTPs should serve a strong environmental protection purpose.

Many Evenk individuals have questioned the process by which the TTPs were delineated, arguing that they give limited protection to the complete spectrum culturally important activities. Major concerns also surround the issue of land alienation. The Chita government holds that a referendum on alienation will involve the total population of a region, whereas
federal legislation suggests that only indigenous peoples or peoples living within the boundaries of a TTP be involved in such a referendum. Evenks constitute between 1 and 15% of the population in the three regions.

The legislation on TTPs includes decrees and a presidential edict, but no law (zakon). Some provinces use the lack of a law to delay the establishment of TTPs. Others chose to implement the decrees and edicts, using ambiguities in these to serve their own purposes. Chita Province has taken the latter approach, arguing the need for rapid protection of a dwindling land base for traditional activities. Its move to focus on traditional activities and play down indigenous land rights may be politically astute in the current environment of national antagonisms in Russia. Yet this approach delays the need to deal with indigenous rights to land.
Territories of Traditional Nature Use, Chita Province

Source: Obobnovanie, 1993, p. 194
FREEZING THE FRONTIER? TERRITORIES OF TRADITIONAL NATURE USE IN THE RUSSIAN NORTH

GAIL A. FONDAHL

Abstract

Russia’s indigenous peoples have faced a history of industrial encroachment, with no effective mechanisms for resistance. Recent federal legislation allows for the establishment of "territories of traditional nature use", semi-protected land bases for carrying out "traditional activities" such as reindeer husbandry, hunting, trapping and fishing. Can these "territories of traditional nature use" afford protection for the traditional indigenous activities? Can they serve as loci for self-governance? Using a case study of one province’s setting up of such territories, this paper examines the strengths and weaknesses of this approach to freezing the industrial frontier.

Russia’s North has long served as a resource frontier for the state. Furs, minerals, oil and gas, timber and other resources of its expanses enriched the coffers of the Tsars, then the Communist Party. The state incorporated the northern indigenous peoples into the process of extracting these resources when it needed their help. It pushed them aside when their own needs impeded resource development.

Concerns about the cultural and even physical survival of Russia’s northern First Nations has recently provoked a reassessment of state policy toward them. The 1979 and 1989 censuses showed low population growth among most of the northern indigenous nations, and absolute numerical losses for several peoples (Osnovnye 1990). Both censuses also recorded high rates of linguistic assimilation, a sign interpreted as indicating poor cultural health. Glasnost has allowed the pursuance of research which attests to high levels of social malaise, as indicated by extreme rates of suicide, homicide and alcohol abuse. By the early 1990s even the mass media frequently invoked the term "ethnocidal" to describe much of the last half century of Soviet policy toward its northern indigenous peoples.

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Scholars and indigenous northerners themselves have attributed the dire situation in part to a reduced ability to enjoy "traditional" cultures, including participation in "traditional activities". The state defines "traditional activities" as herding, hunting, trapping, fishing and gathering. If less than 50% of Russia's indigenous northerners work in so-called traditional activities, these activities still define the core of the various indigenous ethnoses in the minds of both many indigenous individuals themselves, and many outsiders (Materialy 1990).

Perhaps the single most significant threat to the traditional activities is an eroding land base. Industrial development has destroyed tens of millions of hectares of reindeer pasture and hunting lands (Materialy, 1990). Leaders of the northern indigenous rights movement within Russia since the late 1980s have called for the establishment of "territories of life", zones from which "non-traditional" activities would be barred, and traditional ones thus protected.

Recent Russian Federation legislation has called for the establishment of "territories of traditional nature use" for the benefit of northern indigenous peoples. These territories are to be areas of significant size in which activities other than traditional ones will be limited. This paper assesses "territories of traditional nature use" (territorii traditsionnogo prirodopolzovaniya or TTPs) as a medium for "freezing" the frontier in the Russian North. Through the use of a case study, I examine the importance of traditional activities (reindeer husbandry, hunting) to one indigenous nation, the Evenks, in one small area of their homeland, northern Chita (front. Map). After providing a brief history of industrial penetration into the area, I summarize the recent Russian Federation legislation which calls for the creation of TTPs. I then describe the manner in which this federal legislation is being implemented in northern Chita. The paper ends with a short discussion of the potential of TTPs for protecting traditional activities -- and promoting indigenous rights -- in the Russian North.

