A Revolution in the Forests?
Forest Conservation in Soviet Russia, 1917-1925

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“If our forest affairs continue to be run [as they have been in recent times] then nothing will be left, and where there was forest will be only open steppe. What will future generations say? They’ll say: there’s cultured people for you! Cultured peoples previously made it so that where there had once been steppe there are now gardens. But the communists? What did they do? Where once there were gardens, now there is empty steppe.”
—Comrade Smirnov, speaking to the Soviet Central Executive Committee, 15 October 1924

As in the United States and most of Western Europe, so too in Russia the emergence of forest conservation as a significant public concern is best dated from the late nineteenth century—perhaps thirty years or so prior to the early Soviet period.

The concentration of much of the Russian Empire’s population in European Russia, rather than in the far north or across the huge expanses of Siberia and the Far East, had for centuries mitigated pressure on the forests of those latter areas, and continued to do so well into the twentieth century. In European Russia, on the other hand, things were different. The clearing of land for agriculture, as well as growing industrial use, took an increasing toll during the decades between the serf emancipation of 1861 and the outbreak of World War I. Domestic use by the peasant population (for whom wood was the main source of fuel and building materials) added mightily to the pressure. Drawing for their inspiration on American, French, German, and other foreign examples, as well as on their own traditions, Russian foresters and the Imperial government came together toward the end of the century to lay the foundations of a conservation regime whose main achievement was a fairly comprehensive—but not hugely effective—forest protection law passed in 1888. Anxiety for the fate of Russia’s forests, however, only increased thereafter. Calls for further and more drastic conservation measures became ever clearer and louder during the years leading up to World War I. Though the war itself put serious forestry reform in Russia on hold, the revolutions of February and October 1917 (Old Style) opened up radical new possibilities. Indeed, the Soviet regime that seized
power in October took great interest not only in the forest economy generally, but specifically in forest conservation, which it claimed to understand—and set out to establish—as an integral part of the new socialist order. The raison d’être of Soviet conservation was from the start twofold. Economic considerations were primary. Forest use was to be planned and managed along the most scientifically and technically advanced lines so as to achieve the most efficient and sustainable yields. But at the same time, a social goal was implicit: to enroll the peasant masses—those who lived and worked in, around, and off the forests—in the new socialist order. As in other areas of life, so in forest matters, this involved inculcating collectivist rather than individualist attitudes, in large part through the establishment and maintenance of centrally-planned systems for resource management and use. Accordingly, major forest codes—were passed in 1918 and 1923.

The first decade of Soviet conservation—whether of forests or other natural resources—has been little studied, especially by English-language scholars. Brenton Barr and Kathleen Braden’s The Disappearing Russian Forest, for example, though an admirable work in many ways, moves rather quickly and lightly over these first years. Other, more general works on Russian and Soviet natural resource conservation also tend to give relatively short shrift to the revolutionary years, preferring to emphasize developments from the 1960s forward. The same is largely true also of post-Soviet Russian-language scholarship. (Soviet-era writings, on the other hand, often do place greater emphasis on the revolutionary era, and in particular on the figure of Lenin. However, in most cases they are heavily ideological and of limited scholarly use.)

Particularly relevant to the present study is Douglas Weiner’s Models of Nature: Ecology, Conservation and Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia. This treats early Soviet conservation generally, and only occasionally offers direct discussion of forest matters. Nonetheless, it has become the authoritative work on its subject, and it is in dialogue with this book that the present article is at least partly conceived. In his introductory essay, for example, Weiner writes that “through the early 1930s the Soviet Union was on the cutting edge of conservation theory and practice.” In fact, this claim—which has been seconded or cited by various other scholars—is not based on a comprehensive study of early Soviet resource management policies, but instead derives mainly from an evaluation of a network of unique nature preserves (zapovedniki) established by the Soviet government during the periods of War Communism and New Economic Policy. The preserves’ uniqueness lay both in the unprecedented level of inviolability they envisioned—disallowing in theory all economic activity, including hunting, fishing, and the gathering of materials—and in the emphasis given to their role as “natural laboratories,” areas in which proto-ecological scientific work would be conducted into the structure and dynamics of natural communities. The zapovednik project’s historical importance has been well established and will not be played down here. On the other hand, it also should be immediately clear that nature preserves represent only one aspect of Soviet nature conservation overall and a tiny fraction of the total land area of the early Soviet state. This raises some immediate questions. What, one wonders, did the establishment of Soviet power mean for natural resource use in other domains?
Does the story of the *zapovedniki* provide a model for early Soviet conservation in general? Or was this rather an isolated example of relatively progressive policy?

This essay—a general survey of forest policy and realities during the revolutionary era (including important pre-revolutionary antecedents)—is an effort to help fill in these blanks. An examination of forest policy paints a less flattering picture of early Soviet conservation than does Weiner’s focus on nature preserves. In particular, three points stand out. First, early Soviet forest protection, though it introduced some important innovations, was less than a new beginning. In contrast to the *zapovednik* project, whose pre-revolutionary antecedents were modest, post-revolutionary forestry drew heavily on tsarist-era traditions—the value and accomplishments of which, though not overwhelming, probably deserve greater recognition than they have received. Second, in terms of actual results, early Soviet forest protection achieved relatively little, and in contrast to the *zapovednik* project, *cannot* be judged “cutting edge” (unless, of course, that term be taken quite literally!). Third—and most important—though the shortcomings of early Soviet forest conservation had specific causes (including the devastation occasioned by years of civil war), the essential problems were not unique to Russia or to the Soviet system, but were in many ways comparable with those inherent in conservation regimes in other times and places, including the United States and western Europe. One problem was the staunch non-cooperation of segments of the population—primarily the Russian peasantry, the nation’s majority population—for whom nature conservation and all it entailed held little appeal and was instead a constant source of irritation, resentment, and even outright hostility. Another difficulty was the failure of government forest planners to establish or impose a consensus of purpose or a unity of interests among the various government organs involved one way or another in forest affairs.

### Forest Protection in Imperial Russia

Forest protection in Russia received its first major impetus well before the years under consideration here, from Peter the Great. Motivated by the desire to establish Russia as a great power, and to this end to build a great navy, Peter issued a slew of decrees during the early 1700s to protect sources of ship timber, and to prevent erosion and blockage of navigable waterways. Of primary importance, instructions issued in 1722 created two major forest categories, *zapovednye* (“protected”) in which cutting was subject to various temporary bans and restrictions, and *nezapovednye* (“unprotected”), which could be exploited more freely. A second protected category also was created called *vodookhrannye* (“water-preserving”), covering forests whose protection was based on their role in preserving hydrological systems in one way or another. Under this heading cutting was forbidden within a 55-kilometer-wide strip along the banks of “large” rivers and a 16½-kilometer one along “small” rivers in parts of European Russia. Peter’s forest categories remained legislatively present in some form or another through and beyond the Revolution.
During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, legislation by Catherine the Great, the Emperor Paul, and Alexander I undermined some of these protections, especially by facilitating the growth of private forest ownership. During the nineteenth century increasing numbers of “speculators,” in search of quick profit, were allowed to purchase and clear forest land, turning it instead to agriculture. The decline of the nobility from the emancipation forward contributed to this process by bringing increasing amounts of forest land (on the estates of downsizing nobles) onto the market. After 1861 contemporary observers frequently spoke of a visible and accelerating “thinning out” of the forests, especially in the more populated areas of European Russia. Although users of all types shared some of the blame—including the state and peasant communes—privateers attracted by far the lion’s share of attention and the condemnation of foresters.

