

## CONTENTS

### RUSSIAN PROGRAMS

JR. FORESTERS' CONTEST	pg 1
VISITOR CENTER DESIGN AND INTERPRETIVE SIGNS	1
HOW TO INVOLVE CITIZENS IN PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT	2
KOPPI RIVER ASSESSMENT	2
COMING TOGETHER ACROSS THE BERING STRAIGHT	2
BACKYARDS AND BEYOND	3

### EASTERN EUROPE

USFS FIRE SCIENTISTS IN UKRAINE	3
TRAIL DESIGN TRAINING IN UNA NATIONAL PARK	4
UKRAINE'S MT. HOVERLA TRAILS	4

### CAUCASUS

FORESTRY IN GEORGIA	5
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### MONGOLIAN PROGRAMS

WHITE-NAPED CRANE HABITAT CONSERVATION	5
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND CIVIC EMPOWERMENT	5
HOVSGOL NATIONAL PARK	5
FOREST ECOLOGY TRAINING FOR COMMUNITY FOREST USERS	6

THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES SHOW HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR WORK THROUGHOUT THE RUSSIA, EUROPE AND NEAR ASIA REGION OVER THE PAST SIX MONTHS.



*Sandra Baker represented the USA at the 10th annual Jr. Foresters Competition in Russia; here, she joins Tatiana Yakusheva (left) of the Russian Federal Forestry Agency in planting a larch tree--a species common in both of their hometowns.*

### RUSSIA: 10TH ANNUAL JR. FORESTERS' COMPETITION

In mid-September, a recent high school graduate from Bigfork, Montana traveled to Moscow and Khanti-Mansyisk to represent the US in the 10th annual International Junior Foresters' Competition. The competition is hosted annually by the Russian Federal Forestry Agency. This event brings together youth from nations around the world to promote and reward young scientists for their interest and efforts in the environmental field and encourage international dialogue concerning forestry issues. This year, close to 100 students from 35 countries participated. The American student's participation in this competition is part of an ongoing collaboration between the US Forest Service (USFS) and the Russian Federal Forestry Agency.

### RUSSIA: VISITOR CENTER DESIGN AND INTERPRETIVE SIGNS

In July 2013, a USFS interpretive planner and graphic design specialist traveled to Buryatia to work with two Russian Protected Areas on their interpretation needs. Baikalsky Reserve, the first of the two areas visited, is working on a new visitor center. The USFS team advised the Reserve staff on



# PROGRAM UPDATES



*USFS detailer Mark Franklin (left) helps pick the location for several newly produced signs in Zabaikalski National Park in Russia.*

how to determine their interpretive theme for the center and brainstorming the topics to be covered. The team then used the newly formulated and pre-existing ideas to design a bubble-diagram exhibit layout for the two-building visitor center.

At Zabaikalsky National Park (ZNP) the USFS team shared experience on interpretive sign design, discussed planning alternatives that balance provision of recreation and education opportunities with protecting the Park's natural resources, and provided a half-day training to staff about the basics of interpretive infrastructure design. The team produced an interpretive sign template that ZNP can use as it orders dozens of new signs to provide interpretation for visitors. The team also provided the park with a detailed report outlining recommendations for seven natural areas with recreation potential in the park.

## **RUSSIA: SHARING US EXPERIENCE ON INVOLVING CITIZENS IN PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT**

Two USFS representatives participated in a conference on protected areas, cultural landscapes, and development held at Kenozero National Park. The conference was organized by the NGO Centre Zapovedniki and had over 70 participants from protected areas, NGOs, and academic institutions from across Russia. USFS Regional Director for Wilderness and Cultural Heritage gave a presentation entitled "Involving Citizens in Protected Areas Management: Lessons Learned in the US." The presentations described how US land management agencies work with volunteers, NGOs, businesses, and local communities.