The analysis offered in this paper is informed by observations made by Evenk individuals from Northern Chita, regarding the impact of industrial development on traditional activities, the utility of the recent federal legislation, and process of its implementation in northern Chita. These observations were recorded during twenty weeks of field research (April-August 1994) in the Chita Province and the neighboring Buryat Republic.
Indigenous Traditional Activities and the Frontier in Northern Chita Province

Historian Frank Tucker (1980) offers a definition of frontiers as "thresholds, borderline areas... between things mastered and other things not yet mastered," as "those areas in which men [sic] are most dynamically in motion to master the environment." From an indigenous perspective, most of Russia's North would hardly fit this ethnocentric definition. The various northern nations have long 'mastered' the reindeer pasture, hunting grounds, fishing sites and other lands, through intricate rotational usage schemes of both temporal and spatial character (Krupnik, 1993; Turov, 1990). For instance, toponymic studies evince a cultural landscape, barely perceptible to the Slavic eye, but rich with meaning to the indigenous peoples (Vasilevich, 1958).

The Evenks, one of Siberia's First Nations, have 'mastered' much of the area from base of the Taymyr Peninsula in central Arctic Russia, southward into Mongolia and Manchuria, and from west of the Yenisey River to the Okhotsk Sea and Sakhalin Island. About four percent of the Evenks (1168 individuals) live in Chita Province's three northern regions (rayony) (Map). Until the mid-twentieth century most of the Chita Evenks pursued small-scale reindeer husbandry and fur and game hunting. Deer provided critical transport for a nomadic life, both as pack animals for household belongings and as riding animals. Hunters covered extensive areas mounted on deer, tracking fur animals. Non-hunting family members herded the other deer, moved camp, tended to domestic chores, and processed the harvested furs.

Sustained Russian penetration into present-day northern Chita Province began in the mid-seventeenth century, with Russian governmental representatives exacting yasak, or fur tribute from the Evenks. Slowly an immigrant population grew, attracted by the valuable sable. However, until the twentieth century the number of resident non-Evenks remained relatively small.

Gold mining began in northern Chita in the late 1920s, and stimulated rapid immigration into the area. By 1931 the population had reached 7,210, 58% of which were miners. Evenks numbered 1,739, or about 24% of the population. Over the next five years the population more than doubled, to 17,787. The Evenk population remained stagnant, at 1,732 (Obosnovanie, 1993).

Mines development affected the traditional activities of the Evenks in numerous ways. Traffic along supply routes to the mines and activities at the gold-washing sites frightened away the wild animals, especially the larger ungulates, upon which the Evenks depended for
meat. The miner's use of fire, for clearing and for thawing auriferous deposits, caused frequent forest fires, which destroyed thousands of hectares of forest and lichen pasture -- the habitat for domestic reindeer, fur bearers and game animals (Zisser, 1929).

Development of Chita's northern gold deposits stimulated the demand for cargo transport. Reindeer caravans provided transport through the roadless taiga in the long season during which river navigation was impossible (Kosmachev, 1979). Reindeer numbers had sharply declined as a result of Evenk protests against forced collectivization, dropping from 13.3 thousand reindeer in 1931 to 8.2 thousand in 1935. Yet the well-being of indigenous households directly correlated with the number of deer owned (Petri, 1931). Appropriation of animals by the mining enterprises further impoverished and demoralized the herders.

If some federal policies of the 1920 and early 1930s preached protectionism for northern peoples and their traditional activities against too-rapid industrialization, others sought the need to incorporate indigenous cadres into the industrialization of the North, precisely because only their skills in coping with the severe northern environment could ensure the rapidity of industrialization that the State desired (Forsyth, 1992; Slezkine, 1994). Industrialization's needs eventually took precedence over those of the traditional activities, both where it competed with the traditional activities, and where it subsumed them.

The gold mining population briefly burgeoned in Northern Chita. With the expansion of richer lodes to the east, in the Aldan basin, many miners moved on. In 1949, however, world-class copper deposits were discovered in the central Kalar Region. Reconnaissance for other mineral resources, and for a route for a second trans-Siberian rail route incorporated Evenk herders into the industrialization process as guides, and their reindeer as pack animals. By 1960 Evenk collective farms of Chita's three northern regions received more than half their income from providing reindeer transport to geological, mining, and railroad reconnaissance parties (Nedeshev, 1968).

