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Stalin's Environmentalism

STEPHEN BRAIN

Environmentalism survived—and even thrived—in Stalin's Soviet Union, establishing levels of protection unparalleled anywhere in the world, although for only one component of the Soviet environment: the immense forests of the Russian heartland.¹ Throughout the early Soviet period, the agencies in charge of timber extraction repeatedly pressed for greater latitude, advancing visions of highly engineered, regularized woodlands while employing aggressive, revolutionary rhetoric. Yet with one quickly reversed exception, the Politburo consistently rejected the drive toward hyperindustrialism in the forest. After briefly capitulating to the industrialists' unrelenting attacks on conservationism in 1929, Stalin's government reversed course, and in the 1930s and 1940s set aside ever larger tracts of Russia's most valuable forests as preserves, off-limits to industrial exploitation. Forest protection ultimately rose to such prominence during the last six years of Stalin's rule that the Politburo took control of the Soviet forest away from the Ministry of Heavy Industry, and elevated the nation's forest conservation bureau to the dominant position in implementing policy. The results of this struggle for supremacy in the forest, which pitted the party leadership against those very bureaucratic interests assigned to carry out the party's industrial ambitions, show that environmental protection could find a place in a rapidly industrializing, authoritarian regime as aggressive as Stalin's—provided that the reasons given for protection were sufficiently pragmatic, and the supporting faction sufficiently powerful.

Such an assertion, clearly, represents a significant revision to the existing consensus about Soviet environmental politics, which holds that Stalin's government was implacably hostile to environmentalist initiatives. This consensus did not emerge without reason: by the late 1980s, scholars of Soviet environmental history had documented a number of grave environmental problems in Russia, many of which had roots, or appeared to have roots, in the Stalin era. Soviet promethean proclamations from the 1930s, typified by Gorky's famous dictum, "Man, in changing nature, changes himself," and Ivan Michurin's motto, "We cannot wait for kindnesses from nature; our task to wrest them from her," strongly influenced this

¹For the purposes of this article the term "environmentalism" will be used to refer to the political and philosophical position that the health of the natural world should be an item of social concern, rather than the psychological and educational theory. Environmentalism overlaps with, but is not coterminous with, conservationism (the belief that natural resources should be treated carefully so as to produce the greatest benefit) and preservationism (the belief that untrammeled nature has inherent value, whether ecological, economic, aesthetic, or spiritual, and therefore that some landscapes should be left undeveloped).

view, as well as accounts of the mammoth engineering projects of the First Five-Year Plan such as Paul Josephson's *Industrialized Nature: Brute Force Technology and the Transformation of the Natural World*.² The failure to adopt meaningful emissions controls like those enacted in the West in the 1960s further reinforced the impression of Stalinist enmity toward nature; Marshall Goldman's *The Spoils of Progress: Environmental Pollution in the Soviet Union* (1972) first drew attention to the severely polluted Soviet landscape and assigned considerable blame to Stalin's rule:

For more than three decades after Lenin's death in 1924, slight attention was paid to preserving the country's natural resources. There was little enforcement of existing laws and almost no enactment of new laws. ... Ecological interests were not important to the Soviet leaders of the day.³

Charles Ziegler's *Environmental Policy in the USSR* sounded a similar note, underscoring "Stalin's attempt to forcibly and rapidly industrialize the Soviet Union without regard for the environmental consequences," and concluding that during Stalin's tenure "the value of the natural environment was totally ignored in the campaign to transform the USSR into a modern industrial society."⁴ The consensus received its last major refinement with the publication of Douglas Weiner's two books about Soviet environmental history, *Models of Nature* (1988) and *A Little Corner of Freedom* (1999), which illustrated the apparent Stalinist animus toward untrammelled nature by describing the process whereby a unique network of nature preserves dedicated to scientific research (the *zapovedniki*) was created during Lenin's time, only to be dismantled in the 1930s and 1940s.⁵

Although the aforementioned works all point to real and important shortcomings of Soviet environmental policy, each with lasting consequences for the Soviet Union's successor states, these shortcomings have been extrapolated into a sweeping conclusion that conservationist or preservationist awareness in the Stalin era was entirely lacking.

²See Paul R. Josephson, *Industrialized Nature: Brute Force Technology and the Transformation of the Natural World* (Washington, DC, 2002); and idem, *Resources under Regimes: Technology, Environment and the State* (Cambridge, MA, 2004).

³Marshall Goldman, *The Spoils of Progress: Environmental Pollution in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA, 1972). Other works which explore and expand upon this theme include Philip Pryde, *Conservation in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, England, 1972); Fred Singleton, ed., *Environmental Misuse in the Soviet Union* (New York, 1976); Boris Komarov (Ze'ev Vol'fson), *The Destruction of Nature in the Soviet Union* (White Plains, NY, 1980); Murray Feshbach and Alfred Friendly, Jr., *Ecocide in the USSR: Health and Nature Under Siege* (New York, 1992); John Massey-Stewart, ed., *The Soviet Environment* (Cambridge, England, 1992); D. J. Peterson, *Troubled Lands: The Legacy of Soviet Environmental Destruction* (Boulder, 1993); Oleg Yanitskii, *Russian Environmentalism: Leading Figures, Facts, Opinions* (Moscow, 1993); and Murray Feshbach, *Ecological Disaster: Cleaning Up the Hidden Legacy of the Soviet Regime* (New York, 1995). Among Russian scholars of environmental history, of special note are Vladimir Boreiko, an associate at the Kiev Ecological-Cultural Center's Center for the Protection of Wild Nature, who emphasizes the cultural implications of the natural degradation, and Victor Teplyakov, whose works on the history of Russian forestry focus on the leading figures in Soviet dendrology and silviculture. See V. E. Boreiko, *Belye piatna istorii prirodookrany*, 2 vols. (Kiev, 1996); and Victor Teplyakov, *A History of Russian Forestry and Its Leaders* (Pullman, WA, 1998).

⁴Charles Ziegler, *Environmental Policy in the USSR* (London, 1987), 28.

⁵Douglas Weiner, *Models of Nature: Ecology, Conservation, and Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia* (Bloomington, 1988); idem, *A Little Corner of Freedom* (Berkeley, 1999). See also Feliks Shtil'mark, *History of the Russian Zapovedniks, 1895–1995*, trans. G. H. Harper (Edinburgh, 2003).

A representative expression of this interpretation can be found in Ronald Suny's discussion of the First Five-Year Plan in *The Soviet Experiment*:

The rush to modernity ... meant that attention was paid almost exclusively to output and productivity and almost no notice was taken of the impact of rapid industrialization on the natural environment. This insensitivity to the limits of nature was characteristic of capitalist industrialization as well, but in the Soviet Union general ecological ignorance was compounded by the bravado of the Communists, who looked upon nature simply as an obstacle to be overcome on the road to progress.⁶

So dominant is this interpretation that countervailing evidence has been unable to shake it: William Husband's recent survey of Soviet children's literature from the Stalin era, for instance, revealed a multiplicity of encoded attitudes toward nature, with a "small but significant number" of books depicting nature in a nonadversarial way.⁷ Yet for Husband, such sympathetic portrayals of nature did not suggest a more complex attitude toward the environment, but instead represented only a failure of totalitarianism: "Stalinist-era literature," he writes, "eluded the hegemony the dictatorship sought, and in so doing it demonstrated an important limit to political control in the USSR."⁸ Although the English scholar Jonathan Oldfield recently pointed out the need for scholars to "move purposefully beyond broad understandings of the Soviet environmental legacy" in order to check a "tendency towards overly crude interpretations of Soviet environmental degradation," the consensus remains basically unchallenged.⁹

Aside from its somewhat narrow evidentiary basis, focused primarily on the engineering projects, the decimation of the *zapovedniki*, and the lack of pollution regulations, the prevailing view about environmental policy under Stalin seems to privilege one certain kind of environmentalism—a variant popular in the West beginning in the late 1960s, rooted in liberal individualism and centered on the aesthetic appreciation of natural beauty—to the exclusion of other varieties of environmentalism, with other, more statist goals. Although Weiner's 1992 article "Demythologizing Environmentalism" argues convincingly that environmentalism can comport well with a variety of different political ideologies and is vulnerable to critique when it "pretend[s] to represent an absolute 'good' validated by an absolute authority," his analyses of Stalin-era environmental politics imply that environmentalist attitudes fit poorly with command-style economies and authoritarian political structures (or the Soviet variant of these), as opposed to liberal individualism.¹⁰ For example, in his effort to explain the persistence of environmentalism in Soviet Russia—albeit in the shadows—Weiner writes that "although we lack conclusive answers as to why

⁶Ronald Suny, *The Soviet Experiment* (New York, 1998), 238–39.

⁷William Husband, "'Correcting Nature's Mistakes': Transforming the Environment and Soviet Children's Literature, 1928–1941," *Environmental History* 11:2 (2006): par. 2.

⁸*Ibid.*, par. 38.

⁹Jonathan Oldfield, *Russian Nature: Exploring the Environmental Consequences of Societal Change* (Aldershot, England, 2005), 1.

¹⁰Douglas Weiner, "Demythologizing Environmentalism," *Journal of the History of Biology* 25 (Fall 1992): 385.

the nature protection movement was not obliterated along with other institutional sources of political, cultural, and moral dissent or deviation ... the persistence of various nature protection movements seems to indicate a certain lack of efficiency of Soviet rulers in the face of subjects determined to defend their autonomous selfhood.”¹¹ Weiner, relying upon the sociologist Oleg Ianitskii and his assertion that “self-sufficiency lies at the core of the values embraced by environmentalists ... who understand independence as a way of life,” contends that nature protection in the USSR acted as a vehicle “for Soviet people to forge or affirm various independent, unofficial, but defining social identities for themselves.”¹²

However, the term “environmentalism” refers to an expansive and diverse group of political movements, a set with a common denominator (the belief that the nature has value and humans should take the natural world into account when making decisions) but with many variants. For example, the wilderness ideal of John Muir differs significantly from the considerations behind the U.S. Clean Water Act, or those motivating the environmental justice activists of Warren County, North Carolina, yet all fall under the heading of environmentalism.¹³ Environmentalism—and forest conservationism especially—can produce benefits that redound to the collective just as much as to the individual; preserving the integrity of the environment has often been linked with quality of life, but it can be linked, and in Stalin’s Soviet Union was linked, with quantity of industrial output.