Efforts to address the growing destruction resulted in a major legislative effort passed in April 1888 under the title “Statute on the Safeguarding of Forests” (Polozhenie o sberezhenii lesov). Despite various amendments this remained the basis of forest protection in European Russia until the first world war. The statute aimed to establish measures “guarding . . . against [forest] destruction and exhaustion,” to encourage their “correct economic management,” and to facilitate the raising of new forests (articles 1-2). To this end it revamped the Petrine idea of “protected” forests. These could henceforth be declared on any type of land regardless of its ownership “by the state, crown, various establishments, [peasant] communes, [or] private individuals” (article 1). Protected forest areas could not legally be cleared or turned to any other type of use. Following designation, a ban obtained also on the cutting of any and all growing trees. This high level of protection was temporary, however, pending the creation in each specific case of an “economic plan,” to be worked out by local Forest Preservation Committees (Lesookhranitel’nye komitety) in cooperation with the forest owner and in accordance with general principles subsequently to be laid down by the Ministry of State Domains (Ministerstvo gosudarstvennykh imushchestv). Economic plans, in turn, were required to promote a system of “gradual” cutting, facilitating “natural” and continual regeneration (articles 6, 7, 14). These localized plans foreshadowed more ambitious and larger-scale forest planning under the Bolshevik regime.

Forests not declared protected or vodookhrannye—the vast majority—were also accorded legal protections by the Statute, though of dubious worth. Nonetheless, following 1888, where unauthorized cutting could be proved to have occurred—in forests of any designation at all—violators were required at their own expense to reafforest the affected areas within a time-frame to be established by the local Forest Preservation Committee. Failure to comply could result in completion of the work by the Forest Preservation Committee itself at the owner’s expense (article 15). Significantly, in cases where the owner refused or was unable to comply, the decree authorized the compulsory sale of his land to the state (article 9). The notion that the state should take possession of sensitive or abused forest land for the good of the wider society, present here in highly limited form, was to enjoy growing popularity among foresters over subsequent decades. It became a constant theme in
forest journals and congresses in the early twentieth century. It reached its apotheosis, of course, during the Revolution.

### On the Eve of Revolutions

Speaking in 1914, D. M. Zaitsev, chair of the First All-Russian Congress of the Representatives of Forest Industry and Trade (Pervyi vserossiiskii s”ezd predstavitelei lesnogo promyshlennosti i torgovli), held in St. Petersburg, found the general shape of forest management and protection, in law and in practice, essentially unchanged since 1888. By 1914, of the 55,516,243 desiatinas (1 desiatina is 1.0925 hectares) of forest under the jurisdiction of the Forest Preservation Administration (Lesookhranitel’noe upravlenie), 572,352 desiatinas—a little more than 1 percent—had been designated protected. A further 733,364 desiatinas had been established vodookhrannye. This brought the protected total to between 2-2½ percent. The entire 55,516,243 desiatinas were administered by sixty-seven Forest Preservation Committees comprising 657 individuals. In practice, however, forest conservation enforcement fell to a great variety of other persons and groups: local officials of the state forest administration, various ranks of foresters and guards, local land managers [zemskie nachal’niki] and even the general police.

How effective were the protections thus established? Probably not very. The foresters of the time offered typically negative assessments and stressed the need to do more and better. Vaguely-worded legislation, the lack of a proper definition of “clear-cutting,” and other factors were well understood as invitations to abuse. Criticized too was the state’s inability to punish violations except in explicitly protected forests or “where . . . cutting has been carried out after the confirmation of a [specific] forest economy plan or in violation of a [specific] ban issued by the forest preservation committee.” Then, of course, there were budget constraints, corruption, and a whole host of other issues further weakening protections. Thus, it was not surprising that from 1887 to 1907 the total area of European Russian forest had been reduced, by one estimate, from 90,058,000 to 81,785,000 desiatinas, a loss of more than 8 million desiatinas, or some 8-9 percent of the total.

On the other hand, some positive effects and trends can be discerned, too. Certainly, the limited protections Zaitsev noted were an improvement on those obtaining pre-1888. That clear-cutting could be stopped at all, even if only after it had begun, was of some value. Furthermore, by 1914, of the 54,210,527 desiatinas of forest not designated either protected or vodookhrannye about 20 percent (a total of 10,859,610 desiatinas) were by Zaitsev’s figures nonetheless currently being managed in accordance with “forest economy plans” confirmed by local Forest Preservation Committees. The remaining 80 percent were “exploited according to the inclinations of their owners, without any concrete adherence to forest preservation oversight.” While this latter statement is not cause for rejoicing, it does suggest that 10,859,610 desiatinas were not being thus exploited—that they were in fact receiving somewhat better treatment. Figures cited by Douglas Weiner in Models of Nature also suggest a slowing in the rate of cutting nationwide after 1888, perhaps in
response to the new law: four percent “aggregate” loss of woodlands in European Russia and the Caucasus from 1887 to 1905 versus a loss of one-quarter during the period 1775-1804 to 1880 in the forests of central and southern European Russia.22 These and other available figures, however, are more suggestive than conclusive.

More useful, perhaps, is the concrete example of the Iuzhnoberezhskoe lesnichestvo in the Crimea.23 Writing in July 1917 from first-hand experience gathered over many years, Aleksei S., a member of the Foresters’ Union (Soyuz Lesovodov, or Soles), credited the 1888 statute with having brought improved order and protection to the formerly “more or less chaotic state” of forestry in this area. “Up to the early 1890s,” he wrote, local forests “were being destroyed by fires, overcutting and the grazing of cattle.” A huge blaze during 1881-1883 had wiped out the “whole lower band of deciduous forest.” Widespread cattle grazing had made regeneration impossible. The 1888 statute however, despite “never having been well designed” for the “unique forest conditions” of the Crimea, nonetheless brought “a significant portion of good.” As a result of the law, certain forests in the area “were declared ‘protected’ in 1890,” following which the forest administration “was given the right to insist on vital . . . limitations on both cutting and grazing.” Over the complaints of some elements of the population (a strong sign conservation did in fact operate), at least two local zemstvos [village governments] enforced the new protections with “an iron hand,” achieving, if this report is to be believed, “strict protection from cutting and seizure in [local] state forests and in those assigned [to industrial plants],” as well as better general distribution of forest products to local peasant communes, and increased revenues for the state.24 It is possible this was an isolated example of successful protection. Alternatively, what operated here may have operated elsewhere also. Either way, it suggests that where there was a will to implement it, the 1888 statute proved useful. Another positive assessment of the same law was given in an article published in Lesnoi Zhurnal [The Forest Journal] in 1911, which asserted that the law, despite other deficiencies, brought about a perceptible decline in the practice whereby forest lands purchased by speculators from impoverished landlords were clear-cut for quick profit by the new owners.25

Yet ultimately these were small victories, unable fundamentally to head off the continuing toll on Russia’s forests. Well aware of this, educated foresters debated throughout the decade or so prior to the Revolution the parameters of desired and possible further forest reform. While no fully unified vision emerged, the basic parameters of a rough consensus were forged during these years. Early Bolshevik forest policy freely combined these plans and existing legislation.