This "transport boom" did not last long. By the mid 1960s, planners had identified a route for the new railroad (the Baykal-Amur Mainline, or BAM). At the same time, the introduction of helicopters, jeeps, and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) drastically reduced the need for reindeer as pack animals. Geological expeditions kept apace, still numbering several dozen per year into the late 1970s, but they no longer depended on Evenk traditional activities. Mechanization also helped push back the frontier to a new degree:
The BAM was very bad. It spoiled the region. It spoiled the pastures. Both the railroad itself and the ATVs. Helicopters, too. Deer were slaughtered from these vehicles... (Evenk elder, Kyust-Kemda, 7 June 1994).

The decline of reindeer husbandry, of traditional activities, is related to the fall of nature. This started around 1974, with the introduction of technology -- snowmobiles, ATVs. These allowed for easier penetration into the taiga, and thus the destruction of land as people came in and over-hunted the game animals." (Evenk hunter and former herder, Tungokochen, 3 May 1994).

Degradation of the land, and the over-hunting of the taiga's fur and game species by outsiders, increased in scale from the late 1970s onward. This further threatening the ability of the Evenks to carry on their traditional activities.

With the end of the transport boom, Evenk herders lost a major source of income. Noting this, planners suggested that reindeer herding, and to a lesser extent hunting, now be articulated with the industrial economy in a different way -- as a source for meat for the burgeoning population (Borozdin and Makushev 1978). The construction phase of the BAM was projected to attract over 14,000 workers to northern Chita. Beef production cost four to five times more than reindeer venison production (Karelov, 1979). Reindeer herders were to become reindeer ranchers, in a move that would purportedly help both themselves, while continuing to aid the industrialization process.

After reaching a high of 15.5 thousand reindeer in 1970, herds declined under pressures of "rationalization", poaching, and general mismanagement. By 1993 they had fallen to 7.4 thousand animals, lower than the post-collectivization (1940) level of 8.4 thousand. Hunting has also experienced overall declines, in both numbers and types of animal harvested (Obosnovanie, 1993). Explanations for the demise of the traditional fields include a whole complex of factors -- compulsory education at boarding schools and thus lack of appropriate training in the traditional fields; difficulty in recruiting herders and hunters from the (ill-trained) indigenous youth; state confiscation of private, then collectivized property, including deer; sedentarization and 'villagization' of the indigenous population, into larger centers chosen for their agricultural potential rather than their potential to favor traditional activities; and poor provisioning by state organs of those remaining in traditional activities. If these factors negatively affected Evenk herding and hunting, scholars identify as most important the effect of state-sponsored industrialization on the traditional activities (Zadoroznui, 1992). In trying to mold these activities to the changing needs of first the reconnaissance, then the construction, and then the operation of industrial nodes and transport infrastructure, the state required fundamental changes in the
conduct of the Evenk traditional activities. As it finally attempted the introduction of reindeer ranching for meat production, we can question whether the state was even supporting a traditional activity -- the Evenks assiduously avoided culling domestic animals for meat, except in times of need.

Spatially, industrialization in northern Chita shifted the frontier's fulcrum, with the balance of land "mastered" by industrial processes and related activities ever increasing. While substantial areas remained little affected by direct industrial activities, Evenk herders and hunters suffered (largely illegal) competition from an ever increasing number of immigrant hunters who held few of the ethical and ecological principles toward nature use that characterized Evenk relations toward their homeland.

By the early 1990s, the development path followed over the course of the last half-century came under severe criticism. Recent publications stress the need for "sustainable development," in northern Chita, based on traditional activities and recreation rather than the development of non-renewable resources (Zadorozhnyy, 1992). At the same time, interest in gold mining has revived, and gold-mining guilds, some with foreign investment backing, are invading the taiga anew.

The process described above for the Chita North — of industrial activities eroding the land base of traditional activities, and of forced articulation and "rationalization" of traditional activities for the benefit of industrialization processes — has occurred throughout the Russian North, with varying degrees of intensity. Legislators at the federal level have recognized, perhaps for a variety of reasons, the need to address this situation, and have begun to do so.