Indeed, forest protection long enjoyed institutional support in the Soviet Union, but it did not find a secure place in Stalin’s system until supporters found a rationale that comported with rapid industrialization. In the 1920s, when representatives of the industrial bureaus advanced visions of a new, socialized landscape, with highly abstracted, regularized forests and logging quotas based on industrial demand, the party leadership sided with conservationists who championed traditional ideas such as sustainable yield. But later, in the 1930s, after industrialists and student activists succeeded in labeling such concepts as bourgeois, advocates of conservationism regained the upper hand by citing the theories of the prerevolutionary soil scientist V. V. Dokuchaev, who linked the hydrological stability of Russia to the maintenance of permanent forest cover.¹⁴ By arguing that deforestation would increase the silt load of the rivers, and thus decrease the lifespan of the regime’s hydroelectric dams, conservationists provided an argument that industrialists never successfully rebutted, thereby enabling the institutionalization of environmentalism. After 1931, hydrological concerns became the justification for the creation of a vast forest preserve in the center of European Russia, at the time the largest in the world.

¹¹Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom*, 3.

¹²*Ibid.*, 6, 20.

¹³For a discussion of the environmental justice movement, which stresses the equitable distribution of environmental burdens across racial, class, and gender lines, rather than the importance of preserving untouched landscapes or protecting wild animals, see Eileen McGurty, *Transforming Environmentalism: Warren County, PCBs, and the Origins of Environmental Justice* (Rutgers, 2007).

¹⁴V. V. Dokuchaev, the founder of modern soil science, was asked by the tsar to lead a government expedition to determine the causes of the 1891 famine, and concluded that the crop failures could be traced to climatic instability consequent to centuries of steady deforestation. For more about Dokuchaev see David Moon, *The Environmental History of the Russian Steppes: Vasilii Dokuchaev and the Harvest Failure of 1891* (London, 2005).

The decision to create an enormous forest preserve represented a compromise, advanced by Stalin himself, to settle a long-standing dispute about what form socialized forests should take. One faction in this debate drew inspiration from the teachings of Georgii Fedorovich Morozov, a professor at the St. Petersburg Forest Institute who in the first decades of the twentieth century developed—in explicit response to the German theories long dominant in Russia—a new approach to forest management, tying economic activity in the forest to the forest's ability to regenerate. Aiming to construct an alternative forest science around his deceptively simple assertion that “the cut of the forest and its regeneration are synonyms,” and the belief that Russian forests required more careful treatment than those of Western Europe, Morozov urged foresters to establish a personal connection with each plot and to learn its idiosyncrasies, so as to determine the most sustainable set of practices. In the years preceding the Bolshevik Revolution, Morozov and his allies argued in favor of socializing Russia's forests, maintaining that only state ownership could establish forest health, rather than profit, as the guiding principle in management. Members of an opposing faction, oriented toward maximizing industrial output, believed that the onset of a new era rendered the romanticism and nationalism of Morozov's ideas utterly obsolete; that the Revolution had ended the subjugation of man to nature, and thereby liberated managers from old-fashioned ideas such as the need to conserve forest resources. At issue was nothing less than the meaning of communism, at least in the forest: whether communism would be an improved form of capitalism, in which natural resources would be treated with greater caution than capitalism could afford, or capitalism's antithesis.

The Soviet leadership attempted to pursue both ideals in the 1920s and early 1930s, but found that the inability of Soviet state agencies to enact more than one policy forced the adoption of a form of environmental protection tailored to command economies: proscriptions against all economic activity in certain areas—in this case, forests near rivers—and unlimited exploitation in all other areas. Despite repeated signals sent by the party leadership throughout the 1920s indicating that the forest cultivation agencies and the forest exploitation bureaus should work together toward shared goals, the logging trusts refused to support conservationism, and instead attacked it as a bankrupt concept. With cooperation proving unworkable, the party leadership ultimately abandoned hopes of a single socialized forest, and divided the forest into three classes: the first dedicated to preservation, the second to conservation, and the third to unchecked exploitation.¹⁵ During Stalin's years in power, the authority of the agencies administering the protected groups steadily and dramatically increased, in a pattern so uniform that mere bureaucratic counterbalancing as determining factor seems unlikely. But after Stalin's death, the forest protection bureaus

¹⁵The division of the nation's forests into classes possessed historical resonance, since Peter I had similarly forbidden logging along major rivers. Peter created both “protected” and “water-preserving” forests, although Peter Blandon suggests that Peter's main goal was not to limit erosion or to control flooding, but rather to check the activity of the charcoal smelters who were rapidly stripping the most accessible forests—those near water—of timber that Peter wanted for his navy. Peter's belts were much larger than those of the Soviets': fifty versts (more than thirty-three miles) near major rivers, and twenty versts (more than thirteen miles) near smaller ones. See Peter Blandon, *Soviet Forest Industries* (Boulder, 1983), 236. Another analysis of Soviet forestry, focused on the period from 1964 to 1982, is Brenton Barr and Kathleen Braden, *The Disappearing Russian Forest* (Totowa, NJ, 1988).

were demoted or eliminated entirely—suggesting that in a centrally planned, industrializing economy, only a figure with as much power as Stalin could transcend political infighting and promote conservationism, an aim simultaneously resonant with rational planning, yet in conflict with the Soviet style of economic development.

In the decade before the consolidation of Stalin's power in 1929, two state agencies representing two very different approaches to forest management vied for control of Russia's forests. The Supreme Soviet of the National Economy (VSNKh, or Vesenkha), charged with felling and processing of timber, sought ever greater access to forest land, while the People's Commissariat of Agriculture (Narkomzem), responsible for the cultivation of the forest, emphasized conservation. The ebb and flow of the forestry debate followed, in broad outline, the standard periodization of Soviet history: during the period of War Communism, the industrialist perspective on forest management prevailed, and widespread clearcutting directed from the center, conducted at a level recognized as unsustainable, became official state policy. By January 1918 the Bolsheviks had abolished the land committees—local bureaucracies established by the Provisional Government and invested with broad authorities, including the power to reject logging plans—and in May 1918 solidified central control by issuing a new codex, the *Basic Law on Forests*.¹⁶ The *Basic Law on Forests*, as the Bolshevik forestry journal *Lesa respubliki* put it, aimed to “centralize the forest economy of the country, dictate its will to the localities, and demand from them absolute economic obedience.”¹⁷ Subsequently, the state used the powers enumerated in the *Basic Law* to pursue a policy based solely on maximization of output, guided by the law's twin goals of maximizing the “extraction of materials for the satisfaction of state needs” and “the extraction of monetary profit from the sale and allotment of forest materials.”¹⁸ A 1921 poster published by Narkomzem illustrated the preferred method of forest management under War Communism: aggressive clearcutting coupled with promises to remedy the damage by planting new forests by hand (Fig. 1).¹⁹

Once the Civil War had ended and the state's demand for timber had dropped, Narkomzem reevaluated the ambitious forest management favored during War Communism, rejected it due to its impracticality, and embraced instead the opinions of tsarist-era experts who recommended more traditional, less centralized forms of forest conservation. In 1921 the director of Narkomzem's forest department moved on to the state planning bureau, and the new director with different sympathies, A. I. Shul'ts, changed course first by initiating a “fundamental review of the entire system ... with the goal of strengthening the forests on the one hand, and decentralizing authority and bringing the population closer to the forest on the other,” and second by creating the Forest Scholar Committee, a powerful senior

¹⁶A detailed account of the evolution of the *Basic Law on Forests* is provided by Brian Bonhomme in *Forests, Peasants, and Revolutionaries: Forest Conservation and Organization in Soviet Russia, 1917–1929* (Boulder, 2005).

¹⁷Quoted in *ibid.*, 128.

¹⁸Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki (RGAE), f. 478, op. 9, d. 48, l. 6:22 (in this *delo*, list 6 consists of 22 sheets of paper).

¹⁹A brief glance at the poster shows that the species composition of the original forest and the new, artificial forest is identical—an assumption which did not always prove correct.

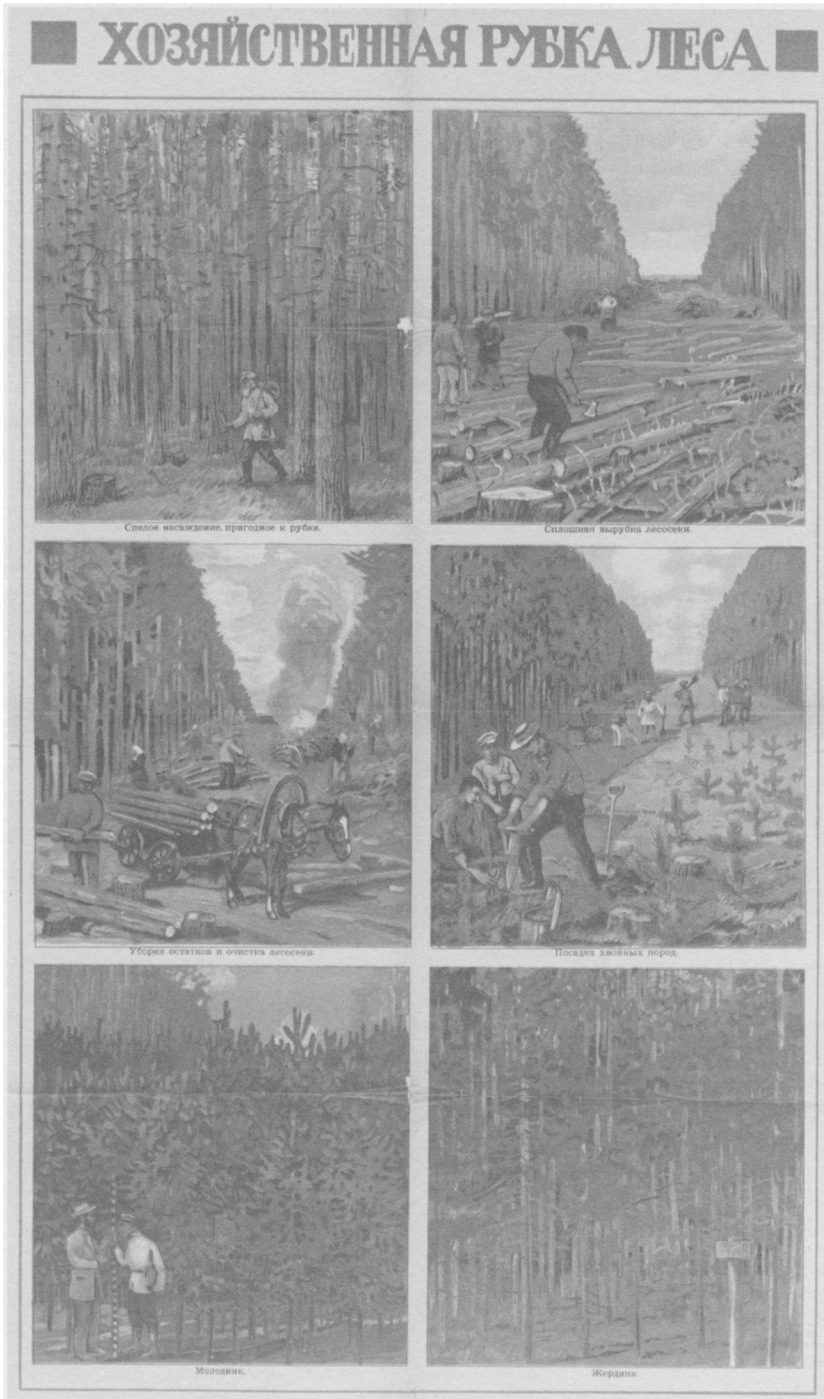


Fig. 1 RSFSR People's Commissariat of Agriculture, "Managed Logging of the Forest," 1921, <http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/id?1216186> (last accessed January 15, 2009).

