
[Russia: Mapping Evenki Lands in Central Siberia](#)

The uplands between the Yenisei and the Lena rivers are one of the last regions of unbroken boreal forest --"taiga"-- in Eurasia. This region is the homeland to Evenki, Ket, Sel'kup, Sakha, and Dolgan aboriginal hunters and herders. Although Cossack frontiersmen used the Yenisei, Lena, and Lower Tunguska rivers as their main route to subdue and integrate Eastern Siberia into the Russian Empire in the 17th Century, the central Siberian plateau escaped most of the dislocations of Russian and Soviet industrialism in the 19th and 20th Century. The central Siberian taiga remains sparsely populated and one of the main ecological niches for waterfowl, migratory and domestic reindeer, and a host of fur-bearing species ranging from the Arctic fox to the coveted Yenisei sable. Although Russians form the majority in the few cities and urbanised villages of the region, aboriginal hunters and reindeer herders remain the masters of the vast rural spaces today as they were in the 17th Century.

This relatively stable situation has been recently disrupted with the shift to monopoly market capitalism in the former Soviet Union. The Central Siberian plateau is today seen as a vast 'reserve' for oil, gas, coal, heavy metals and forest products. Foreign and domestic Russian oil companies are vying both for access to the subsurface resources of the region, as well as to rights to build all-weather roads and pipelines to ship fuels and wood to foreign markets. The aboriginal people of the region, once hailed as vanguard socialist herders and hunters, are now searching for a new legal avenue to regain a say in the changing political and economic climate around them.

The Forest Peoples Programme in collaboration with the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) has started training local Evenki hunters and herdsmen on how to create their own maps of their traditional lands using portable Global Positioning Systems devices and Geographical Information System software. It is hoped that armed with these tools, the local aboriginal rights association can make better use of existing Russian legislation that controls the access that companies have to the taiga.

Land use mapping is a politically-charged issue in the Russian Federation. Existing Soviet and new Russian legislation regulates access to topographical maps and GPS technology at certain scales. Nevertheless, recently passed federal legislation charges aboriginal and non-aboriginal rural hunters with the responsibility of filing maps and descriptions of their traditional lands with the federal government if they want them to be protected from industrial exploitation. The Federal law protecting 'Territories of Traditional Land Use' allows local communities of aboriginal and non-aboriginal people to remove their lands from the federal land reserve register and thus set them aside for traditional, non-industrial use. The challenge of this collaborative project has been to find a way to use modern mapping tools in a way that respects current laws but which also provides as accurate as possible data on the location of traditional sites so that they may be protected. At present, the main oil consortia in the region are open to listening to reasoned proposals for the protection of certain places for traditional activity and there is great optimism in the region for reaching a negotiated settlement.

The joint FPP/RAIPON project has started work in the most northerly county of the Evenki

Autonomous District in the taiga spaces drained by the Lower Tunguska and the Vilui rivers. The region, however, is vast and faces many challenges. In the northern Ilimpei county there are no immediate threats to hunters and reindeer herders from industrial development. However the destruction of traditional settlements and hunting spaces has already started in the most southerly county of the District around the village of Osharavo. Beyond the borders of the Evenki Autonomous District, in Turukhansk County, Irkutsk Province, and in the Taimyr Autonomous District industrial exploitation has proceeded several leaps ahead with aboriginal lands already occupied by pipelines, open-pit mining and clear-cut forestry blocks. There is a lot of work remaining to be done in Siberia and FPP would welcome collaboration from other human-rights organisations who would also like to share this experience with land use mapping.

By: David G. Anderson, Forest Peoples Programme, e-mail: david.anderson@abdn.ac.uk
top

OCEANIA

- Aotearoa: Underlying Causes of Deforestation analysed at Indigenous Peoples Workshop

The weekend of the 21st and 22nd of September PIPEC (Pacific Indigenous People's Environment Coalition) held a workshop on the Underlying Causes of Deforestation and Forest Degradation. The workshop was opened by the new Conservation Minister for New Zealand, Chris Carter, and had representatives from most of the Pacific nations' communities here in Aotearoa, along with Maori representation. Nearly all of the Pacific academics working in the tertiary sector attended, as did a representative of Siosiomaga Society from Samoa.

There were four case studies presented; Aotearoa, Samoa, Soloman Islands and Tonga and the Pacific children were represented by speeches on the importance of forests in our lives by school children in the 10 to 13 year old age group. For most of us, this was by far the most moving part of the workshop as we got to see the next generation of forest activists in action. (many for the very first time)

The second day of the conference saw a facilitated brainstorm on Pan-Pacific underlying causes, hoping to draw out potential solutions and major causes and actors. Given that this was an Indigenous workshop, it is not surprising that most of the solutions focused around political leadership, policy and will. Education and capacity building of Indigenous Peoples was identified as being the single biggest potential solution and this was seen within the context of building true independence.

During the weekend, more than 65 people took part in the workshop, and PIPEC picked up several new members. We look forward to participating further in the International struggle for Indigenous Rights and Biodiversity.

By: Sandy Gauntlett, International Research Institute for Maori and Indigenous Issues, Aotearoa/New Zealand, e-mail: sandygauntlett@hotmail.com