Legislating the Frontier: Federal Protection for Traditional Activities

Protecting traditional activities, and the lands on which they depend showed up on the agenda of Russian legislators in 1989. Since then a number of acts have called for the designation of "territories of traditional nature use" on which traditional activities of indigenous northerners may be pursued (Fondahl, 1995). Such territories were to be selected from land which had not yet been influenced by industrial development.

Most important of the recent legislative acts is Presidential Ukase, No 397, "On urgent measures for defense of places of habitation and economic activities of the numerically small peoples of the North" of April 1992 (O neotlozhnikh 1992). This ukase reinforced the stipulations of preceding laws and decrees in requiring that state organs of power delineate areas in which indigenous peoples practice traditional forms of economic activities, and
confirm these as "inalienable property of the [Peoples of the North], which without their agreement cannot be subject to alienation for industrial or other development which is not tied to traditional economic activities".

Ukase N°397 further orders that the regional associations of the northern peoples be involved in defining the TTPs. The associations consist overwhelmingly (though not exclusively) of indigenous individuals. Thus, this ukase, if implemented, ensures indigenous input into the process of land allocation which previous legislation had not guaranteed.

A draft law on the "Legal status of Numerically Small Peoples" (Foundations, n.d.) also has, as a cornerstone, the creation of TTPs as

specially organized places of residence and economic activity (reindeer pastures, fishing and hunting areas), not subjected to withdrawal and industrial development, created to ensure the development of traditional forms of economy in places of residence and economic activity of indigenous peoples of the North, especially not numerous ones (Article 8.2).

This proposed law has gone through a number of drafts over the last four years, but the state parliament has yet to adopt it.

The legislation, passed and pending, seemingly offers an opportunity to indigenous peoples to "freeze" the industrial frontier where that is their desire, and to shape its spatial development along lines that fit their own aspirations. However, several problems confront the legislation. Firstly, "traditional nature use" itself is poorly defined legally (Obosnovanie, 1993). Legislative acts and Russian academic literature seem to agree on a litany of activities which include hunting, trapping, reindeer herding, fishing and gathering. Yet several issues surrounding these activities are left unspecified, including:

1) who can be a "traditional nature user" (is this limited to indigenous persons?);
2) What technologies are allowed under the aegis of "traditional nature use"?; and
3) does "traditional nature use" include commercial development or only subsistence use?

These are issues which have plagued land claims processes in other circumpolar states.

Another fundamental problem persists in that state control over the definition of what constitutes a traditional activity contradicts principles of First Nations self-determination. Attempts to incorporate indigenous input into the realization of TTPs, and even into the process of defining what these territories should be, still falls short of their incorporation into the process of defining what traditional activities themselves should comprise.

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1For instance, the various drafts of the Law on the Legal Status of Numerically Small Peoples of the North have been sent out to the regions, for comment by, inter alia, First Nations individuals. The Associations of Numerically Small Peoples often organize meetings to discuss and comment on such drafts.
Yet more problematic than the ill-defined nature of "traditional nature use", and intrinsic difficulties with who does the defining, are the imprecise stipulations on land alienation. Protected status of the TTPs is not unqualified. Ukase N°397 permits alienation of land within TTPs for uses not connected with traditional activities if indigenous peoples consent to this. Thus, by setting up TTPs, the industrial frontier is not crystallized, only congealed.

Allowing indigenous peoples to chose to develop these lands industrially accords with international policies of self-determination. However, Russian Federation legislation fails to specify concretely what constitutes indigenous "agreement" to alienation, and who precisely should participate in such a choice. That is, who should vote in a referendum on alienation of TTP lands? Presidential Ukase N°397 suggests that indigenous people living within a TTP or within a region which contains a TTP would vote in a referendum for alienation of TTP lands. Article 8.2 of the Draft Law on the "Legal Status of Numerically Small Peoples of the North" (Foundations, n.d.) holds that the land within the territories is not alienable at all, while the text of Article 8.1 and 8.4, taken together, stipulates that indigenous participation is required in any decision to alienate land, but does not dictate the relative power of the indigenous voice vis-à-vis the non-indigenous in such a decision. As described below, the local interpretation of the legislation can deviate from what appears to be the intention of the presidential ukase, the draft law, and federal decrees.