advisory body filled with veterans from the tsarist forest bureau.²⁰ The Forest Scholar Committee identified the effort to place all of Russia's forests under central control as a failure, since the requisite level of political coordination did not exist, and hence a welter of competing administrative bodies "with lifespans no longer than the life of a butterfly" grew up and competed with one another, according to one observer, in pursuit of one goal: "to take from the forest all that [was] possible at the moment, leaving the soil so that even grass will not grow."²¹ Similarly, the committee concluded that the promises of artificial reforestation had yielded unsatisfactory results because the fulfillment of such promises required more resources than the state possessed, and therefore that the "works on artificial regeneration ... ultimately came to nothing."²² The influence of the Forest Scholar Committee and the traditional conservationist ideal exerted itself most conspicuously in 1926, when Narkomzem published a new set of forest organization instructions (the document guiding all forest management decisions throughout the Soviet Union) with "its center of gravity on natural regeneration," as Shul'ts put it.²³ In broad support of the new direction were the rank-and-file forest workers, as indicated by articles published in *Lesovod* (the journal of the Union of Agricultural and Forest Workers), since a Soviet forest management that aimed to "understand the nature of the forest as an organism, to comprehend the forest's vital qualities, its sensitivity (*chuvstvitel'nost*) ... its regeneration, and so forth," aside from its resonance with the theories of Morozov, simultaneously elevated wardens and rangers into scientific experts.²⁴

The reemergence of conservationism based upon natural regeneration (and by implication, lower timber harvests), however, only infuriated industrialists, who saw in it a return to a discredited past when a leap to the future was desperately needed. The journal *Lesnoe khoziaistvo, lesopromyshlennost' i toplivo* (the public voice of Vesenkha on forestry matters) frequently gave vent to this point of view, expressing the fear that Soviet forestry, with its sentimental emphasis on the health of the nation's forests, was falling behind the rest of Europe, and especially Germany:

Remnants of tsarist practices are blocking the path to progress in the forest ... and from the point of view of new currents in Germany, contemporary Russian forest management is characterized by obsolete concepts, technical backwardness, inertness, and a formulaic quality out of step with new German forestry ideas.²⁵

Instead, Vesenkha wanted "forest organizers, speaking vulgarly, to work as merchants," as well as forest organization instructions that would authorize the removal of timber in the amount that Vesenkha requested, regardless of forest conditions or academic calculations;

²⁰RGAE, f. 478, op. 9, d. 2219, l. 3, and d. 2546, l. 4. The Forest Scholar Committee was described as the most powerful convened body in the forest bureau; see "V TsUL'e NKZ," *Lesnoe khoziaistvo, lesopromyshlennost' i toplivo* 4 (January 1924): 58. For a statement of the committee's extensive responsibilities see "V upravlenii lesami NKZ RSFSR," *Lesovod* 3–4 (March–April 1926): 70.

²¹P. Morozov, "Chto delat'?" *Lesnoe khoziaistvo, lesopromyshlennost' i toplivo* 21–22 (June–July 1925): 6.

²²RGAE, f. 478, op. 9, d. 1535, l. 5.

²³A. I. Shul'ts, "Problema lesnoi politiki," *Lesovod* 1 (1924): 29.

²⁴V. Savich, "Obsledovanie lesov na novykh nachalakh," *Lesovod* 1 (July 1924): 34.

²⁵"Leningradskoe Lesnoe Obshchestvo za polgodu," *Lesnoe khoziaistvo, lesopromyshlennost' i toplivo* 21–22 (June–July 1925): 77.

only management based on demand, Vesenkha's representatives argued, would facilitate "tight links between forest management and forest industry."²⁶ Bolshevism's first push, from the perspective of forest industrialists, had failed miserably in the forest; Russian forestry remained bound to romanticism and old-fashioned considerations about forests as biological entities. As a result, beginning in the mid-1920s, the industrial bureaus initiated a second drive to bring radical industrialism to the forest.

Forest industrialists found a theoretical foundation for their demands in the works of Sergei Bogoslovskii, a forestry professor from St. Petersburg who in the early 1920s published a series of books and articles contending that traditional Russian forest science had foundered not, as Morozov has suggested, for its over-reliance on German forest theory, but for not carrying its adoption of German abstraction far enough. Bogoslovskii argued that Soviet forestry, in order to provide all the forest products that an industrializing country needed, should adopt a new German method called "flying management," wherein units larger than individual groves—possibly even entire countries—were made the basis of management:

The western provinces of Prussia contain less timber when compared with the provinces of the east, but at the same time the demand there is significantly greater. Therefore, [some German foresters] recognize as desirable the exploitation of forests in the east while halting cutting in the west, not going beyond the norms of use for the state forests as a whole. If the idea has been accepted in such a densely populated and industrialized country as Prussia, then why should we keep with our old methods?²⁷

Bogoslovskii rejected using individual forests as the units of management and instead suggested entire regions, for doing so allowed much larger harvests: according to the conventional understanding of the concept of sustainable yield, a forest cannot provide more timber than it generates in any given year—a proscription placing serious limitations on industrial expansion. But if managers could, for the sake of convenience, combine many forests (even if separated by hundreds of kilometers) into one unit and concentrate the logging scheduled for both forests into just one, then a given forest might be "sustainably" harvested at a rate greatly exceeding its annual growth, provided that forests elsewhere were left to stand as "credit" against the logged forest. The adoption of this method, Bogoslovskii argued, would allow the reorientation of Soviet forestry away from the health of individual forests, and toward the needs of industry: "The interests of rational logging with the widest possible application of mechanization requires the concentration of logging, rather than the scattering of small cuts over large areas. A planned economy of the union republics is not possible unless the fullest possible interlinking of interests is implemented."²⁸

²⁶I. Iatsenko, "O novykh osnovaniakh lesoustroistva," *Lesnoe khoziaistvo, lesopromyshlennost' i toplivo* 13 (October 1924): 8; "V leningradskom Lesnom Obshchestve," *Lesnoe khoziaistvo, lesopromyshlennost' i toplivo* 9 (June 1924): 75.

²⁷S. Bogoslovskii, "K voprosu o gosudarstvennom lesnom khoziaistve," *Lesnoe khoziaistvo i okhota* 3 (February 1923): 21 (Bogoslovskii's name was sometimes, but less often, printed as "Bogoslavskii").

²⁸S. Bogoslovskii, "Ideia gosudarstvennogo lesnogo khoziaistva i lesoustroistva," *Lesovod* 2–3 (August–September 1924): 31.

Bogoslovskii's ideas offered proponents of industrial expansion the chance to eliminate individual forests as the bases of management, as well as the related propensity to focus management plans on local conditions. Even better, Bogoslavskii's approach would allow forest organizers to count remote Siberian woodlands as "credit" forests, and thus enable the exploitation of centrally located tracts in European Russia (by far the most profitable stands) at rates far exceeding annual growth.

Beginning in 1925, long before the announcement of the First Five-Year Plan, the industrial bureaus began agitating for the implementation of Bogoslovskii's ideas, so as to maximize output. Pro-industrialists coveted the freedom of maneuver promised by flying management, as one 1928 article made clear, no matter the cost:

We should not worry ourselves with fears about the deforestation of certain regions, even if this changes the character of regions such as Smolensk, Kostroma, Tver, Novogorod, and others entirely. If all the forests of these regions were to be cut down, then these regions could be converted into areas suitable for the development of grain crops. No one will suffer from such a change; on the contrary, those "rotten places" on the map will disappear.²⁹

Critics of Bogoslovskii warned of the dangers inherent in flying management—entire regions stood to lose their forest cover permanently while distant forests in the far east and north maintained the fictional balance—but for industrializers, such an altered countryside was, if anything, a desirable result.³⁰

Despite the seemingly irresistible appeal that flying management and a changed landscape might appear to have held for the Bolshevik leadership, Vesenkha's requests to shift management in that direction met with remarkably little success throughout the 1920s—blocked, apparently, by politicians and agencies close to Stalin. In 1926, for instance, Vesenkha asked the People's Commissariat of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate (Rabkrin) to investigate Narkomzem's performance over the past years, in the hopes that the inspectorate might force Narkomzem to adopt flying management.³¹ The industrial bureaus claimed that its various sub-departments required 2,487,293 cubic sazhen, and the Commissariat of Transport demanded another 755,585, but Narkomzem had only allotted 2,914,000 cubic sazhen; if Narkomzem could not remedy the shortfall, Vesenkha argued, then perhaps more appropriate methods need be found.³² After evaluating the various claims, Rabkrin saw only two solutions to the dilemma; either "satisfy the annual petitions of

²⁹F. Syromolotov, "Organizovat' lesnoe khoziaistvo vokrug promyshlennosti," *Torgovo-promyshlennaia gazeta* 266 (1928), 4.

³⁰One of forestry's leading lights from the tsarist period argued that Bogoslovskii's theories "can in no way be recognized as correct, since in practice half of his management units would be mature forest, and the other half be completely barren—conditions barely describable as providing for strict sustainable use." See Mikhail Mikhailovich Orlov, "Novye techeniia v lesoustroistve," *Lesnoe khoziaistvo, lesopromyshlennost' i toplivo* 17–18 (February–March 1925): 18.

³¹"Vesenkha," Rabkrin reported, "in its presentations to this body has attempted to prove that Narkomzem cannot satisfy in full the needs of transport and forest industry ... and advances the claim about the necessity of linking the existing system with the fulfillment of industrial plans." See Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), f. 374, op. 9, d. 162, l. 4.

³²A sazhen is an old Russian unit of measurement approximately equal to seven feet.