The information exchange worked both ways. The USFS team had the opportunity to see an innovative example of cultural heritage preservation in Kenozero National



*During a conference at Kenozero National Park in Russia, USFS Regional Director of Recreation and Cultural Heritage, Liz Close, presents how protected areas in the US engage with volunteers, civil society, NGOs, and private businesses.*

Park, which works with the community to create a better experience for visitors and economic opportunities for local residents. "My trip notes and photos are full of examples and practices – interpretive displays, festival activities, tour guides," wrote one of the detailers. "I'm sharing with National Forest staffs in my Region and throughout the Forest Service."

## **RUSSIA: FOREST HEALTH ASSESMENT ALONG THE KOPPI RIVER**

In late September, three USFS specialists visited Khabarovsk, Sovietskaya Gavan, and the Koppi River to assess the current forest health in the Koppi River Protected Area. The goal of the trip was to provide recommendations about necessary steps for forest restoration and wildfire prevention. The Koppi River Reserve was set aside by the Khabarovsk



*On the Koppi River in the Russian Far East, USFS specialists Ron Overton and Theresa Gallagher traveled by boat with local partners to assess the health of the riparian zone and the nearby forests.*

# PROGRAM UPDATES



regional government in 2010 in order to protect the critically endangered Sakhalin taimen, Siberian tiger, and other wildlife in the Russian Far East. The Koppi River region has suffered from severe wildfires and intensive logging, and the local NGOs and protected area management agencies requested technical assistance from USFS partners to determine priorities for conservation and protection measures in the wake of these major disturbances. The trip was sponsored by the USFS International Programs office and organized by the Wild Salmon Center, with support from local partners, including the Khabarovsk Wildlife Protection Center and the Koppi River Watershed Council.

## **RUSSIA: A MEETING OF NATIVE COMMUNITIES, SCIENTISTS, AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGERS ACROSS THE BERING STRAIGHT**

In 2013, USFS cooperated with the National Park Service (NPS) to support the organization and participation in the bi-annual Beringia Days, a conference that brings together the Native peoples of Alaska and Chukotka, Russian and American scholars, researchers, environmentalists, and representatives of government and non-government organizations of the Beringia region. A 29-member US delegation, consisting of community and native leaders and government representatives from the NPS and the USFS traveled to Anadyr, Chukotka for the conference. This year's Beringia Days was of special note for protected areas, as the new "Beringia" federally protected area has just been created in Chukotka. The director of the new Russian protected area presented at the conference and interacted with the US delegation.

*Group photo of the US and Russian participants at the 2013 Beringia Days conference in Chukotka, Russia.*



## **RUSSIA: BACKYARDS AND BEYOND CONFERENCE**

A three-person delegation from the Russian Federal Forestry Agency and the Russian Aerial Forest Fire Center attended the Backyards & Beyond Wildland Fire Education Conference in Salt Lake City, UT from November 11th to 15th. The conference and pre-conference training organized by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) focused on issues related to protecting communities from wildfire, as well as improving community awareness and increasing community participation in mitigating the risk caused by wildfire. The USFS and the Russian Federal Forestry Agency have had numerous activities on this topic in recent years, including an exchange program to visit communities actively implementing mitigation activities as part of a USFS-supported domestic program, *Fire Adapted Communities*. The Russian delegation's attendance at this conference provided an excellent opportunity for engaging community members, scientists, and policymakers from around the U.S. involved in wildfire management and safety.



*The Russian delegation with US and Portuguese participants at Backyards & Beyond Wildland Fire Education Conference in Salt Lake City, UT*

## **UKRAINE: VISIT BY FIRE SCIENTISTS FROM THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN RESEARCH STATION**

Two USFS scientists from the Rocky Mountain Research Station visited Ukraine to look at fire and smoke risk in Crimea and in and around the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone. Mark Finney and Alan Ager worked with faculty and students from the National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine (NULES) to discuss

# PROGRAM UPDATES



*USFS and Ukrainian fire scientists discuss characteristics of forest plots to determine fire risk*

methods for determining fire risk, including soil composition, historical weather data, and changes in vegetation from pests and contamination. USFS personnel met with Chernobyl foresters to discuss methods for collecting and using historical data in determining targeted areas for fire mitigation. USFS also examined, with Crimean foresters and firefighters, some of the challenges with fighting fire in rocky, coastal terrain, as well as the difficulty of educating residents and visitors about the dangers associated with areas at higher risk for fire.