Freezing the Frontier: Chita’s Territories of Traditional Nature Use

Few areas in the Russian North have acted on the presidential ukase to set up TTPs. Chita Province is one which has. In order to implement the federal legislation, the provincial government contracted a group of scholars to draw up a preliminary plan for protected territories. Members of this Working Group then traveled to the regional (rayonnye) capitals (Verkh Usugli, Tupik and Chara; (Map) to present proposals and solicit input from the local, and especially the Evenk, population. In at least one case a meeting was also held in an outlying village (Tungokochen). After approximately a year’s work, the Group presented its final recommendations in a report, "The Basis for a Territory of Traditional Nature Use of the Evenks of the Chita Province" (Obosnovanie, 1993). This report proposed that significant areas of the three northern regions be set aside for TTPs (Map).

When in 1992 the Working Group set about its task, Presidential Ukase N°397 had summoned a set of laws, including the Law on the Legal Status of Numerically Small Peoples of the North, which would more precisely guide the establishment of rights for the
indigenous population and for the establishment of protected territories. Such legislation was still in draft form, and its passage not imminent. (This was the excuse that many provinces used to *not* implement the presidential ukase.) The Working Group chose to work toward implementation of the existing decrees and ukases by taking into consideration the drafts of laws being circulated, by guessing at future developments -- and by using inconsistencies in the federal legislation to serve the provincial purpose. To govern the TTPs until such federal legislation was adopted the Chita government passed a set of temporary rules for use of the land and other natural resources on these territories (Ob utverzhdenii, 1994).

Chita Province clearly espoused the position that the goal of a TTPs should be not to protect *indigenous rights* to land, but rather to protect *traditional activities* of the indigenous (Evenk) population. This approach, the Working Group argued, would serve to minimize ethnic conflict. It viewed the use of nationality criteria for establishing TTPs use as "very problematic," for both demographic and cultural reasons (Obosnovenie, 1993). Less than four percent of the population of Chita's three northern regions is Evenk; in all but five settlements Evenks constitute a minority. If the federal legislation was directed toward preserving and developing traditional fields as an important prerequisite for cultural survival, the use of nationality criteria for establishing land bases for such activities could possibly undermine this goal in areas like northern Chita. While for some Evenks, traditional activities remain the major means of securing a living, for others hunting, herding or fishing provides only an auxiliary source of livelihood. Some Evenks do not participate in traditional activities. In northern Chita more non-Evenks participate in the traditional activities (mainly hunting) than do Evenks. Many such Siberians, whose roots go back generations, resent the idea of any limitations on their rights to practice traditional activities in connection with improved rights for indigenous peoples. Although it was not clear what these limitations might be, and how the borders of the TTPs might have differed, if "ethnic" criteria were used, the Working Group dismissed such criteria as faulty and dangerous. By setting up TTPs for all inhabitants involved in traditional activities in the Chita North, the provincial government claimed that it avoided discrimination based on either nationality or length of residence (Obosnovenie, 1993).

The areas delineated as TTPs comprise 26.6% of northern Chita. As the Map indicates, the territory dedicated in each region borders neighboring TTPs, forming a continuous zone of protected land (with an additional exclave in the Kalar Region). Three criteria prevailed in delineating the lands: presence of reindeer habitat, relative absence of mineral deposits, and contiguity. By choosing adjoining areas, the Working Group sought to maximize
environmental protection effects of the TTP. A tentacle of TTP wrapped around the eastern extreme of the Tungiro-Olekma Region, providing a buffer zone against industrial development in the neighboring Amur Province. The Working Group repeatedly underscored the role of the TTPs as not only a zone protecting the future of traditional activities but as an important component in Chita's system of nature protection.

Some areas were specifically excluded from the TTPs, including the flood zone of a potential hydroelectric station on the Vitim River, and a proposed national park site in the Kalar Region. Strong lobbying by the neighboring region (Chernyshevskiy) to the south influenced the decision to not extend Tungokochen's TTP to its southern border. Officials in Chernyshevskiy Region suggest that this border area may be gold-rich, and feared that a TTP in Tungokochen might limit their ability to develop gold mining. These and many other areas of critical importance to both herding and hunting remain outside the protected zones.