Vesenkha in full, and consequently to travel further toward the destruction of the forest, as well as to ignore the needs of the rural population and the cities,” or “bring proper forest management to the nation’s groves.”³³ Noting that similar petitions had been reviewed and denied many times—five times in 1925 alone—Rabkrin sided with Narkomzem.³⁴ Instead of approving flying management, the inspectorate endorsed Narkomzem’s right to “determine which forest lands will be made available for exploitation and to balance the needs of the state forest consumers,” thereby simultaneously spoiling Vesenkha’s designs for increased control over forest land and acknowledging that Soviet control figures had run ahead of reality.³⁵ In short, Rabkrin opted to support Narkomzem in its assertion that “the demands of Vesenkha exceed the available resources by more than one million cubic sazhen,” and thus endorsed the policy that industry should accustom itself to work with less timber, in accordance with scientific limitations.³⁶

When Rabkrin revisited the matter in October 1928—after the acceptance of the First Five-Year Plan—its disdain for what it saw as wastefulness on the behalf of the industrial bureaus only intensified. Vesenkha again was grumbling that its allotments were too small, and that countries as small as Finland and Sweden had more success on the export market as a result.³⁷ But rather than endorse a relaxation of restrictions, Rabkrin instead listed a variety of shortcomings that Vesenkha should correct, insisting among other things that the agency should acquire more highly educated workers, institute longer work days, and clear its assigned plots more thoroughly.³⁸ Rabkrin yet again reaffirmed sustainable yield as a guiding principle, and if this principle resulted in timber shortages, then logging firms were encouraged to strive for increased efficiency.

Rabkrin’s support of conservationism carries special significance because of the inspectorate’s connections to the very pinnacles of Soviet power and Stalin himself. E. A. Rees asserted that Rabkrin wielded considerable influence because of its ties to the party’s ruling elite: “conceived as a party watchdog, [Rabkrin] was transformed into the Secretariat’s handmaiden in the service of the ruling triumvirate” of Stalin, Zinoviev, and Kamenev.³⁹ Rabkrin’s directors—in 1925, Valerian Kuibyshev, and from 1926 to 1930, Sergo Ordzhonikidze—were both close allies of Stalin, as well as future members of the Politburo; if it is true, as Sheila Fitzpatrick writes, that Rabkrin functioned “as the party Central Committee’s agent for the control and supervision of industry,” then it is unlikely that

³³GARF, f. 374, op. 9, d. 162, l. 7.

³⁴Vesenkha’s requests had been rejected by the Supreme Economic Council on May 18, 1925, and September 3, 1925, by the Council of People’s Commissars in May 1925, and by the presidium of the Supreme Executive Committee on July 20, 1925.

³⁵GARF, f. 374, op. 9, d. 162, ll. 8, 12.

³⁶*Ibid.*, l. 65. Rabkrin’s support of Narkomzem was steady and stretched back to 1923 (*ibid.*, d. 165).

³⁷*Ibid.*, op. 8, d. 1650, l. 17. According to Vesenkha figures the Soviet Union exported in 1926 3.3 million cubic meters of timber, while Finland exported 3.9 million and Sweden 5.0 million. Vesenkha argued in its petition that “if America had been limited by the same constraints, and had been forced to base its harvests on annual growth, they would have taken but a fraction of the timber that fueled their growth.” Vesenkha protested that Canada, too, benefited from harvesting wood according to its availability rather than its annual growth (*ibid.*, op. 9, d. 1650, l. 61).

³⁸*Ibid.*, op. 8, d. 1650, l. 72.

³⁹E. A. Rees, *State Control in Soviet Russia: The Rise and Fall of the Workers’ and Peasants’ Inspectorate, 1920–34* (Houndsmills, England, 1987), 118.

Rabkrin would have published any report whose findings irritated the members of that body.⁴⁰ And because, as Fitzpatrick writes, “Rabkrin’s specialty was uncovering hidden resources and unused capacity—in other words, demonstrating how industrial productivity could be maximized with minimum new investment,” its choice to thwart Vesenkha’s plans and instead to endorse conservationism fit perfectly with its mission.⁴¹ If Rabkrin, as Rees claims, was “ruthlessly adapted to the Politburo’s needs” and “a powerful instrument [of the Politburo and Stalin’s Secretariat] to control the party-state apparatus,” then forest conservation figured among those needs.⁴²

Like Rabkrin, the Union of Agricultural and Forest Workers played an important role in foiling Vesenkha’s aspirations, since conservationism remained popular among its members, and the reports the union submitted to the Council of People’s Commissars (Sovnarkom) exerted a strong influence upon the council’s legislation through the year 1929. In the late 1920s, Sovnarkom often looked to the Agricultural and Forest Workers’ Union to adjudicate disputes between Vesenkha and Narkomzem, and the union, its reports and documents make clear, zealously supported Narkomzem’s approach to forestry. The union’s 1926 report to Sovnarkom SSSR, for example, complained that

fiscal goals overwhelmingly dominate our forest management. The damage caused by this approach, due to the insufficient attention to restorative processes in the forest, will be felt only after fifty to eighty years. ... All work in the forest should assist the retention and restoration of the forests, for in forest science there exists the indisputable argument that “the cut of the forest is the initial process of its regeneration.” In the future it is necessary to move toward restorative processes in the forest, since only then will the industrialization of the economy be possible.⁴³

Not only did the report of the union warn against the dangers of unchecked exploitation—against practices it characterized as “backward and excessively conservative”—it explicitly proposed linking methods of exploitation to forest ecology by citing Morozov’s principle that the cutting of the forest and its regeneration are synonyms.⁴⁴ The report submitted by the Union of Agricultural and Forest Workers also helped illustrate the deeply irreconcilable nature of the dispute about the correct form of nationalized forestry: both conservationists and industrialists saw each other’s proposals as backward and irrational.

Sovnarkom’s pronouncements in the late 1920s on the matter reveal that, if a choice had to be made, the government would choose conservation. When Sovnarkom published, in November 1927, one of its last major forest decrees before the announcement of the Five-Year Plan, the influence of the Agricultural and Forest Workers’ Union 1926 report was everywhere apparent, while the demands of Vesenkha scarcely received a mention. In isolating the causes of shortcomings of Soviet forest management, Sovnarkom focused primarily on overzealous and unwise exploitation, pointing to “the excessive exploitation

⁴⁰Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Politics of Soviet Industrialization: Vesenkha and its Relationship with Rabkrin, 1929–30* (Washington, DC, 1983), 11.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 24.

⁴²Rees, *State Control*, 227.

⁴³GARF, f. 5466, op. 2, d. 279, ll. 35, 38–39.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, l. 23.

of less forested areas, the insufficient exploitation of forests in richly forested regions, and the extremely unsatisfactory development of regenerative processes in forest management, reflected in the dangerous lowering of forest cover and the worsening of their general condition."⁴⁵ Sovnarkom followed the November 1927 decree with a similar but even more emphatic version published on February 2, 1928. Again repudiating the claims of Vesenkha, Sovnarkom isolated as the basic failures of Soviet forest management "the extremely insufficient development of regenerative processes in forest management, creating a dangerous decrease in the amount of forest cover, the fall of productivity of forest land, and the worsening of their conditions."⁴⁶ Conservation-minded foresters knew very well what this admission meant in practical terms: Sovnarkom had sided definitively with Narkomzem, and rather than expanded, Vesenkha's most abusive practices (from Narkomzem's perspective) would "in many cases ... be completely halted or brought to a minimum."⁴⁷ Delighted by Sovnarkom's endorsement of its prescriptions, the union proclaimed that the decree "should be met with enormous satisfaction by all forest workers. This proclamation of the highest state organ about the strict care for the forest is, on the one hand, an indirect indication of, and approval for, the arguments of Soviet forest specialists; on the other hand, it arms them with a powerful weapon for the assertion of the principles of proper management."⁴⁸ As the contours of the First Five-Year Plan emerged in the autumn of 1928, Narkomzem could look back on several years of nearly uninterrupted political victories and a steady expansion of its authority and funding, and with Vesenkha's attempted incursions repeatedly rebuffed, it appeared that Narkomzem had prevailed, and that Soviet industrialization would proceed on the basis of sustainable practices.

As bright as prospects appeared in late 1928, Narkomzem's fortunes reversed quickly the next spring, when the reports from the first logging season of the Five-Year Plan rolled in. Control figures showed that by the first of January, only 17.3 percent of the annual target had been reached; by February 15 this number had crept up to 31.5 percent, and by March 15—the end of the logging period—to only 48.7 percent.⁴⁹ The dismal performance of Narkomzem's logging apparatus immediately drew the attention of the plenum of the Agricultural and Forest Workers' Union Central Committee, which reversed course and voiced very different opinions about the problems facing Soviet forest management than they had just a few months before: "The plenum deems that the basic shortcoming of contemporary forest management is the insufficient development of forest exploitation, the backward organizational forms and extremely backward technique of forest management, and the contamination of the forest bureaus with foreign elements."⁵⁰ Matters, clearly, had changed. Not only did the Agricultural and Forest Workers' Union mention for the first time foreign, wrecking elements; the union's plenum abruptly turned its back on

⁴⁵Ibid., op. 1, d. 36, l. 230.

⁴⁶"Postanovlenie Soiuznogo pravitel'stva o lesnom khoziaistve," *Lesovod* 4 (April 1928): 6.

⁴⁷N. Iurin, "Lesnoe khoziaistvo SSSR i zakon o merakh k ego uporiadocheniiu ot fevralia 1928 g.," *Lesnoe khoziaistvo* 4 (1928): 21–22.

⁴⁸Ibid., 10.

⁴⁹B. Ende, "Khod leszagotovok," *Lesovod* 3 (March 1929): 22.

⁵⁰"Krupnye industrializirovannye edinitsy lesnogo khoziaistva (Resheniie II plenuma TsK soiuz)," *Lesovod* 5–6 (May–June 1929): 8.