**Themes for Reform, 1905-1917**

Debates within the forestry establishment—in the major forestry journals and at various forestry and agricultural congresses—during the 1900s and 1910s made repeated and focused criticisms of “speculative” forest practices as paragons of destruction and emphasized increased state control over the forests as a prerequisite for better management and protection. In many cases this simply entailed calling
for expanding the jurisdiction of the 1888 statute to cover not just much of European Russia, but all forests in the Empire. Forest Congresses in St. Petersburg in 1911 and Kiev in 1913 approved exactly this measure.26

Beyond simply expanding state management, there also were calls for increasing state ownership of forests. Frequently this involved nothing more than championing an expansion of the existing process of compulsory purchase. In this spirit, the same 1911 St. Petersburg Congress moved not only to “accept in principle and work out formally principles of actual state-public guardianship over [all] private forests,” but also suggested the unconditional transfer of “forest areas from individual private owners . . . to public companies and enterprises [and] cities and local governments.”27 These proposals were given a favorable review again two years later in Kiev. More ambitiously, in 1914, Zaitsev claimed that forest protection in general was “the business not of private individuals, but of the government.” The state, he continued, should buy up from their current owners at least all protected and vodookhrannye forests, as well as marginal lands suitable for artificial replanting.28

Still more radical calls, not for limited transfers but for outright state ownership of all forests also were mooted at least as early as 1905.29 During the spring and summer of 1917, as the collapse of the tsarist regime opened the possibility of sweeping forestry reform, talk was indeed of little else but outright nationalization. G. F. Morozov, speaking that year at a congress of the Foresters’ Union, asserted: “The forest must belong to the state and the latter must be the forest’s boss. . . . [T]he lessons and facts of history prove the right of the state to run the forest economy. The state [gosudarstvennost’] is the generality of interests; the forest, belonging to the state, belongs thus to all, and only the state can expediently manage it in the interests of all the people. Our task therefore is to strengthen in the consciousness of the people this most important principle, this first . . . axiom.”30 The need for nationalization of all forests, championed by other speakers at the same forum also, was subsequently accepted as a general position and resolution of the whole Congress in September.31

The question of exactly what state ownership meant, however, presented problems. As was true of land politics in general during the revolutionary era, the concept could be understood in two distinct ways: as vesting control in the central government or as giving it to local populations and local organs; in other words, as centralizing or decentralizing. Tending to minimize this potential stumbling-block, among foresters at least, was the popular notion that forest land differed importantly from agricultural land, and that it thus neither could nor should be managed or owned in quite the same way. The forests’ cycles were generational rather than seasonal, their expanse was national rather than local, and so on. A rough consensus seems to have existed that forests, unlike farms, thus required management as a single entity, on a national scale, and with the long-term perspective and skills of the forest scientist. They should not simply be transferred to local peasant ownership, even though this might be desirable with agricultural land. “The forests are our national inheritance” became a virtual foresters’ mantra—one that led naturally enough to talk of central planning and central control.
On the other hand, numerous criticisms (in some cases self-criticism) also were made of the existing Forest Department as “aloof” and out of touch with local sentiment and conditions. The rights of the peasantry to adequate timber resources, and of local technicians and planners to due respect and attention, it was claimed, were routinely violated. Less, not more, central control was needed. These apparently opposite sentiments in fact merged in a more or less common vision of a new forestry whose essential priorities, practices, and administration would come from the center, but which would simultaneously allow expanded local initiative and better satisfy local needs. In short, what foresters generally envisioned was a kind of organic or “locally-responsive” centralism characterized by common work and a shared vision. Early Bolshevik forest organization, incidentally, was to articulate and pursue an almost identical balance. Thus N. I. Faleev, who during 1918 was both Forest Department chief and the principal author of the Bolsheviks’ first major forest decree, “Basic Law on Forests” [Osnovnoi zakon o lesakh], could write the same year that the emerging Soviet forest department was “not an autocrat” “waving the conductor’s wand,” but an entity whose entire essence rested on “reciprocal, definite, necessary collaboration with the organs of local Soviet forest power.”32

Between Revolutions: Foresters, Peasants, and the Provisional Government

Foresters too were caught up in the wave of euphoria and optimism that followed the collapse of the tsarist regime in February 1917 and its replacement by the relatively liberal Provisional Government. A huge historical impediment to change had been removed, since the tsarist government had always championed the right to private property, including in forests. Long-term plans and impossible dreams suddenly became tantalizing immediate possibilities. As foresters from across the country gathered in Petrograd in April for the First Congress of the Foresters’ Union, the mood was buoyant. The spring seemed millennial rather than seasonal. Accordingly, modest programs of incremental government forest purchases gave way once and for all to more radical plans for outright nationalization or socialization.

The mood soon turned sour however, largely in response to the actions of another constituency—one possessed of its own agenda for Russia’s forests and in no mood to wait for directions from the Forest Department, forest congresses, or any other self-appointed authority. Encouraged by the sudden evaporation of political and legal authority, in many cases disillusioned and hardened by the experiences of war, and generally hungry for forest materials, rural populations descended that spring in their thousands on Russia’s forests, beginning a lengthy and devastating period of plunder and cutting across much of the country. It was this depressing reality, far more than any hypothetical bright future, which increasingly commanded the attention of forest specialists as the year progressed. Peasant ire turned not only against the forests, but against the Forest Department and the entire existing apparatus of personnel, legislation, and practices. Forest guards and academic foresters, in many cases the very individuals and groups hoping to reshape and lead post-
tsarist forestry, were denounced as “people of the old regime” or “enemies of the people,” and were pushed out of their assigned forest areas altogether. The process was frequently violent, with beatings common. Anecdotal evidence suggests at least a few deaths may have resulted also. Forest Department property was seized or looted. And all the time the cutting intensified and spread. So desperate did the situation seem by the close of the year that in opening the Moscow Regional Congress of the Foresters’ Union the following January, its chair, V. I Stankevich, called for the slogan adopted by the First All-Russian Congress in April (“Take Care of the Forests”) to be changed “to a new more alarmist one—‘Save the Forests from Anarchy and Destruction!’”

In fact, a major conflict was emerging, pitting foresters’ plans for a locally-responsive centralism managing a single national inheritance against the quite different plans of Russia’s rural populations and their Socialist Revolutionary representatives. The latter gave every evidence of desiring local autonomy, locally-organized forest regimes, and little to no input from scientists, planners, or other “experts” or outsiders of any sort. In this atmosphere, the idea of conservation had little chance.