Chita's interpretation of the legislation, and its process of implementation, evoked heated debate in the villages of Northern Chita on several counts. Some Evenks denounced the limited chance for participation in the planning process. The Working Group held public meetings only in the larger villages, thus marginalizing input from Evenk (and other local inhabitants) living in outlying villages. High transportation costs made any expectation of travel to the centers, to participate, unreasonable. At the same time a limited budget (and short time frame) constrained the Working Group from visiting all settlements. Yet 66% of the Evenks of northern Chita live in villages which were not visited by the working group; 42% live in remote villages, not connected by road or rail to villages in which meetings were held. For a significant number of Evenks, attending a meeting would have been difficult if not impossible.

Nor did the process which the Working Group employed to chose the lands for the TTPs allow much inter-regional communication. Members of various regional teams (Kalar, Tungiro-Olekma, Tungokochen) which worked with the Working Group met but once together, in January of 1994, to hear the final decisions of the group. The chairperson of the province-level Association of the Numerically Small Peoples, Maria Fedorovna Grigoreva, boycotted this meeting in protest of a process which provided too little chance for genuine input from the people it was supposed to benefit.

Evenk individuals have also complained about the value of the territory allocated (Author's fieldnotes, April-May 1994). They note that much is alpine tundra, some not even terribly good reindeer pasture. The TTPs of northern Chita include little hunting ground of
decent quality. Several individuals imputed that the selectors chose lands precisely because they were not worth much to non-Evenks. The fact that such a perception exists, whether valid or not, undermines the credibility of both process and results. A few individuals also complained about the failure to include cultural and spiritual sites of major importance in the TTPs: decisions for inclusion of land seemed to focus exclusively on the economic dimension of traditional activities as defined (economically) by the state.

Major concerns surround the issue of land alienation within the TTPs. As noted above, the presidential ukase stipulates that by referendum an area within a TTP can be opened for development. In compliance with this clause, the Working Group's report suggested that in cases where mineral deposits are found within the TTPs, "their fate should be decided by the ethnos itself" (Obosnovanie, 1993). Throughout the report, the term "ethnos" applies only to the Evenks; thus the report seems to promote a decision on alienation by the Evenk population. If this contradicts much of its thrust at not providing special rights for the Evenks, but for those practicing traditional activities, it adheres to the tenets of Presidential Ukase №397.

Chita Province's Temporary Rules governing the TTPs are internally contradictory on the issue of alienation. Article 2.1 notes that "land of the TTP is the inalienable property of the whole population living on this territory...", implying that Evenk and non-Evenk living within a TTP should control decisions about the TTP, while Article 2.3 holds that "land in the TTP can be alienated for industrial or other development not connected with economic activities of the indigenous population, only with its agreement, by means of a referendum carried out in the region...," suggesting enfranchisement of indigenous persons living within the region. Regional (rayonnye) and provincial officials offer yet another interpretation. They hold that procedure for alienation will involve a referendum of the total voting-age population (indigenous and non-indigenous) of the region (interviews with V.I. Shkarovskiy, chairperson of the Chita Provincial Committee on Land Resources and Land Planning, 21 April 94; V.Ye. Renn, Chairperson of the Committee on Land Reform, Tungokochen Region, 25 April 1994; A. Shchetkin, head of the Tungiro-Olëkma Regional Administration, 12 May 94).

This last interpretation provides precarious protection for the TTPs. In the Kalar Region, the vast majority of inhabitants are relative newcomers, workers on the BAM, Bamovtsy. In the Tungokochen Region the bulk of the population (78%) lives in southern mining villages, which were only added to the region in 1977. To what extent will these residents value traditional activities, and support their protection over new economic opportunities? While the 'wildness' of Siberia, the 'pristine' environment and recreational
opportunities attracted some, the relatively high salaries for mining and industrial construction provided the main impetus for these immigrants. Evenks and other long-time inhabitants feel that a referendum of the whole region’s population likely would represent neither the interests of the Evenk population nor the population involved in traditional activities (Author’s fieldnotes, April-June 1994).