Narkomzem's conservationism, and instead supported "factories of wood ... built along the lines of industrial concerns."⁵¹ Ostensibly under political pressure, the union initiated a purge, announcing in its weekly newspaper that "our Soviet apparatus, especially in the village, is littered with bureaucrats, kulaks, sub-kulaks ... [and] people torn from the working masses and who do not understand or accept the essence of class struggle."⁵²

The union's defection from Narkomzem's cause heralded a mass exodus. That same month, Rabkrin performed a similar about-face and supported the "subjection of forest management to the interests of the industrialization of the country."⁵³ *Lesovod*, which until 1929 had been constant in its support of conservationism, began to publish articles by young foresters and forestry students describing Soviet forest management as "distinguished by its conservatism," a field where "new ideas are being created, but due to the fear of the upper leadership are smothered," and where "those who attempt to implement changes are often punished."⁵⁴ Voices defending conservationism in the forestry press grew muted, while those urging the relaxation of regulations spoke out more boldly: Bogoslavskii launched a campaign to dispense with the "fetish" of sustainable yield entirely, as a vestige of the "era of romantics, when small children were frightened by fairy tales" about deforestation.⁵⁵

Yet despite the shift in tone in the spring of 1929, the party leadership nevertheless proved reluctant to abandon conservationism entirely. In June, a plenum of the party Central Committee held a meeting to decide the future of Soviet forest management, and in spite of the uninspiring numbers from the previous winter, a voice no less influential than that of Politburo member Lazar Kaganovich spoke out against an overreaction:

When we approach the question about who should be the master of the forest ... then we arrive at a sticking point between two agencies—Narkomzem and Vesenkha. Vesenkha has the larger appetite—they say "I will take it all and never be satisfied." I am afraid that they will gobble up (*perevarit*) the entire forest. So from the point of view of the protection of the forests, from the point of view of observation of the rules of forest management, oversight by Narkomzem should be left in place.⁵⁶

Despite Narkomzem's poor performance, the Central Committee plenum, concluding that "the existing system of logging is satisfactory neither in the system of Narkomzem nor Vesenkha," proposed a new administration dedicated to the "correct organization of forest exploitation," demonstrating its unwillingness to abandon the hope that, given proper funding, industrial demands could be reconciled with ecological limitations.⁵⁷

⁵¹Ibid., 10. The Union of Agricultural and Forest Workers was subsequently abolished in 1931.

⁵²"Nachinaetsia chistka," *Lesnoi rabochii* 11 (May 26, 1929): 1.

⁵³See "Mobilizuem les dlia industrializatsii! Lesorazrabotki otstaiut ot rosta potrebnosti v lese: Nuzhno izgnat' iz lesa lishnikh zagotovitelei," *Lesnoi rabochii* 7 (April 19, 1929): 1.

⁵⁴M. S., "Bol'she pesitel'nosti," *Lesovod* 1 (January 1929): 27.

⁵⁵S. A. Bogoslavskii, "Nuzhen li peresmotr ekonomicheskikh osnovanii sovremennogo lesoustroistva?" *Lesnoe khoziaistvo* 10–11 (1929): 18.

⁵⁶"Voprosy lesnogo khoziaistva na II plenum TsK," *Lesovod* 7–8 (July–August 1929): 18.

⁵⁷Ibid., 32. As late as August 16, 1929, Sovnarkom still drafted resolutions the concept that "forest management should be conducted on a basis providing for permanent and uninterrupted use of the forests, the improvement

The misgivings of the leadership notwithstanding, the party finally bowed to Vesenkha's protests on July 12, 1929, when an act of the central government divided the nation's forests into three categories—intensive zones, extensive zones, and reserve zones—and entrusted nearly all to Vesenkha.⁵⁸ Sovnarkom gave Vesenkha responsibility for the “protection of the forests, forest organization and ameliorative work, work for clearing old logging plots, work for the care and regeneration of the forest, and also the composition of plans of exploitation and the determination of annual cuts”—Narkomzem's former duties all—and long-term leases not to expire until the year 1989.⁵⁹ Its position gravely weakened, Narkomzem's decline into irrelevance followed swiftly. In December 1930, Sovnarkom entrusted Vesenkha with “the planning and regulation of all forest management and forest industry of the USSR,” and transferred to their administration “the entire state forest fund of the union republics ... [and] all the property and credits of Narkomzem for the administration of [their] forests,” as well as the scientific-research and experimental forests throughout the country.⁶⁰ Repealed were all the laws regarding state forest management dating back to 1924, the 1926 forest organization instructions, as well as the rules regarding timber pricing that provided revenue streams for regeneration work; after the repeal of the pricing rules, timber became essentially free for the producer.⁶¹ By the end of 1931, Vesenkha had achieved what it had lobbied for since its founding; the path to unchecked exploitation of the forest lay completely open, and flying management (renamed concentrated cutting) became the preferred practice throughout the Soviet Union.

Judging by its actions, the Soviet leadership almost instantly regretted its decision to give the forests over to Vesenkha. And with good reason: Vesenkha quickly embarked upon a program of forest exploitation inspired by Bogoslovskii's dismissal of sustainable yield, but so exaggerated that even Bogoslovskii himself came under fire for insufficient revolutionary enthusiasm.⁶² Vesenkha announced its plans to conduct concentrated logging even beyond Bogoslovskii's flexible guidelines, with enormous swathes of densely forested territory to be bulldozed—areas measured in square kilometers felled all at once.⁶³ Vesenkha

of their composition and quality, and the support and raising of productivity of forest soils” (GARF, f. 3316, op. 33, d. 602, l. 8).

⁵⁸RGAE, f. 5674, op. 1, d. 37, ll. 54–56.

⁵⁹Ibid., l. 55.

⁶⁰GARF, f. 3316, op. 23, d. 297, l. 8.

⁶¹Ibid., ll. 29–30. The timber pricing rules of October 16, 1924, provided Narkomzem with an especially useful tool to control forest exploitation throughout the 1920s; the rules forced Vesenkha to maximize the output derived from each plot they logged rather than demand additional parcels, since Vesenkha had to pay Narkomzem a fee for each parcel they logged.

⁶²The campus newspaper of the Leningrad Forest-Technical Institute argued in December 1931 that Bogoslovskii, “not understanding the role and significance of the [Five-Year] plan, and not considering the transitional period ... carries forward the basic foundations of bourgeois forest economics ... and ignores the theory of Soviet economics” (B. Kalinin, “Za chistotu marksistko-leninskoi teorii!” *Lesnaia pravda* 59 [December 31, 1931]: 3).

⁶³In July 1930, Vesenkha's forestry organ held a conference which resolved that “in view of the necessity of satisfying the economy's demands for wood, the unevenness of the distribution of the forests across the territory of the USSR ... and the presence of a large percentage of overmature stands in the forests of the north, Siberia, and Far East, it is necessary to reject management according to permanent, uninterrupted and even use

announced its intention to shift large-scale forestry to the far north and east sometime in the future, after roads and infrastructure in remote regions had been built. But until then, the ballooning quotas of the Five-Year Plan were to be filled by conducting concentrated cutting in the most accessible timber in the country, those located near the railroads and rivers of European Russia, at rates far exceeding annual growth.⁶⁴ Dramatic overlogging of conveniently located stands ensued; the 1930 take of timber exceeded annual growth in Leningrad oblast by 47 percent, in Western oblast by 125 percent, in Moscow oblast by 129 percent and in Ivanovo-Voznesensk oblast by 104 percent.⁶⁵ Vesenkha felled trees in Riazan okrug scheduled for harvest in 1976.⁶⁶

Protest in the forestry press appeared at once, but because the political atmosphere precluded a frontal assault on Vesenkha, supporters of conservation chose to adopt an oblique approach and emphasized the importance of forests for the country's industrializing drive. Rather than draw attention to the imperiled forests themselves—a previously winning move that suddenly had stopped working—conservationists began to emphasize the hydrological significance of forested land, warning that the state's canal and dam projects might be imperiled if deforestation continued apace. Narkomzem's chief A. I. Shul'ts first sounded the alarm in 1929 when he cautioned Gosplan that "the main water artery in the Ukraine is the Dniepr, and if suddenly the Administration of Forests decided in a fit of revolutionary enthusiasm to cut the forest along the basin of the Dniepr—this would lead, perhaps, even to the breakdown of Dnieprstroi. After all, the forest regulates the water regime there."⁶⁷ The appeals for careful logging—near bodies of water, if nowhere else—found a friendly reception throughout government, first in the Moscow City Soviet, which in the summer of 1930 published a decree outlawing clearcuts in the forests located in the basins of the rivers Moscow, Istra, and Ruza.⁶⁸ Yet this local measure, an article in *Lesnoi spetsialist* asserted, went nowhere far enough: "Although the decree applied only to the forests of the Moscow River, do we not need analogous instructions for the Volga as well? Navigation on the Oka has been closed for many years, and the Dniepr and Don are unnavigable for almost a third of their extent, as a consequence of the destruction of the forests."⁶⁹ The best solution, the

(*postoiianstvo, nepreryvnosti i ravnomernosti*) ... the areas to be logged in the USSR should be established according to the economic demands of forest industry, based on the maximal supply of products." See "Soveshchanie (pri Lesprome) po voprosam organizatsii lesnogo khoziaistva, mekhanizatsii i ratsionalizatsii rubki, vozki i splava 6–12 July 1930 g." *Lesnoe khoziaistvo i lesnaia promyshlennost'* 82–83 (July–August 1930): 71.

⁶⁴At the May 1932 All-Union conference for the reconstruction of forest industry, A. N. Sudarnikov admitted that "the forest exploitation during the First Five-Year Plan was not implemented uniformly. ... The factual exploitation was concentrated in areas composing no more than ten percent of the entire forest fund" (RGAE, f. 7654, op. 1, d. 49, l. 33).

⁶⁵"Sostoianie lesnoi promyshlennosti," *Lesnoe khoziaistvo i lesnaia promyshlennost'* 85–85 (September–October 1930): 77.

⁶⁶M. E. Tkachenko, "Zadachi lesnogo khoziaistva i 'Den' Lesa' v 1930 godu," *Lesnoi spetsialist* 7–8 (April 1930): 10.

⁶⁷RGAE, f. 4372, op. 27, d. 453, l. 136.

⁶⁸I. D. Golubovich, "Za ratsionalizatsiiu sposobov rubki," *Lesnoi spetsialist* 15–18 (August–September 1930): 30. The Moscow city soviet proved so receptive to the warnings perhaps because Moscow had been experiencing gradually worsening periodic floods throughout the early twentieth century, with the 1926 flood raising the Moscow River 25.55 feet above its normal levels (RGAE, f. 9449, op. 1, d. 2069, l. 18).

⁶⁹Golubovich, "Za ratsionalizatsiiu," 30.

article continued, was to strengthen forest conservation near all rivers, such that conservationism shaded into preservationism: “the soil near rivers should be permanently covered in forest ... and [because] the cut and the regeneration are synonyms ... the prescribed cut for forests near rivers should be significantly more complex than pure clear cuts.”⁷⁰ Morozov’s dictum was again referenced as a guiding principle, although disguised as a method to protect the hydrology of the country.