Popular views of the forest, as was noted from time to time, had in fact long given evidence of a general antipathy among peasants toward forest planning and protection. “The peasants wish to get forest materials free of charge and for whatever purpose they wish,” a participant at the Soviet Central Executive Committee (the Soviet legislature) noted in 1918. N. I. Faleev had claimed shortly before that provincial populations in general viewed the whole idea of forest preservation “with extreme distrust.” This, in turn, essentially repeated the stark conclusions of the 1913 Kiev congress, namely that the “Russian folk cannot come to terms with the idea of forest conservation [at all]”; that the idea was deep-rooted and widespread that the forest was in its entirety a “gift from God”; that it was in no way the result—or in need—of any human labor; that the forest “was everyone’s and could be used by anyone who wished.” During 1917 and 1918, as further evidence of local attitudes toward forest protection, members of the Foresters’ Union cited and bitterly criticized the activities of new and self-appointed local “forest guards.” These outfits, which had by then significantly replaced officially-appointed guards, especially in the central agricultural region of European Russia, supposedly provided “no protection at all,” but simply sanctioned the worst abuses in the short-term interests of local populations.

The descent into localism, chaos, and destruction in the forests was, ironically, to some degree compounded by the issuance on 10 October 1917 of a new forest protection law under the title “Temporary Rules Regarding the Protection of Forests and their Felling” (Vremennye pravila ob okhrane lesov i ikh rubke). In addition to restating the goals of forest protection and calling urgently for an end to ongoing excesses, the “Temporary Rules” took the critical, though perfectly logical step (since it reflected the rising tide of localism), of transferring all private and state forests to the control—though not yet the ownership—of recently-created local Land Committees (Zemel’ nye komitety). Thus, when the Bolsheviks took power two weeks later, both “facts on the ground” and legal developments had combined
to create a decentralized forest fait accompli. Though the Bolsheviks would pay much lip service to (and perhaps genuinely believed in) the compatibility of central and local interests under conditions of socialist revolution, they nonetheless were to spend the next several years trying with limited success to rein in the centrifugal forces thus unleashed and attempting to establish a degree of central control so as to implement the rational, national forest planning and protection system already worked out by Russian foresters over the past decade or more.

**Early Bolshevik Forestry: The ‘Basic Law on Forests’**

The Bolsheviks’ first serious effort to effect their forestry goals came in the form of a major legislative initiative, the “Basic Law on Forests” (Osnovnoi zakon o lesakh). As promulgated on 30 May 1918 this was a paragon of centralist planning—free, in the words of one later Soviet commentator, of the “petty bourgeois and provincial views” which had rendered earlier legislation socializing agricultural land essentially compromises. In this respect it might be fair to consider “On Forests” the first major piece of land legislation more or less fully expressive of Bolshevik priorities. Its relative lack of concessions to peasant and localist sentiment, whether construed as courageous fidelity to a lofty ideal or as blind arrogance, was to be its abiding weakness, however.

“On Forests” abolished without compensation all private forest property. Henceforth, forests were to be the “common inheritance” of the RSFSR (Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic), under the management of the Central Administration of the Forests of the Republic (Tsentral’noe upravlenie lesov respubliki), itself under the People’s Commissariat of Agriculture (Narkomzem). It established ten chief tasks of Soviet forestry, which reduced essentially to a call to increase forest output by establishing the bases for a planned—and more sustainable—forest economy. This meant primarily assessing the distribution, size, and condition of existing forest supplies; working out norms for state and individual timber needs; and creating a central plan to satisfy these needs. Improving the country’s relevant transportation infrastructure also was made a priority.

While not included explicitly among the chief tasks of Soviet forestry, conservation did have a place in the new law. Following forest legislation since the time of Peter the Great, the law also provided for a category of “protected forests,” although non-protected ones were simultaneously redesignated “exploited forests” (articles 77-82). In addition to the traditional reasons given in Russian forest legislation for protecting forests (to prevent erosion and maintain climates) the Bolsheviks added two new ones: to establish “monuments of nature” (nature preserves or zapovedniki) and for “aesthetic and cultural purposes” (article 83). The law also included a few general statements about conservation, such as the need to ensure “the constancy of forest regeneration across the country” (article 66b) and to “define measures” to protect forests from fires and insect infestations.

Another major aspect of the law, and directly relevant to forest protection, was its grant to “all citizens of the Soviet Republic” of equal forest rights. As detailed in the
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Implementing the ‘Basic Law on Forests’

Given the dim view taken of “On Forests” in so many quarters, implementing the law proved a frustrating affair. The sheer size of the country, underdeveloped systems of communication, and the exigencies of the Civil War, which raged until 1921, presented obvious handicaps. More importantly, however, the law relied on a level of central-local cooperation—a shared vision of appropriate forest practices and priorities—that simply did not exist. The absence or incomplete establishment of Soviet power “in the provinces”—a more general manifestation of the disconnection between state and society—was in forestry too an ongoing obstacle of immense proportions. In some cases, local organs, offended by centralist ambition, immediately and explicitly rejected the new law, claiming and acting upon the right to manage their own forest affairs in accordance with local wishes and needs. Others ignored it. Modest indications of implementation—the issuance of a local decree to design posters publicizing aspects of the law, for example—seem almost hopeless in contrast. Vague, if enthusiastic statements sent between the center and provinces about “great work” and “promising developments” already
underway in the forests and around the country seem to have been exhortative more than descriptive. Here and there, local decrees were issued based on isolated clauses of “On Forests.” A March 1920 decree of the Nizhegorodskii Provincial Executive Committee [gubispolkom], for example, cited articles 40 and 41 as the basis for drafting “all [local] citizens . . . into broad participation in assisting the forest sections and their organs [in] carrying out a merciless war against all plunderings of the forest and all unauthorized felling.” The success of such measures is uncertain, however.

Overall, clearly, the picture was far from radiant. The first anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution provided the new forest apparatus an opportunity to evaluate a hectic year’s work. A Congress of Land Sections (S”ezd zemel’nykh otdelov) held in November 1918 noted disappointing levels of implementation of communist forestry in general and resolved to redouble efforts. Similarly, the principal author of “On Forests,” Faleev, while lauding the passage of the law as “the greatest pride” and signal achievement of Communist foresters, complained also that there had been little substantial progress made in its implementation. Fundamentally, he argued, the general population remained hostile to the new forest order in general. Even many forest workers, he asserted, failed to understand the law’s essential significance, which he identified as the shift from private to state ownership of forests.

And still the cutting continued. A local report presented to the Foresters’ Union in 1920 noted the widespread persistence of “intense cutting” by “local populations.” Cutting was worst, it stated, near villages, along rivers and near railroads. Reforestation work, at the same time, was going “poorly.” Surveying many similar local reports a speaker at the Union’s June Congress that year concluded bitterly: “[T]he forest economy is completely ruined. The forest is being cut willy-nilly. More accurately, there is taking place a genuine clearing of the forests. Cut areas are not being cleaned of debris and serve as bases for the spread of [harmful] insects . . . . Forests are failing to regenerate naturally due to the unauthorized grazing of cattle, the inadmissible breadth of cuts, the intensity of littering, and so on. The old stands are dying, new ones are not being produced. In a word, the forests are dying.”

Even the occasional superficially positive assessment seems only to underscore the gravity of the situation. A note in a 1919 edition of Lesa Respubliki, for example, claimed that in Kaluga Province the “pressure on the forests” was “beginning to ease,” that there were “no longer any mass cuttings” and that the population was “beginning to relate more peacefully to the directives issued by the [state] . . . .” On the other hand, the same article noted, the damage from the previous year was immense. Every single linden tree in the area, down to the very last individual, had been chopped down, for example. Much of what remained overall was bushes and shrub. That cutting was slowing was thus understandable. This story was far from unique.