Discussion

Can TTPs promote traditional activities? Can they provide a territorial base on which to promote indigenous self-governance? The recent federal legislation embodies both these goals. The Russian Constitution (Article 69) implicitly invokes the principles of international conventions which stipulate both the right to continue "traditional" activities and the right to self-governance over historic homelands (Konstitutsiya, 1993).

To date, however, the legislation on TTPs includes governmental decrees and a presidential ukase -- but no law. The lack of law has permitted local (i.e. provincial and republican) officials to respond to the decrees and ukase in various ways. Many provinces have done nothing, choosing to wait for a law's passage. Critics of this approach note that in some areas of the Russian North industrial encroachment proceeds at a rate which will all but eliminate any chance of setting up TTPs in the not-too-distant future. It is perhaps this very prospect which some provincial governments find attractive -- by postponing the creation of TTPs they postpone the possible freezing of lucrative industrial frontiers. By delaying long enough, significant territory not influenced by industrial development will be hard to identify, and will comprise only the most marginal of lands, in all senses.

Key officials in Chita Province felt that the slow pace of legal reform in Moscow could indeed compromise the chance of establishing TTPs in its northern regions. Unlike their counterparts in some provinces, they supported the general concept of TTPs. This is evident in choice of a Working Group, composed of some of the province’s leading proponents of a shift to "sustainable development." Thus provincial officials chose the other response -- to act. They chose to manipulate the still incomplete and internally contradictory legislation to their purpose, through creative interpretation. The interpretation favors protection of traditional activities, but not protection of indigenous rights. Such an approach has both merits and failings.

Ensuring a substantial land base for traditional activities may in some cases provide a significant step toward facilitating the persistence of indigenous land-based cultures in the Russian North. Yet extant legislation makes it all too easy for officials to ignore cultural
needs. Legislation does not address the need to protect, and incorporate into the TTPs sites beyond those critical for the economic imperatives of the traditional activities. Hunting, herding, and other traditional activities throughout the Russian North have held cultural significance far beyond that of simple economic support of the indigenous peoples. A limited understanding of the cultural complexity of traditional activities may in the end continue to undermine cultural persistence, as the totality of a land base critical to the continuation of an ethnos is ignored.

Politically astute, the approach of focusing on traditional activities rather than indigenous rights acknowledges the reality of an environment of growing nationalisms and national antagonisms in Russia. Some Evenk individuals themselves applaud this approach of not differentiating along "ethnic" lines, but along "professional" ones (Author's field notes, April-June 1994). In the rocky transition to market relations which Russia is experiencing, they concede that the primacy given indigenous peoples' needs will unlikely be great. A shift in the rhetoric surrounding the creation of TTPs, from one of indigenous rights to one of sustainable development, may make the concept of TTPs more palatable in today's Russia. Yet in providing for sustainable economic development, TTPs, if properly delineated, also can provide for sustainable cultural development. Evenk individuals stressed this point, that "sustainable development" must be construed as culturally, as well as economically and ecologically sustainable, and thus, that lands for traditional activities need to include sites and areas of cultural as well as economic importance.

Yet sidestepping the issue of aboriginal rights is but a short term solution. In an increasingly legalized Russian society, this issue sooner or later must be confronted. Some analysts propose that TTPs can serve both industrialists and First Nations, as one linchpin in a land claims settlement procedure which will inevitably occur in the Russian North in the future. Following the pattern of land claims settlements in other Circumpolar states, First Nations of the Russian North would extinguish "nominal and very undefined rights" to much of their historical homelands in return for concrete rights, guaranteed by the government, to self-governance over smaller territories (Pika and Prokhorov, 1994). Industries might even facilitate the establishment of such TTPs in order to progress their own interests outside of the TTP boundaries. In this way, the creation of TTPs continues, if in a new way, the model of co-optation of traditional activities for industrial purpose -- perhaps in a way at last beneficial to both parties.

If in fact the TTPs are to be loci of indigenous self-governance, can a definitional focus on traditional activities, even with a broadened understanding of these activities to
encompass non-economic facets, suffice? The form of TTP created in the Chita North potentially freezes the industrial frontier. But it is not the indigenous population which is empowered over its continued congealment or thawing.

References


Academy of Sciences, and the Chita Province Committee on Land Resources and Land Use Planning (in Russian).


