

National park sparks controversy

by Igor Astapov
Northern News Service

It has been decided to create a national park, Lake Lama, on the Taimyr Peninsula near Norilsk.

However, far from all local people — and there are nearly 300,000 of them — support this idea.

The future park will bear the name of a unique lake in the Northwest part of the Plutoran Plateau, 100 kilometers from Norilsk.

The inhabitants of the peninsula — Dolgans, Nganasans and Evenks — first came there several centuries ago to graze domesticated deer, to fish and hunt. The local landscape is remarkably beautiful with its deep canyons, glaciers, mountain springs and cascades of big and small waterfalls.

The mountain slopes and valleys around Lake Lama are covered with pines, larches, birches, alders and mountain ash trees.

The forest is full of raspberries, red and black currants and red bilberries.

While 50 years ago there were more bears than people in this region, the situation radically changed when a mining and metallurgical combine and the city of Norilsk was built.

ritories will be closed to visitors.

"We also support the idea of a national park," said Victor Rapota, the leader of the Taimyr Green Front public environmental movement.

"But we think that harmful emissions from the Norilsk combine are more dangerous than tourists. Bans or fences won't save the situation, as technological vapor and acid rain clouds do not recognize any boundaries."

I'm glad that the "greens" voice has been heard and the management of the combine is taking measures to reduce harmful emissions into the air.

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Today the 250,000-hectare area around the lake is usually referred to as a "distant holiday zone."

"On weekends," said Dr. Alexei Solomakha, a biologist and director of the Norilsk Institute of Agriculture in the Far North, "nearly a thousand ships and boats go down the Norilka River to the lake zone, which is visited by almost 35,000 people in the summer, a very short season at this latitude. Such an invasion cannot but damage the local flora and fauna."

"Bighorn sheep and several species of birds have long since deserted the area. When water reservoirs were polluted, many valuable fish species stopped spawning there," Solomakha said.

"Holidaymakers, however, won't have any restrictions or hear of a national park, which, in their opinion, will be 'violation of democracy.' Fortunately, such people are in the minority, and we hope that a referendum in Norilsk will be in favor of a national park," he said.

Solomakha said he wished the organizers of the future park had some experience in this field. Of course, it is much simpler to declare some territories nature preserves closed for all except to researchers.

The organization of a national park requires a more flexible approach and large expenditures.

Though there will be several camping sites, tourist inns, boathouses, helicopter landing pads and fishers' clubs on the lake shores, some ter-