It is at this pivotal moment that Stalin brought his personal influence, heretofore indirect or tacit, to bear: he personally initiated legislation predicated on the belief that Russia’s hydrology necessitated forest protection. Party archives show that on May 30, 1931, Stalin raised a topic for discussion, “On the order of cutting of timber,” requesting Sovnarkom to prepare “in a month’s term, a draft law about the absolute forbiddance of cutting timber in certain regions so as to conserve the water in other regions.”⁷¹ On July 15, Sovnarkom returned its draft law to the Politburo, and by the end of July 1931, Decree No. 519, dividing all the forests of the country into two zones—the forest-industrial zone, and the forest-cultivation zone—became law. Vesenkha retained control over the forest-industrial zone and logged them as mercilessly as before, but a portion of the forest-cultivation zone was given back to Narkomzem.⁷² Furthermore, the decree obligated Narkomzem to establish for the rest of the forest-cultivation zone a “special, rigorous regime of cutting these forests, providing for their reestablishment,” and to make corresponding recommendations for Vesenkha to implement.⁷³ Regardless of which bureau controlled them, the forests in a one-kilometer belt along both banks of the Volga, Dniepr, Don, and Ural rivers were made off-limits to any logging whatsoever. Hence, less than one year after uniting the forests under one management system, Sovnarkom acknowledged that such an arrangement offered no safeguards against excessive exploitation, and again divided them into two.

Concerns about hydrology, rather than ideas about forest health, helped bring about the 1931 law, but the new legislation undoubtedly redounded to the advantage of conservationists by blunting the drive toward maximalism in forest politics and complicating the position of the forest radicals—and the radicals were enraged. “The construction of a classless, socialist society,” declared E. F. Pasyukov, a student at the Leningrad Forest Institute, in an article in the institute’s newspaper, “demands the subjection of forest industry to the interests of the present day. Either we can relate to the forest carefully and give power to the capitalists, or we can provide for stormy tempos of industrialization and make our country better able to protect itself.”⁷⁴ Yet the party, Pasyukov riskily insisted, had lost perspective and chosen the incorrect option: “Unfortunately, the seventeenth party conference on forest industry ... supports measures conducted in the forest-cultivation zone that are

⁷⁰RGAE, f. 4372, op. 27, d. 453, l. 32–33.

⁷¹Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii, f. 17, op. 163, d. 790, l. 58.

⁷²RGAE, f. 9465, op. 1, d. 1, l. 35; *Lesnoi spetsialist* 7–8 (July–August 1931): 9–10, 11–12. The forests of the forest industrial zone continued to be exploited as though the very concept of planning for the future was inherently bourgeois; if in 1929–30 the timber harvested by VSNKh equaled 175 percent of the annual growth of the accessed forests, these percentages for 1932 through 1935 were to be 248, 213, 193, and 180 (GARF, f. 5467, op. 14, d. 44, l. 93).

⁷³GARF, f. 5446, op. 1, d. 61, ll. 176–77.

⁷⁴E. F. Pasyukov, “Perspektivy razvitiia lesnoi promyshlennosti,” *Lesnaia pravda* 69 (25 April 1932): 3.

based on principles of sustainability; such planning subverts the spirit of Marx and Engels, and subjugates forest industry to nature itself rather than to planning. The forest is not for man, it would seem, but man for the forest.”⁷⁵ Perhaps just as vexing to Vesenkha leaders was the fact the protected forests provided conservationists with places to work. A forester working a plot near the Volga reported that by July 1930 almost half of the management staff had been cashiered by Vesenkha and placed under arrest, but the remainder “continue[d] the selective cuts proposed for the forest and insisted upon by the late professor Morozov”; the 1931 law halted the purge by making those Volga forests part of the protected zone.⁷⁶

Supporters of hyperindustrialism in the forest found themselves in a strange situation: closely allied with state interests and in possession of every ideological and rhetorical advantage in the struggle against conservationism, yet unable to defeat their enemies conclusively or shake the state from its support of forest protection. They organized conferences and filed petitions, but to no avail. In May 1932, Vesenkha invited 478 functionaries to Moscow to discuss the reconstruction of forest industry, with nearly all participants employees of national or regional planning commissions, Vesenkha, or other industrial bureaus. The speakers did their best, without going too far, to equate the newly protected forests with the discredited concept of sustainable yield. “It is necessary with all decisiveness to unmask the Trotskyite, right-opportunist wrecking position in forest management and forest organization,” proclaimed an employee named Kalinin from Vesenkha’s forest bureau:

We must strike a blow at the reactionary theories attempting to counterbalance and undermine forest exploitation based on mechanization and increased labor productivity, identified with the well-known slogan of the old forestry, “the cut and the regeneration of the forest are synonyms.” The principle of permanence ... is not compatible with our plan, of moving toward socialism.⁷⁷

Kalinin’s speech—and his views reflect well the mood of the conference—suggests that for the workers of the industrial bureaus, the issue was not only free access to exploitable resources, but whether communist society would be characterized by constant change, or by caution and conservatism.

The party leadership chose to ignore the protests and, in 1936, to strengthen forest protection further, by greatly expanding the zone of protection, and, with Stalin’s direct participation, by creating a powerful new administration to enforce the new regulations. After operating for a few years, the 1931 law’s shortcomings emerged: for most of the protected forests, Narkomzem could make only management recommendations, which Vesenkha had no incentive to heed. To remedy this, in July 1936 a new agency was founded, the Main Administration of Forest Protection and Afforestation (GLO) whose sole duty would be to look after lands henceforth called “water protective forests.”⁷⁸ There would be

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Lesovod Belov, “Tragediia Sredne-Volzhskogo leskhoza,” *Lesnoe khoziaistvo i lesnaia promyshlennost’* 82–83 (July–August 1930): 66–67.

⁷⁷RGAE, f. 7654, op. 1, d. 49, ll. 96–97. As all participants at the conference were aware, “the cut and the regeneration are synonyms” was Morozov’s primary tenet.

⁷⁸GARF, f. 5446, op. 17, d. 9, l. 141.

no intervening layers of bureaucracy; the head of the GLO and his two deputies were to be designated by Sovnarkom and would answer to that body alone, and only Sovnarkom could allow exceptions to the logging restrictions that the GLO established.⁷⁹ Forbidden under threat of criminal responsibility was any cutting of the forest (aside from sanitary cutting) in vast zones lying

- a) in a twenty-kilometer belt along the Dniepr and two of its tributaries, the Don and three of its tributaries, the Volga and ten of its tributaries, the Ural, and the Western Dvina;
- b) in a six-kilometer belt along two tributaries of the Dniepr, four tributaries of the Don, five tributaries of the Volga, two tributaries of the Ural, and two tributaries of the Oka; and
- c) in a four-kilometer belt along five tributaries of the Don, eleven of the Volga, one of the Bel', and one of the Oka.⁸⁰

In the areas that lay outside these belts but still inside the basins of the rivers named above, logging was allowed, but this would be conducted by the GLO, and the harvest could not exceed the annual growth of the forests in question. Explicitly targeted for criticism in the publicity surrounding the law was Vesenkha, accused in *Pravda* of “pursuing narrow bureaucratic interests,” of “conducting forest management in an uncultured manner,” and of forsaking forest protection, “the holy duty of all Soviet citizens.”⁸¹

The 1936 law reached far beyond the scope of its predecessor. The transferred area totaled 51,737,000 hectares, or 200,000 square miles—not only a significant percentage (roughly a third) of the forests of European Russia, but more importantly, the very best forests of European Russia; the most accessible, the cheapest to transport to population centers, the best watered, and the most productive.⁸² These protected zones were so extensive that they amounted to a majority or near majority of forest land in most oblasts of central Russia, and moreover, a significant percentage of total land in many oblasts, as the map of the vicinity of Voronezh shows (Fig. 2). Like the 1931 law, the striking decision to sequester the nation's very richest forests focused on hydrological function, and like the 1931 law, the initiative came from the very top of the party apparatus. As the deputy head of Narkomzem's forest protection arm, V. M. Solov'ev, reported to a convention of foresters, “this unusual law, comrades—a turning point in forest management—was developed under the direct guidance and with the direct participation of Stalin himself.”⁸³

The foresters who convened at the GLO's first conference in November 1936 formulaically expressed their “limitlessly happy” thanks to Stalin, but they also heard complaints from Narkomtiazhprom (Vesenkha's new appellation after 1936), whose workers were rather less pleased with the new protection regime—telling indications that the new

⁷⁹Ibid., op. 7, d. 10, l. 277.

⁸⁰Ibid., op. 17, d. 8, ll. 142–44.

⁸¹“Na okhranu rek i lesov,” *Pravda*, July 4, 1936.

⁸²RGAE, f. 9449, op. 1, d. 654, ll. 23–24. In some places, protected forests greatly outnumbered the non-protected; in the Belarussian republic, for instance, 3,032,000 hectares, out of a total of 3,662,000 hectares were protected (ibid., op. 2, d. 1, l. 13). The area of the water protective zones was equal in size to 80 percent of all the forested area in Western Europe.

⁸³Ibid., op. 1, d. 1984, l. 3.

law had teeth.⁸⁴ Loggers, it was reported, thought of the law as a “handicap,” as “reactionary legislation,” and they worked to make the transfer of lands and personnel to the GLO as difficult as possible.⁸⁵ In Western oblast, Narkomtiazhprom’s logging representatives “unconditionally refused to transfer the primary expert foresters,” and at the meetings called to discuss the new boundaries, “the director categorically forbade the discussion