The Bolshevics’ inability quickly to reign in a chaotic rural population or to convince them of the need to conserve forests, was, however, only part of the problem now besetting Russian forests. Government organs too were swinging their
axes more often than one might suspect. Having lost huge oil- or coal-producing areas as a result of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty of March 1918, or elsewhere to the occupying Whites, during the depths of the Civil War in 1919-1920 the Soviet government and people experienced a harsh “fuel crisis.” Reliance on wood fuel grew accordingly, temporarily reaching as high as 82 percent of total state fuel supply expenditures by 1919. Questions of conserving forests quickly lost out to the need to supply fuel to factory and soldier. The priority of cutting over conserving was authorized from the top down in the form of a flurry of decrees. These include a November 1918 order authorizing “forest sub-sections and land sections” to “carry out unrestrictedly and without compensation the release of forest materials [for] strategic railroad works”; a May 1919 demand that the Central Forest Section of the Commissariat of Agriculture (responsible for forest conservation), “give over immediately to the use of Glavleskom [a timber procurement organ]... 250,000 desiatinas of forest” situated in a six-mile-wide strip along both sides of railroad lines; and more infamously, a July 1919 decree on timber procurement authorizing the cutting of 375,000 desiatinas (about 412,000 hectares) of forest on erosion-sensitive lands along rivers. Further down the chain of command, government bureaucracies argued with or ignored each other on questions of jurisdiction. Cutting and supplying took precedence.

The Decline of the ‘Basic Law on Forests’

By 1921 “On Forests” had already been marked a failure. An All-Russian Forest Conference that year blasted it for having brought “ruin on forest affairs” by antagonizing the peasantry and failing to provide adequately for domestic and state needs. Its conservation successes were no better evaluated. Neither the unauthorized cutting being carried out by peasants, nor the authorized type done by state organs had been brought under anything resembling control.

Regarding spontaneous peasant actions, professional foresters and representatives of various rural Soviets alike noted over and again that the problem lay not only in lack of enforcement of existing law, but in the very nature of the law itself. The early push for a single plan on a national scale had presented insurmountable—or at least highly aggravating—problems for most peasants, requiring them, for example, to travel unreasonable distances to cut wood in designated areas or to obtain already-processed supplies from officially-designated stockpiles, which often existed only in theory, anyway. The peasants were thus almost forced both to get their supplies illegally and to resent the authorities they felt responsible for so many inconveniences.

Regarding authorized cutting by state organs, Comrade Kozyrev, a speaker at a meeting of the Soviet Central Executive Committee, noted in June 1923 that planned figures for forest harvesting—they themselves reckoned on optimistic assessments of what the forests could stand without sustaining structural damage—had been exceeded during the previous operating year (1922-1923) by almost 100 percent. A more detailed report presented the following year to the Soviet Central Executive
Committee surveyed a longer period and drew particular attention to the actions of the *zheleskomy* (railroad timber-supply committees). Since their establishment during the first half of 1918, these organs, it turned out, had been cutting regularly from strips 15 versts (about 15 kilometers) wide along rivers and railroads in various parts of European Russia an amount of trees grossly in excess both of Forest Department recommendations and of what was thought to be sustainable even in a strip twice as wide. During 1918-1919, for example, when the “permissible” cut was 10.4 million “kuby,” 14.5 million had been cut. In 1920, when the cut was supposed to be 10.2 million, slightly over 22 million had gone. For the 1920-1921 operating year the figures were almost identical. What went for the *zheleskomy* appears to have been the case more widely. In a time of civil war, various Soviet organs, railroad committees, and industrial enterprises, all had to be supplied. This seems to have been done more or less without any regulation at all, paper laws to the contrary notwithstanding.

**A Second Bolshevik Forest Constitution: The Forest Code of 1923**

Opposition to the 1918 law now began to gain momentum within state and Party circles. “On Forests” was subjected to particularly withering criticism in early summer 1923, at the second session of the Soviet Central Executive Committee. In this era of New Economic Policy and related efforts to placate the population, the law seemed “completely outdated” and to have “lost its meaning.” It was “fundamentally at odds with recent central decrees” allowing the peasantry increased economic and other freedoms. Forest nationalization carried out under its auspices now seemed to have been excessively “blunt” or “straightforward,” causing resentment among local populations and simultaneously failing in its stated goal of fully meeting local demands for forest materials. The time had come to bring the NEP to forestry. The Committee justified the new policy with reasons similar to those that had obtained more widely two years before, in 1921, when the Bolshevik government had sought to head off both escalating resentment of their rule and to reinvigorate a moribund economy. Above all, the population had to be placated. “At every village meeting,” it was reported to the Soviet Central Executive Committee in 1923, “there is a general and unanimous howl among the peasant population: ‘Give us the opportunity at least to make a horse-harness [by cutting wood] near the village, rather than forcing us to go to the town to get one.’” The ubiquity and urgency of demands of this sort suggested, as was indeed the case, that five years of efforts by the Bolsheviks had made little if any headway in bringing the population around to the idea of rational, national forestry.

The substance of a new forest code had in fact already been proposed at the Tenth Congress of Soviets in 1921: “To meet the wishes of the peasantry and in order to facilitate their [efforts to] raise the agricultural economy, the Congress accepts as necessary to re-examine the Republic’s forest holdings for the purpose of establishing forests of local significance to be given over for use by the agricultural population under the control [of local organs].” The idea was to allow local exploitation...
of some forests in relatively heavily-populated areas, thus at once reducing state-
society tensions and freeing resources for better state management of larger and
more economically important forest expanses elsewhere. The new law, in other
words, was to be a concession to peasant and local interests, much as the NEP was
a concession to private interests and public sentiment on a broader scale.

As passed on 7 July 1923, the “Forest Code” (Lesnoi kodeks) called upon the
Commissariat of Agriculture to identify and inventory areas of forest to be removed
from current state holdings altogether. These would be transferred to the mostly
unregulated use of the working peasant population. Further and larger transfers
were then to be made establishing “forests of local significance” (lesa mestnogo
znachenia). These, though some regulation of their usage would continue in ac-
cordance with economic plans, were also essentially a step back from national
planning in favor of local exploitation. A two-year timetable was established, dur-
ing which some 12½ million desiatinas of land were slated for transfer. In fact closer
to 16 million seem to have gone by 1925. The remaining, diminished forest fund,
designated “forests of general state significance” (lesa obshchegosudarstvennogo
znachenia), was to continue to provide for national demand and to be run largely
by central plan. “Forests of special designation” (lesa osobogo naznacheniia), in-
cluding protected forests, remained a sub-category of the forests of general state
significance.