## **BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: TRAILS TRAINING IN UNA NATIONAL PARK**

In September 2013, USFS personnel partnered with the nongovernmental organization FIRMA to carry out a trails workshop and consultation with the staff of Una National Park (UNP) in northern Bosnia and Herzegovina. Established in 2008, Una is one of the newest national parks in Europe,



*Martin Brod waterfall in Una National Park, Bosnia & Herzegovina*

and the third in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Because it shares a northern border with Croatia, the most recent addition to the European Union, Una Park personnel have high hopes for the development of tourism in the area. The main purpose of the park is to protect the scenic pristine Una and Unac rivers, which run through it, and to provide sustainable recreation opportunities. In 2013, UNP was awarded the Global Under Water Awareness Association “white flag” as one of the cleanest bodies of water on earth.

## **UKRAINE: MT. HOVERLA TRAILS**

Located in the Carpathian National Nature Park (CNPP), Mount Hoverla is the highest peak in Ukraine. More than 300,000 people visit the park each year, creating challenges with waste, safety, erosion, and degrading infrastructure. Trails that lead to the summit were blazed by users and the park staff is attempting to deal with problems stemming from braided trails, wide corridors, overuse and heavy erosion, as well as impacts to the aesthetics of the area, wildlife habitats and plant life.



*NGO, park and USFS personnel assess the slope and braided trail behind them.*

In the fall of 2013, the USFS partnered with the nongovernmental organization, Carpathian Paths, and the park to host a two and a half day seminar. The seminar focused on assessing the current state of the trail; ways to stop erosion in some of the worst areas; ideas for rerouting and closing-off problem spots; opportunities to expand their resource base by partnering with NGOs and environmental organizations; using volunteers to help reconstruct and maintain the trails; and engaging the community as stakeholders in caring for and protecting the area. More than 45 participants from five NGOs and nearby protected areas attended the seminar. Following conversations with USFS personnel, the CNPP plans to leverage discussions from this seminar to advocate at the national level for changes to land

# PROGRAM UPDATES



*Hank Kashdan, retired USFS Associate Chief, describes multiple use management in the US Forest Service during a training in Georgia.*

designation in the park.

## GEORGIA: SHARING EXPERIENCE ON SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

In September 2013 a USFS team led by a retired USFS Associate Chief visited Georgia in order to provide trainings and hold discussions on future cooperation. During three training for the Forest Agency (FA), held in the central office in Tbilisi, and the FA branches in Imereti and Kakheti regions, respectively, the USFS team shared the US experience and answered questions on a variety of topics from multiple-use management, to timber contracting, combating illegal logging, and staff training. The team also had the opportunity to visit some of Georgia's forests and discuss key issues with the managers of those areas. In addition to the training, the team met with a number of individuals from the Georgian government, donor community, and NGOs in order to lay out plans for cooperation on natural resource management in Georgia during 2014.

## MONGOLIA: HABITAT CONSERVATION FOR WHITE-NAPED CRANES



*USFS Avian Program Specialist Robert Skorkowsky (right) helps local partners catch white-naped cranes in the Daurian Steep of Eastern Mongolia*

In 2013, the USFS provided support to the International Crane Foundation (ICF) and the Wildlife Science and Conservation Center of Mongolia (WSSC) to study critical stop-over sites and wintering areas of the white-naped crane. In August, assisted by two USFS specialists, the ICF/WSSC field team captured and banded a total of 42 white-

naped cranes; six of these were also outfitted with satellite telemetry tracking devices. The Forest Service specialists found that multiple factors are affecting white-naped crane habitat, particularly intensive livestock grazing and drought, as well as broader issues which are impacting the entire Daurian Steppe region: loss of permafrost due to climate change, mineral extraction, the expansion of agricultural fields, and changes in water management. The USFS specialists, a wildlife biologist and a hydrologist, also worked with the partner organizations to develop conservation recommendations for wetland, grassland, and wildlife conservation.