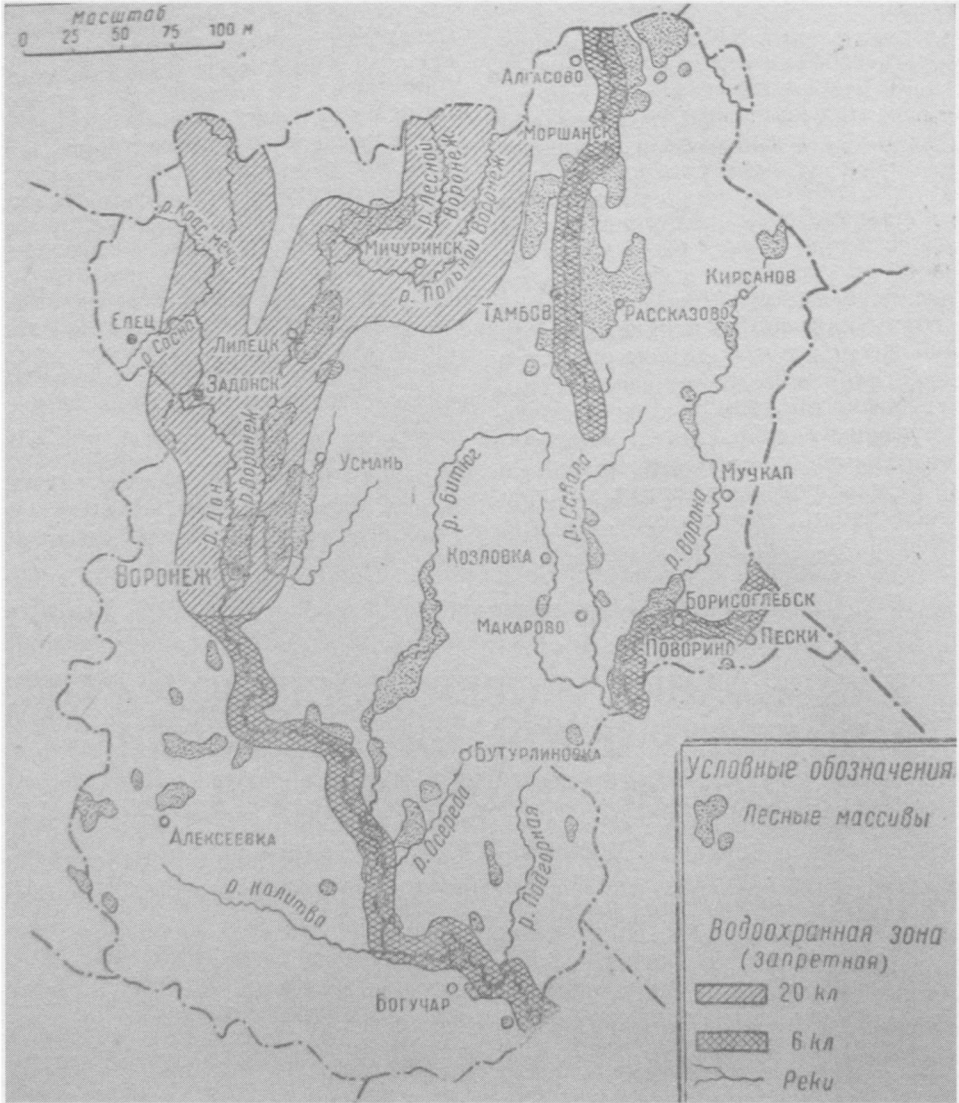


FIG. 2 Map of Voronezh oblast, from G. F. Basov, “Regulirovanie poverkhnostnogo stoka v vodookhranoi zone v usloviakh voronezhskoi oblasti,” *V zashchitu lesa* 2 (October 1937): 26.

⁸⁴Ibid., op. 2, d. 1, l. 5. After 1931, Vesenkha was reorganized, and hence forest logging was transferred to the People’s Commissariat for Heavy Industry, or Narkomtiazhprom.

⁸⁵Ibid., op. 1, d. 1984, l. 4.

of take-overs and surrenders,” and then asked the GLO representatives to leave.⁸⁶ In the Middle Volga region, the local logging agency, Sredles, steadfastly refused to give up any worker housing, automobiles, or horses to the GLO; in Gor'kovskii krai, representatives offered the GLO—charged with overseeing almost six million hectares in the local area—office space in their *bania*.⁸⁷

After the transfer finally took place, the GLO was able to assess the condition of the forests it inherited, leading the agency to reverse almost all of the practices that Narkomtiashprom had employed since 1929. Research conducted in 1937 showed that in 1935 Narkomtiashprom had budgeted 67,000 rubles to care for the 27,000,000 hectares of water protective forests under its supervision, or less than one-fifth of a kopek per hectare—but in many places, even this small sum had not been spent.⁸⁸ Vesenkha's inattention had consequences: 39 percent of the forests in Ukraine's protected zone, for instance, were denuded of tree cover; in the Lower Volga region, 58 percent of such forests had no trees at all.⁸⁹ In response, the transferred forests were, as before, divided into parcels, test plots laid anew, and calculations linking logging to annual growth drawn up. The logging plans that Narkomtiashprom had left for 1936 were revised dramatically downward, from 17,583 cubic meters to 6,180 cubic meters, a reduction of 63 percent.⁹⁰

Despite the GLO's less-than-perfect performance record during its first year of existence—or perhaps because of it—the state only expanded the GLO's reach and funding after 1936.⁹¹ At the explicit request of republic-level governments, the GLO's fourteen administrations were divided into twenty-three so that inspectors could observe more closely conditions on the ground.⁹² Sovnarkom's decree of April 9, 1937, gave the GLO the responsibility to oversee the forest activities of every other state agency, even in non-water protective forests.⁹³ At the same time, the GLO's funding was greatly enlarged, from 465,440,988 rubles in 1937 to 843,883,442 rubles in 1938 (an increase of 81 percent), with the money allocated for capital investment almost quadrupling.⁹⁴ Finally, in 1940 a large percentage of the forests obtained in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was granted to the GLO, raising its holdings from fifty-eight million hectares to seventy-four million.⁹⁵ Narkomtiashprom stemmed the tide successfully only once, when in 1941, in connection

⁸⁶Ibid., op. 2, d. 1, l. 9.

⁸⁷Ibid., ll. 20 ,38.

⁸⁸Ibid., l. 172.

⁸⁹Ibid., op. 1, d. 1977a, l. 10.

⁹⁰Ibid., d. 651, ll. 12, 18.

⁹¹The GLO fulfilled its national quotas for surveying and categorizing forests and for planting new ones in 1937, but individual regions such as the Lower Volga (32 percent) or Gork'ii (25 percent) offices fared far worse. See “Plan vesennikh lesokul'turnykh rabot i zadachi stakhanovskogo dvizheniia,” *Za zashchitu lesa* 2 (February 1938): 5.

⁹²RGAE, f. 9449, op. 1, d. 654, ll. 4–5, 20. In a letter from July 9, 1937, the Council of People's Commissars of the Udmurt Autonomous Republic complained that “the lack of a local office of forest protection hinders the oversight of the leskhozy,” and asked for its own regional office. Though this appeal was rejected at first, by 1938 the Udmurt branch of the GLO had opened. Likewise, the Chuvash Republic reported that without a local GLO outpost, its forests were disappearing at four times the rate of natural replenishment.

⁹³Ibid., d. 669, l. 12.

⁹⁴Ibid., d. 654, l. 27.

⁹⁵Ibid., d. 2214, l. 3.

with wartime demands, it persuaded Sovnarkom to reduce the four-kilometer-wide “forbidden zones” to three kilometers; but the six-kilometer and twenty-kilometer belts were left intact. More sweeping measures, such as Bogoslovskii’s call for the Soviet Union to “rid itself of its attachment to ‘old village ways’” by introducing clearcuts in the water-protective zone, Gosplan’s proposed legislation to “fundamentally rework” the GLO’s logging rules so as to “reduce the influence of Morozov,” or Narkomtiashprom’s efforts to eliminate the GLO entirely, came to nothing.⁹⁶

Soviet forest protection grew yet more robust—and achieved the form it would retain until the last day of 2006—on April 23, 1943, when Sovnarkom reversed the temporary war-time legislation allowing increased logging and issued Decree N°. 430, dividing the nation’s forests into three groups, two of which were subject to protective measures.⁹⁷ Into Group I went “the forests of the state *zapovedniki*, soil protective, field protective, and resort forests, [and] forests of green zones around industrial firms and towns”; in these forests, only “sanitary cuts and selective cuts of overmature timber” were allowed, with clearcuts of all types forbidden.⁹⁸ Into Group II went all the forests of Central Asia and along the left bank of the Volga; here, only cuts less than or equal to the annual growth, “ratified by Sovnarkom,” were allowed. Group I and II forests remained under the control of the GLO. In Group III were grouped all other forests, on which no restrictions whatsoever were imposed.

The 1943 classification greatly expanded upon the protections provided by the 1936 law; the forests of entire oblasts, among them Moscow, Voronezh, Kursk, Smolensk, Vladimir, Tambov, Penza, Riazan’, Saratov, Rostov, and Stalingrad, were placed in groups I and II, protecting them, at least ideally, from all exploitation.⁹⁹ Over time, the size of Group I forests grew tremendously, until they represented by far the world’s largest area so protected.¹⁰⁰ As had been the case with the 1931 and 1936 laws, concerns about the hydrological function of forests rather than fears about overuse continued to underlie Soviet

⁹⁶S. A. Bogoslovskii, “Systemy rubok glavnogo pol’zovaniia v lesakh SSSR,” *Za zashchitu lesa* 1 (September 1937): 6; M. G. Zdorik, “Perspektivy razvitiia lesnogo khoziaistva vodookhranoi zony v tret’em piatiletii,” *Za zashchitu lesa* 5 (May 1938): 7; RGAE, f. 9449, op. 1, d. 2199, l. 4. In the summer of 1938, Gosplan submitted to Sovnarkom draft legislation indicating that “the rules of logging the forest in the water protective zones ... are scientifically unfounded and composed according to formula (*shablonno*) ... and should be fundamentally reworked,” but GLO chief G. P. Motovilov countered that “generally accepted scientific opinions about [our] practices are as of yet lacking,” and therefore neither affirm nor condemn GLO practices; a “fundamental reworking [was] not necessary.” Sovnarkom sided with Motovilov (RGAE, f. 9449, op. 1, d. 2199, ll. 4, 7ob., 8). In addition, Sovnarkom received repeated requests to entrust protection measures to Narkomles, thereby obviating the GLO. They always rejected them (for example, *ibid.*, d. 11, l. 13).

⁹⁷The 1943 law also may have been a response to the extreme exploitation of the water protective forests of the occupied zone by the Nazis, who leveled for firewood the forests of suburban Moscow and the Donbass in the first year of the war (Red’ko and Red’ko, *Istoriia lesnogo khoziaistva Rossii*, 396).

⁹⁸RGAE, f. 9466, op. 5, d. 323, ll. 1–2.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, d. 207, ll. 25–35. At this juncture, it should be mentioned that the level of enforcement of the forest protection laws is hard to gauge. The laws may have been violated extensively, either by state agencies or by individual citizens, but if so these violations have not left a paper trail. The extensive complaints of the logging firms, in contrast, suggest that the laws were enforced.

¹⁰⁰Over the next decades, the Group I forests would grow to encompass 194.3 million hectares, an area the size of Mexico, or one-fourth the size of the continental United States (Blandon, *Soviet Forest Industries*, 238). See also Charles Backman and Thomas Waggener, *Soviet Timber Resources and Utilization: An Interpretation of the 1988 National Inventory* (Seattle, 1991).

forest protection, but forest protection driven by hydrological considerations is forest protection nonetheless. And intriguingly, although forest protection in the Stalin era was driven by pragmatic rather than preservationist concerns, Stalin's policies withdrew millions of hectares from economic exploitation and ordered that they be left more or less untouched, in keeping with the supposition that complex, wild forests regulated water flows and decreased silt loads more effectively than managed forests. As a result, one could say that Soviet forest protection was not only conservationist, but *de facto* preservationist as well.