By 1925 peasants had received or were slated to receive twice the amount of forest
area they had had prior to the war. Efforts were made where possible to return
forests that peasants had used before 1917, typically those near their villages. Where
such forests had already been designated protected (some half million desiatinas by
1923), in many cases economic plans—designed to control usage—were again
envisioned. Perhaps more frequently, however, a substitution was planned, with
peasants being given other land instead. Both of these approaches, however, also
preserved some of the inconveniences peasants had so resented, and provoked fur-
ther angry outbursts. Bolshevik desires to preserve some level of rational organiza-
tion for national rather than local needs also meant that in many cases peasants did
not in fact get stretches of forest they had used prior to 1917 or for other reasons felt
they were entitled to claim. This was true especially in the Black Earth region.
Villages also quarrelled among themselves over rights to specific areas, in many
cases apparently resuscitating older squabbles. During the years after 1923 limita-
tions on exploitation of “forests of local significance” were scaled back, and their
area increased in response to continuing peasant demands. Tax breaks, extra-budget
distributions of timber, and other privileges also were given out. Still, however,
peasant needs proved hard to meet. Familiar complaints continued: “There is
forest right by us, but we are sent 5 or 7 verst” to cut.

Given that the regime was at this point a minority leadership of urban socialists
in a land of peasants, complaints such as these could not be taken lightly. Indeed,
numerous indications exist that those in the government to some degree equated
satisfying peasant demands for timber and forest access with their own retention of
power. In this spirit, for example, the Soviet Central Executive Committee, debat-
ing forest law in 1925, discussed the “political minuses” of failing to address “the
dissatisfactions of the peasantry” and the need quickly to “issue regulations” granting still better local forest access “so as to avoid [further] criticism of Soviet authority.” Clearly there seemed little indication that peasant and state interests would converge any time soon.

**The ‘Forest Code’: Beyond 1923**

Space limitations preclude proper treatment of the implementation and results of the “Forest Code.” Overall, however, familiar problems persisted, as the peasantry continued to significantly resent, dispute, and ignore Moscow’s scaled-back efforts at forest conservation and planning. This remained so at least up to the era of Collectivization — beginning in 1929 and extending through the early 1930s — when the struggles between state and society — and the dynamics of forest politics also — were transformed in general and in brutal fashion.

More of concern here, though the ferocity and pervasiveness of unauthorized cutting had begun to subside by the end of the Civil War, the overall situation remained highly unsatisfactory. According to Comrade Burlakov, a speaker at a meeting of the Soviet Central Executive Committee in 1924, still nothing much at all had changed since the “revolutionary days, when the forest was being destroyed everywhere . . . when everyone tried to cut down whatever he wanted.” Now as then, “in the provinces and all over the place the same system is operating as during those . . . times.” In Tver’ province, “the population, without any supervision cuts down the forest” with no response from the local authorities. “In the Sofonovskii forest, near the town of Giorgievsk, cutting is going on at will.” Local organs, profited from rather than resisted these illegal activities, Burlakov claimed. A report given to the Soviet Central Executive Committee the following year noted that 75 percent of all forest areas given or readied for transfer to peasant control consisted in fact of mere “bushes.” Others were “swamp.” Not surprisingly, by late 1925 peasants nationwide were meeting only an estimated 60 percent of their timber needs from sources supposed to provide it all. The shortfall was made up variously, but largely at the expense of general state forests. There were also reports of “forests given to peasant societies which in one year had cut them down completely.” Things seem not to have changed much over the following few years either. As late as 1929 a review of forest affairs in the same Soviet Central Executive Committee had only familiar tales to tell: of general disorganization, peasant dissatisfaction, and ongoing cutting. Summing up previously heard reports, one speaker noted that conditions around the country had been such that “up to the present time” the state’s efforts to manage the “forest economy not only could not develop, but could not even have any serious effect.”

Authorized forest use also seems to have remained impervious to real control, despite sporadic efforts from Moscow. With scant progress taking place in efforts to open up new forest areas to cutting (alike in the far north, Siberia, or European Russian areas not already under exploitation), the loss of large areas of more accessible forest to local control as a result of the Forest Code, and a concomitant failure
to establish rational use systems around the countryside, almost the entire harvest continued to be drawn from relatively small and already heavily-depleted forests along railroads and rivers and near villages, towns, and cities. The 1929 report noted in this regard that the “rapid development of forest exploitation and the notable growth of procurement and export of timber” achieved since about 1921 had been possible only because “the extraction of timber exceeds the natural yearly growth. . . . That is, we are working up a deficit. We are over-cutting the forests.” Funding shortfalls, bureaucratic inefficiencies and infighting, and a shortage of skilled personnel (all traceable in one way or another to the Bolshevik Revolution) were cited as contributing factors, along with corruption and the continued hostility of local populations, which included in many cases the staff of local “Soviet” organs. By thewaning days of the NEP a coherent forestry—and useful forest protection in particular—seem to have been as elusive as ever.

Conclusions

Several conclusions follow from the above, all tending somewhat to downplay the achievement and uniqueness of the Bolshevik Revolution in forest protection. Early Soviet forest conservation derived significantly from models and programs worked out prior to the Revolution, and especially during the 1900s and 1910s. The idea of splitting forests into protected and unprotected categories; of increasing the role of the government, and ultimately of transferring ownership entirely to the state; of better satisfying local populations’ needs and concerns; and, in particular, of establishing all the forests as one “national inheritance” to be administered according to a single, scientific plan: all were concepts current in some form before October 1917 and among organizations and individuals not connected in any obvious way with the Bolshevik Party. Viewed in this light, the Bolsheviks’ main role was not to establish basic new parameters—these they inherited—but to choose among existing ideas and hone them into a clearer, more narrowly-defined vision which then hopefully could be implemented. (Above all in this regard, the Bolsheviks tried to resolve in favor of the center the ambiguities about where state ownership and control should be vested.) This being so, February, not October, seems to stand as the critical break in Russian forest history. The February Revolution cleared away the old social, legal, and political edifice, thus making substantial change possible. February also unleashed the ruinous centrifugal forces the Bolsheviks struggled against and compromised with at least until 1929.

Once in power, the Bolsheviks thus made relatively little headway. In forest protection as in so many aspects of early Soviet life, the government and local populations—state and society—pursued very different, perhaps irreconcilable, interests. Efforts to implement rational, national forest management and scientific conservation flew in the face of popular culture and of local aspirations to use the forests more or less without restriction or plan. Before 1929, at least, the government lacked the power effectively to alter this dynamic. Compounding this fundamental problem, and tending to undermine the effectiveness of efforts to mitigate it,
there were serious tensions and incompatibilities even within government. These tensions were exemplified by the failure of government foresters associated with the chief agricultural organ to make much headway against the cutting carried out by other state bodies, such as the zheleskomy, connected to the chief economic organ.

In both cases, of course, parallels can be drawn with non-Russian episodes in conservation history. In the United States, for example, tensions between state and federal conservation authorities and local-level resisters were common. In _The Hunter’s Game_, Louis Warren explores a comparable struggle over game law enforcement in New Mexico, Pennsylvania, and Montana. In _Crimes against Nature_, Karl Jacoby tells a similar story about the impact of conservation on the lives of local, rural populations in the Adirondacks, Yellowstone, and the Grand Canyon.78

Likewise, the Soviets’ failure to secure a unified approach to forestry among the relevant government organs bears similarities to the disconnect in American conservation history between government calls for development of sustained yield practices and multiple forest use on the one hand and commercial logging and recreation interests on the other, as Paul Hirt demonstrates in _A Conspiracy of Optimism_.79 While government culture and the nature of the economy differed dramatically in the United States and the early Soviet state, basic conflicts of interest between state and society, and among important groups of forest users appear both fundamental and quite similar in both situations.