## MONGOLIA: ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND CIVIC EMPOWERMENT

In August of 2013, representatives of the Center for Citizenship Education (CCE), the Project WET Foundation, and the USFS met with the Mongolian Ministry of Education to discuss ways of integrating environmental education and civics education into the national curriculum, which is currently being revised. This productive meeting resulted in a workshop led by Project WET's International Project Manager for members of the National Curriculum Development Department and a group of primary school teachers selected to pilot new teaching methods in their classrooms during the 2013-2014 academic year.

As a part of this project, CCE went through the process of becoming an official country host for Project WET, an activity and resource guide for educators focused on water developed by scientists, classroom teachers, and curriculum specialists. CCE now has the copyright permission to translate, adapt, and publish lessons from this guide book into Mongolian and to conduct local workshops to share the methods throughout Mongolia. Over the course of the two year project, TBI and CCE held four Project WET teacher trainings and two "train-the-trainer" workshops for educators interested in facilitating their own trainings based on this valuable resource. Trainings, workshops, and demonstrations included audience from Yeroo, Bugant, and Mongonmont soums (townships), Khentii and Gorkhii Terelj National Parks, and from multiple schools within Ulaanbaatar.

## MONGOLIA: RESOURCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK FOR HOVSGOL NATIONAL PARK

In late July and early August 2013, a USFS Regional Ecologist, visited to Lake Hövsgöl to contribute to an ongoing project led by the NGO Mongol Ecology Center (MEC) supporting recreation planning and natural resource

# PROGRAM UPDATES



management within the Park. Working closely with leaders from partner NGOs including Global Parks and the Lake Hövsgöl Conservancy (LHC), the USFS specialist interviewed park managers to learn about local ecology, current issues, and on-the-ground conditions within the park.

Based on information gathered during these activities, the USFS specialist was able to help the MEC/LHC and Park staff conceptualize a natural resource management framework. After the trip, the team produced a report detailing their observations and recommendations, as well as identifying potential opportunities for partnerships. This report is a major first step toward the initiation of a comprehensive inventory, monitoring and natural resource management planning program for Lake Hövsgöl National Park.

## MONGOLIA: FOREST ECOLOGY TRAINING FOR COMMUNITY FOREST USERS

In August 2013, a USFS specialist traveled to Mongolia to support capacity building in forestry and resource management skills for local herders and members of forest user groups. The specialist, a Regional Ecologist for the USFS Pacific Northwest Region, led three one-day trainings about basic ecology and forest management for three audiences: 1) local forest stakeholders, 2) rangers at Gorkhi-Terelj National Park, and 3) US Peace Corps Volunteers. This project helped the USFS further its ties with the Center for Citizenship Education (CCE), a Mongolian NGO active in environmental and civics education. CCE's camp, *EcoLand*, in northern Mongolia (Yeroo soum) was used as a training site for the ecology/forest management training for local forest stakeholders from Yeroo and Bugant. The USFS specialist also provided CCE with an assessment of the forest resources within the camp's territory and made forest management recommendations, at the request of the CCE leadership.



USFS Regional Ecologist Tom DeMeo leads a training about ecology and forest management in Northern Mongolia in Yeroo sum.

## ABOUT THE USFS INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

International Programs of the USFS, Department of Agriculture, promotes sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation internationally. By linking the skills of the field-based staff of the USFS with partners overseas, the Agency can address the most critical forestry issues and concerns. International Programs regularly taps into the agency's wide range of expertise. Wildlife biologists, forest economists, hydrologists, disaster and fire management specialists, and policy makers are among those who comprise the staff of over thirty thousand employees.

Since international cooperation is necessary to sustain the ecological and commercial viability of global forest resources and to conserve biodiversity, most of our work is done in collaboration with other organizations.

The United States benefits from our work overseas. Innovative technologies are brought back to the country, cross boundary environmental problems are addressed, and opportunities to hone USFS skills are increased. Lastly, strengthened international ties lead to mutual aid, as illustrated by assistance from Mexico, Canada, Australia and Israel who assisted with the devastating 2000 fire season in the western region of the United States.

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