Stalin-era environmentalism reached its zenith in 1947 with the creation of the Ministry of Forest Management (Minleskhoz). (Another initiative from this period related to forestry, the Great Stalin Plan for the Transformation of Nature of 1948–53, sought to reverse human-induced climate change via afforestation, but space limitations prevent a discussion of the plan here.) Throughout the 1940s, Soviet governments at both the union and republic level repeatedly expressed frustration with the chronic underperformance of the forest industry, and had issued stern warnings to Narkomtiazhprom in July 1945 and May 1946 urging decisive action.¹⁰¹ In the spring of 1947, after yet another disappointing year, Sovnarkom carried through on its threats and eliminated Narkomtiazhprom's forest bureau (the Ministry of Forest Industry, or Minlesprom) as an independent entity, folding its duties into the new Minleskhoz; according to a decree signed by Stalin, Minleskhoz was to take control of all the nation's forests, to "define the size and placement of all logging plans, to allot the parcels to various logging bureaus," and to ensure that the logging rules were observed.¹⁰²

Gross industrial output, however, was only one factor in the decision to liquidate Minlesprom, and likely not the predominant one. If output were the guiding concern, the state could have relaxed or eliminated the restrictions regarding Group I and II forests. Instead, conservation issues represented the primary consideration. In its decree creating the new agency, Sovnarkom cited the confusing welter of logging agencies—at least twenty-four ministries contracted with Minlesprom for logging rights, and countless more, including the NKVD's gulag, conducted their own felling—as a cause of serious mismanagement and environmental degradation: "The forest fund is distributed among many ministries of bureaus, which leads to the incorrect exploitation of the forest, a predatory logging of immature and middle-aged stands and the use of construction timber as firewood."¹⁰³ Minlesprom, in the central government's estimation, had proved itself unable to protect the

¹⁰¹GARF, f. A-259, op. 6, d. 3507, l. 76. A letter from the State Planning Commission to the deputy head of the RSFSR Sovnarkom from May 7, 1946, reveals the exasperation that government officials felt when considering the industrialists' management of the forest; it gave as the reasons for Minlesprom's failures its inability to "cope with the basic and urgent tasks for the fulfillment of the plan of logging, and its inability to create its own cadre of workers"—in other words, its basic incompetence. In 1945, Minlesprom RSFSR met only 78 percent of its gross production targets and 75 percent of its logging targets, with a financial loss of 77 million rubles (*ibid.*, ll. 6, 10). In 1945, in keeping with the renaming of every branch of the government apparatus, the People's Commissariat of Forest Industry (Narkomlesprom) was redesignated the Ministry of Forest Industry (Minlesprom).

¹⁰²RGAE, f. 9466, op. 1, d. 22b, l. 2.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, l. 1. Agencies that held their own forests and conducted their own logging included bureaus as diverse as the Ministry of Arms Production and the Ministry of Fishing (*ibid.*, d. 228, ll. 2–5).

forest from overlogging, fires, insects, disease, or from logging errors hindering regeneration—and thus was abolished.

The elimination of Minlesprom might have amounted to a simple reorganization without practical significance (like the many reshufflings that Soviet forest management would undergo in the 1960s and 1970s) if not for the fact that the leadership of Ministry of Forest Management was drawn from the old protection agency, the GLO. For the six years that Minleskhov existed, the GLO's former employees and their priorities dominated the new forest management agency.¹⁰⁴ In his first report to Sovnarkom written in the fall of 1947, the head of Minleskhov and the former chief of the GLO, G. P. Motovilov, immediately set out the objectives of the new ministry: to bring forest management in line with the conservationist aspects of Soviet law, and to undo many of the industrialists' reforms from the early 1930s.¹⁰⁵ In three years' time, his efforts began to bear fruit; while harvests were basically constant, logging in Group I and II forests was down throughout the Soviet Union, compensated for by logging in Group III forests (Table 1).

TABLE 1 Lumber harvests (millions of cubic meters)

	1948	1949	1950
Group I + II Forests	114.9	103.2	96.7
Group III Forests	147.0	168.5	180.5
Total	261.9	271.7	277.2

RGAE, f. 9466, op. 1, d. 273. l. 11.

Minleskhov also carried forward the work of the GLO—and thereby advanced environmentalist concerns—by steadily expanding the size of protected forests throughout the country. During its six years of existence, Minleskhov submitted seventy-six petitions to Sovnarkom—all were approved—requesting that forested land be designated as deserving Group I protection. In 1950 alone, according to Minleskhov's 1950 annual report, “there was transferred from Group II and III forests to Group I forests 3,540,000 hectares,” an area larger than all of the forests of the United Kingdom.¹⁰⁶ In addition to creating new Group I forests, Minleskhov expanded those already existing by reversing the 1941 legislation narrowing the protective belts alongside rivers; on September 29, 1949, the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR restored the twenty-, six-, and four-kilometer forbidden

¹⁰⁴The minister and deputy minister of Minleskhov met with Stalin soon after the new ministry was created in order to lobby for increased protection measures, and Stalin responded favorably. At 7:00 P.M. on June 13, 1947, the two Minleskhov leaders, plus two representatives from the Ministry of Forest Industry met with Stalin, Mikoian, Beria, and Malenkov in Stalin's Kremlin office. Most of the meeting concerned timber mills in the Russian Far East, but when a the deputy minister of Ministry of Forest Industry indicated that he was interested in logging some rare birch stands that Koldanov thought should remain protected, Stalin interjected: “I know that place well; I swam there in my time ... back in 1913 I ran around there.” With that remark, the group moved on to another subject (RGAE, f. 538, op. 1, d. 17, 11. 1–7).

¹⁰⁵Motovilov's initial reports can be found at RGAE, f. 9466, op. 1, dd. 23 and 24a.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, d. 252b, l. 3.

zones throughout the Russian republic.¹⁰⁷ The power of the ministry to increase protection was so extensive that at times Minleskhoz even succeeded in reversing decrees from the All-Union Council of Ministers. On September 27, 1951, for instance, after the Council of Ministers issued a law “obligating Minleskhoz SSSR to grant logging plots in Tula oblast in order to eliminate damaged and overmature stands,” Minleskhoz responded that, “given the exhaustion of the mature stands in Tula oblast, and also the special significance of those forests, [the Ministry] does not find it possible to give permission to cut these stands of overmature timber.”¹⁰⁸

Undoubtedly, violations of the forest protection regime did occur, just as the wildlife protection measures described by Douglas Weiner were occasionally violated by party officials—but taken as a whole, the evidence suggests that Minleskhoz made real progress in protecting ecologically sensitive forests.¹⁰⁹ Official statistics, such as those cited above, show a clear shift away from logging in protected areas. Although such statistics might contain inaccuracies or even deliberate distortions, accounts from professionals who worked in Soviet forestry suggest that the period of 1947 to 1953 indeed did represent a high point in Soviet forest management. For example, an account published in *Pravda* on January 19, 1966, by Professor Viktor Nesterov of the Timiriazev Agricultural Academy noted that whereas the timber industry had during its years of dominance succeeded in converting 40,000,000 hectares of Soviet pine forests into thickets of aspen and underbrush, the Ministry of Forest Management in its years of existence had reduced the area of active forest exploitation and greatly expanded forest protection. Nesterov concluded his assessment by asserting that “the results of [Minleskhoz’s] work were apparent to anyone who had anything to do with the forests.”¹¹⁰

The period when Minleskhoz dominated Soviet forest management, however, was brief. On March 15, 1953, six days after Stalin’s funeral, Minleskhoz was liquidated.¹¹¹ With the

¹⁰⁷GARF, f. A-337, op. 1, d. 7, l. 113.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, d. 146, l. 208. The level of Minleskhoz’s funding provides an insight into its political influence; in 1948 it received 428 million rubles; in 1949, 510 million; in 1950, 798 million; in 1951, 519 million; in 1952, again 519 million, and in 1953 (the year of its elimination) 472 million (*ibid.*, dd. 1364, 1381, 1407, 1433, 1467, and 1500).

¹⁰⁹For a discussion of one such violation of Soviet nature protection laws see Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom*, chap. 15, which relates how the president of the All-Russian Society for the Protection of Nature was caught poaching fish with an illegal net—a violation detected only because a professor of biology happened to be bird-watching on the same river, and chose to report the infraction.

¹¹⁰Nesterov’s full statement of the actions of Minleskhoz reads: “There is a pressing need for an all-Union forest management agency with its own system of subordinate organizations. ... Specialists express the opinion that a USSR Ministry of Forestry could become such a competent agency. Incidentally, such a ministry existed from 1947 to 1953. During that time forest workers managed to do a great deal: The amount of sowing and planting of new groves was sharply expanded, and the trimming of the cutting areas was achieved everywhere. The ministry set up two hundred forest-protection stations outfitted with machinery. The annual volume of forest sowing and planting increased sevenfold. We are by no means thinking of idealizing the activity of this ministry, but the results of its work were apparent to everyone who had anything to do with the forests.” See V. Nesterov, “Reader Raises Important Problem: Forests Need a Solicitous Master,” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 18:3 (1966): 3.

¹¹¹RGAE, f. 9466, “predislovie,” l. 2. The outgoing deputy minister of forest management, Vasilii Iakovlevich Koldanov, blamed the liquidation of the protective agencies directly on Khrushchev and Beria (RGAE, f. 538, op. 1, d. 16, l. 104).

functions of *Minleskhoz* transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture, forest conservation fell into deep decline. The number of workers assigned to forest matters in Moscow fell from 927 to 342 in the space of six months, a drop of 62 percent, and then to 120 workers after a year.¹¹² The Council of Ministers shifted the center of gravity back to the industrial bureaus by decreeing that, beginning in 1954, “Russia’s exploitable forests will be allotted by the local organs of forest management according to economic plans established by ministries and agencies demanding timber,” rather than by a central forest management agency.¹¹³ Deputies from the eliminated bureau appealed directly to Khrushchev for help—“I wish to know the true motives for [this] incomprehensible reorganization,” one functionary demanded in 1955, “and why the capital investment in forest management has fallen from 217 million rubles in 1952 to 40 million in 1955”—but to no avail.¹¹⁴ Sixty-five different ministries and agencies thereafter shared control of the forests of the Russian republic, and for the rest of the Soviet period, forest management and forest exploitation were separated from one another, with industrial interests never again losing control. The Group I and II forests retained their protected status throughout the Soviet era and beyond—Putin finally eliminated them in December 2006—but forest protection measures never received the same attention after 1953. When Stalin passed from the scene, supporters of forest protection apparently lost the one political actor in Soviet history who was both willing to confront the industrial bureaus and powerful enough to tip the balance in conservation’s favor.

¹¹²RGAE, f. 538, op. 1, d. 1, l. 212, and d. 2, ll. 14 and 260.

¹¹³GARF, f. A-259, op. 7, d. 80, l. 2; RGAE, f. 538, op. 1, d. 75.

¹¹⁴RGAE, f. 538, op. 1, d. 1, l. 124.