Clearly, one lesson to be drawn from the Soviet experience, and particularly in comparing it with others, is the difficulty of implementing conservation from the top down and in the absence of a consensus among the various involved parties both of basic interests and of purpose. The relatively authoritarian and anti-democratic character of the state established by Lenin appears to have made little difference. Conservation could not effectively be put in place by simple government fiat in Russia any more than in any other political environment.

Finally, the fact that the Soviet government’s achievement in forestry was less impressive than its work in establishing nature preserves seems understandable. Nature preserves were small, relatively marginal parcels of land. They could be—and were—managed as, so to speak, exceptions to the rule. Forests, on the other hand, represented a major economic resource of central importance to both state and society. They also were an environment in which millions of Soviet citizens lived and worked. Locking them away for preservation or research, as was the goal with the zapovedniki, neither was nor ever could have been a realistic proposition. Thus, though the Bolsheviks’ ambitions for forest planning and protection may have exceeded those of the tsarist government, their level of success was not proportionately greater.

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Notes

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limited re-emergence of small-scale privateering and the abolition of grain requisition-
ing in favor of a money tax. The years 1921-1928 are usually considered a liberal era in
comparison with what came before and after.
8. In fact, significant violations of at least some zapovedniki did occur. Regarding damage
done to a forest zapovednik, Les na Vorskle, see a report filed in Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv
russkoi federatsii (hereafter, GARF), fond. 359, op. 2, del. 8, st.st. 5-20 (May 1924).
9. Bolshevik forces and an array of counter-revolutionary enemies fought a brutal civil war
during 1918-1921.
10. See, for example, V. N. Makarov, Okhrana Prirody v SSSR (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe
izdatel'stvo kulturno-prosvetitel'noi literatury, 1947), 19.
12. “Polozhenie o sberezhenii lesov.” Sobranie uzakonenii i rasporiazhenii Rossiiskogo
pravitel'stva, 1888, st. 406, 831-46. The 1888 law was promulgated with numerous geo-
graphical exemptions even within the limited sphere of European Russia. These ex-
emptions were somewhat reduced over the following years. Nonetheless, Siberia, parts
of the European far north and some other areas remained beyond its reach even by 1914.
13. The clearing of forests, for example, was banned except in specified cases. Those cases,
however, were broad to a fault, including, “when [clearing] is necessary in order to
establish the more profitable organization of an estate” (article 11). On the other hand, it
was required that permission for clearing be sought in advance from the local Forest
Preservation Committee; and a six- to twelve-month waiting period was mandated be-
tween the original cutting request and issuance of a permit. In the case of privately-
owned forests, requests still could be denied if the attendant destruction to the forest
economy of the wider region was deemed unacceptable. A few other restrictions ob-
tained also (articles 11-13).
14. D. M. Zaitsev, Lesnoe Zakonodatel'stvo (Kommentarii k proektu novogo Ustava
Lesnogo). Doklad 1-omu vserossiiskomu s'ezdu predstavitelei lesnogo promyshlennosti
i torgovli. Biuro po uchrezhdeniu s’ezdov predstavitelei lesnogo promyshlennosti
i torgovli. (St. Petersburg, 1914), 11 and passim. Numerous amendments to the 1888
statute were issued by 1914. For example, the operation of the law was expanded to
Poland over the years 1899-1901, special instructions were ordered during the 1900s
regarding the establishment of protected forests, and so on. None of these altered the
law in any fundamental fashion, however.
15. The 55,516,243 desiatinas under the jurisdiction of the Forest Preservation Administra-
tion was perhaps between one-third and one-half of the total forest area of European
Russian and a much smaller fraction of the total within the whole Empire. Zaitsev,
Lesnoe Zakonodatel'stvo, 11.
17. Ibid., 12.
18. Ibid., 13.
19. A vivid, and at times amusing series of anecdotes on corruption in the Russian forest
economy is given by the Englishman John Croumbie Brown, who traveled in Russia
during the early 1880s. The problems he described continued to characterize the
situation for decades to come. Space restrictions unfortunately prevent quotation here
of any of Brown’s many insightful, and sometimes hilarious stories. See John Croumbie
Brown, Forestry in the Mining Districts of the Ural Mountains in Eastern Russia
(Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1884).
Lesnichestvo is a managed unit of forest.

24. Aleksei S__. “Otnoshenie iuzhnoberezhskogo lesnichego k naseleniiu i lesam za poslednie 20 let/1898-1917.” GARF 5520, op. 2. del. 18, st.st. 112-14. Author’s family name is illegible.


26. “Postanovlenye vynesennye vneocherednym Vserossiiskym S”ezdom lesovladel’tsev i lesokhoziaev dla obsuzhdeniia lesokhranitel’nogo zakona.” Lesnoi Zhurnal 3-4, 1911, pp. 377-89. “Lesnaia sektsi na Pervom Kievskom Sel’skohoziaistvennom S”ezde i printsip obshchego lesokhraneniia.” Lesnoi Zhurnal 8, (1913), 1366-78; and 9-10 (1913), 1414-37. Nothing came of these plans, however, due largely to the outbreak of war in 1914.

27. “Lesnaia sektsi na pervom kievskom sel’skohoziaistvennom s”ezde i printsip obshchego lesokhraneniia.” Lesnoi Zhurnal 9-10 (1913), 1436 and 1435.


29. That year M. M. Orlov, for example, called for “concentrating [all] the forests in the ownership of the state”, and G. N. Vysotskii made a similarly sweeping proposal, differing from Orlov only in focusing on the zemstvos (local governing bodies) rather than the central state apparatus as the appropriate vessel in which to place control of the nation’s forests. (Protokol’ 9-go ocherednogo zasedaniia S. Peterburgskogo lesnogo obschestva, 26 November 1905. Lesnoi Zhurnal 2 (1906), 191, 203, and passim.)

30. G. F. Morozov was one of the most important figures in academic forestry, even beyond Russia, during the late Imperial and early Soviet periods. Much of his research focused on the methods, consequences, and ecology of forest cutting, clearing, and replanting. He edited Lesnoi zhurnal (“The Forest Journal”), a major Russian publication, from 1904-1918. Morozov is quoted in Lesnoe Khoziaistvo SSSR za 50 let. Gosudarstvennyi komitet lesnogo khoziaistva soveta ministrov SSSR (Izdatel’stvo “lesnaia promyshlennost’, 1967), 15.

31. GARF, fond 5520, op. 1, del. 2, st. 47. Following their reading, a motion was floated and seconded that the articles, and specifically their ideas on nationalization, were so important that they should be printed up and distributed as widely as possible. G. F. Morozov suggested there and then that the fund already existing in his name would provide the necessary financial support for this in the aim of “popularizing the idea of nationalization.” GARF. Fond 5520, op. 1, del. 2, st. 15. The essays were subsequently published in Lesnoi Zhurnal.


34. V. M. Bortkevich, “Moskovskii oblastnoi s”ezd Soiuza lesovodov.” Lesnoi Zhurnal, 3-5, 1918, 113

35. Foresters and forest workers themselves, though generally united in a desire to improve, coordinate and plan forest management and protection, and though sharing a common horror at the scale of unauthorized cutting following March 1917, were in other ways split among themselves, especially along political lines. These tensions increased significantly following the Bolshevik seizure of power. By 1918 the Foresters’ Union (Soles)—comprising large numbers of older, more technically-qualified but less fervently
revolutionary individuals—had fallen out with “inside” and more “political” groups coalescing around N. I. Faleev and the new Forest Department. These dynamics cannot be given adequate attention in the present essay.

36. On the antipathy of peasants toward forest protection see RSFSR, Protokoly zasedaniiia vserossiiskogo tsentral’nogo ispolnitel’nogo komiteta, 4-go sozyva. Stenograficheski otchet (Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo, 1922), 318. On the distrust of the idea of preservation, see N. I. Faleev, “Shto sdelano i shto predstoi’ sdelat’.” Lesa Respubliki 8-9 (1918), col. 467.

37. “Lesnaia sektsia na pervom kievskom sel’sko-khoziastvennom s’ezde i printsip obshchego lesookhraneniia.” Lesnoi Zhurnal 9-10 (1913), 1433.

38. “Vremennye pravila ob okhrane lesov i ikh rubke.” Sobranie uzakonenii i rasporiazhenii pravitel’stva, no. 271, 31 October 1917, st. 3234-36. “Instructions” (Nastavlenie) for its implementation were passed separately on the 30th, days after the Bolshevik seizure of power.


41. In fact, the jurisdiction and authority of this body appears not to have been well established. Early Soviet forest debate makes frequent references to “bureaucratic overlap,” and to challenges made on its authority by other organs.

42. The latter rubric seems mainly to have concerned urban parks and squares. In general aesthetic and sentimental bases for conservation received scant official support.


44. “Levye s.-r. i lesnoi zakon.” Lesa Respubliki 8-9 (1918), col. 487.

45. See, for example, “Nashi zadachi.” Ibid., col. 451.

46. Such, for example, was the case in Olonetskii province, against whose “capitalist” and “restorationist” Land Section [Zemel’nyi otdel] a writer for the Soviet publication Lesa Respubliki railed in November 1918. This writer then went on to note the Section’s equally “treacherous” ruling illegally “increasing the size of forests of local use,” and “insisting on the transfer of all of this to [their own] exclusive control.” The actions and proposals of the Olonetskii province had been condemned also in October at a congress of Land Sections held in Petrograd. But beyond censure, there was little that could actually be done at this point. See: Al’fa, “Ne priznaiushchye kommunisma.” Lesa Respubliki 16 (1918), cols. 863-65

47. See: N. Kuznetsov, “Propaganda osnovnogo zakona o lesakh.” Ibid., col. 870. More useful signs of the law’s implementation include receipt by the center of the occasional communication from one or other local Soviet of specific areas of forest inventoried or designated exploited or protected.

48. In just one of several examples, the Viatskii Forest Sub-Section was praised in Lesa Respubliki in November for having done “very much work” within the framework of the law. See, Tertius, “Revoliutsiia I mesta.” Ibid., col. 855.

49. GARF. Fond 5520, op. 4, del. 8, st. 5.

50. “Resoliutsii s’ezda.” Lesa Respubliki 17-19, 1918-1919, col. 907

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52. GARF. Fond 5520 op. 4, del. 1. st. 30
53. Ibid, st. 39.
54. Lesu Respubliki 20 (1919), col. 1066.
55. This treaty—designed to end hostilities with Germany and allow Russia thus to remove itself from the Great War—cost Lenin’s government control over vast tracts of important agricultural and industrial land and vital resources. The losses were Poland, the Baltic states, parts of Belorussia, the Ukraine, Finland (previously granted its independence), and parts of Transcaucasia bordering on Turkey. These lands represented a loss to Lenin’s government of some 1,300,000 square miles and over 60 million people. After Germany’s surrender in 1918 much of this land came back under Russian control.
56. It was estimated in 1921, for example, that currently some 62 percent of all Russia’s fuel was derived from wood (RSFSR, II sessiia Vserossiiskogo Tsentral’nogo Ispolnit’nogo Komiteta, VIII sozyva. Pervoe zasedanie. Stenograficheskii otchet. [Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo izdatel’stvo, 1922]), p. 19. This is compared with a figure of 56 percent for 1916 (Ibid., vtoroe zasedanie, 49). The figure rose to a staggering 85 percent during 1918-1919, estimated by forestry experts to have been the worst year of the fuel crisis (Ibid.).
57. On the November 1918 order, see “Predpisanie SNK lesnym podotdelam i zemel’nym otdelam gubispolkomov proizvodit’ besprepiatsvenno i bezvozmezdno otpusk lesnykh materialov Komitetu gosudarstvennykh sooruzhenii i obschestvennykh rabot dlia proizvodstva dorozhnykh strategicheskikh rabot,” in Dekrety Sovetskoi vlasti (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1923-1930), vol. 4, 91-92. “Give over …”: “Dekret SNK o poriadke otpuska lesa.” Dekrety Sovetskoi vlasti (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1923-1930), vol. 5, 147. On the July 1919 decree, see Dekret SNK ob otpuske Glavnomu lesnomu komitetu 375 tys. desiatin lesosek pod zagotovku lesa.” Ibid., 338-39. The Russian specialist V. E. Boreiko has written that these were lands already designated protected as vodookhrannyie lesa (see his “Ekologicheskii Leninism,” in Belye piatna, 134.
60. Zhelezodorozhnyye lesozagotovitel’nye komitety, more often referred to by the contraction “zheleskomny.” These were designed specifically to supply wood to the railroads. They were officially subordinate to the Commissariat of Transport (and thus not to the forest department or its parent, the Commissariat of Agriculture).
61. It is not clear from the source whether by “kuby” are meant cubic meters or cubic sazhens (an old Russian measure equaling approximately 7 ft). Since it is the scale of actual versus planned cutting that is at issue, the precise size of the measurement is not critically important. For figures on the 1920-1921 operating year, see RSFSR. Vserossiiskii tsentral’nyi ispolnit’nyi komitet, XI sozyv. Tret’ia sessia. Zasedanie vos’moe, 15 October 1924, 349.
63. Ibid.
64. RSFSR, Vserossiiskii tsentral’nyi ispolnit’nyi komitet, XII sozyva. Vtoraiia sessiia. Stenograficheskii otchet., 513.
65. Ibid., 514.
66. Ibid., 508.
68. To be fair, this was not simply a barrage of unreasonable demands made by an irrational or excessively greedy peasantry. Real shortages continued, despite all these concessions.


70. Ibid., pp. 527-28, 532.

71. Ibid., XI sozyv, tre’t’ia sessiia, zasedanie vos’moe, 15 October 1924, 379.

72. Ibid., XII sozyv, vtoraya sessiia, zasedanie desiatoe, 23 October 1925, 528 and 535.

73. Ibid., 521.

74. Ibid., 538.


76. Ibid., 10.

77. Ibid., Biulletin’ 8, Zasedanie vos’moe, 24 November 1929, p. 7.
