



ТАНОЕБАЙКАЛ

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March 4th, 2003

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

USFS Experts Focus on Developing Eco-Tourism and Promoting Watershed Management Tools and Techniques at Lake Baikal, Russia—the World’s Largest Freshwater Lake

South Lake Tahoe, CA—In 2002 the United States Forest Service began a long-term relationship with the Tahoe-Baikal Institute to promote the development of eco-tourism, and improve watershed management tools and methods at Lake Baikal in Siberia. Lake Baikal is a World Heritage Site and is the world's deepest, oldest, and largest (by volume) freshwater lake. USFS and TBI have developed a series of trainings, research, and exchanges specifically focused on: (1) an ambitious effort to build a 1500 mile “Great Baikal Trail” (GBT) around Lake Baikal connecting over 8 national parks and protected areas to promote low-impact tourism; and (2) synthesizing and developing research and policies working to improve resource planning efforts in Lake Baikal’s largest watershed, the Selenga River, which stretches into both Mongolia and Russia. Both projects are building on lessons learned from the policies and expertise developed within the Lake Tahoe watershed in California and Nevada, as well as other watersheds within the United States.

Ecotourism and Trail Development on the Great Baikal Trail

In 2002, USFS and TBI focused on the first of a 3-year project to improve local capacity to plan, design, construct, and maintain a 1,500 mile trail around Lake Baikal in a way that is sensitive to the local environment as well as able to draw domestic and international tourists. In particular, year 1 USFS assistance brought 3 eco-tourism and forestry experts from Lake Baikal to Lake Tahoe, Washington DC, and Montana to learn from local experts, work on trail crews, attend trail-building and protected area seminars, and to meet with partners to bring trail building volunteers and tourists to work on the GBT in 2003. Training drew heavily from the lessons learned in completing the “Tahoe-Rim Trail”, a 150 mile loop trail around Lake Tahoe that took over 18 years to complete. The TRT required careful long-term planning with private and public land-owners as well as recruiting thousands of volunteers to complete the trail

The development of the GBT and associated USFS/TBI projects are connected with a close, unique, collaboration between a coalition of Russian and American organizations, including the USFS (LTBMU and Humboldt-Toiyabe Districts), the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Sport Tourism and Mountaineering Federation of Buryatia, TBI, Earth Island Institute, Zabaikalsky National Park, the Foundation for

Russian American Economic Cooperation, Earthcorps, the Tahoe Rim Trail Association, and others. .

“Assistance in developing the GBT project has created a unique partnership between Russia and the United States where both countries are implementing a near identical idea,” said Ed Gee, Deputy Forest Supervisor for the USFS Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU). “Completing a trail around both lakes has proved to be a monumental task. But both efforts understand the *process* of building the trail is more important in bringing tourists and volunteers, training protected area specialists on new trail development and interpretation techniques, and improving resource management at both Lake Tahoe and Lake Baikal which are international treasures.”

Participants in the 2002 exchanges included: (1) Andrey Sukhnev, a long-term eco-tourism expert at Baikal and overall GBT project leader; (2) Igor Zadevalov, a former aeronautical engineer responsible for coordinating the technical design and planning for the GBT; and (3) Galina Sedova, the senior park ranger from the Zabaikalsky National Park (the 2nd largest park around Baikal) responsible for all trail planning (including the GBT) and interpretation within the park. Notable aspects of the exchange included Mr. Zadevalov’s 4 month internship with the USFS Humboldt-Toiyabe District trail crews, Mrs. Sedova’s attendance at the 4th annual USFS Protected Area Seminar in Montana, and Mr. Sukhnev’s presentations in Washington DC and Lake Tahoe.

Additional USFS/TBI projects in Year 1 included developing an interpretive brochure (in Russian and English) for one of the most popular GBT hiking routes and supporting the 2002 exchange participants to travel to the “Baikal Tourism Conference” in Irkutsk Russia to discuss the GBT.

Year 2 (2003) and Year 3 (2004) projects will continue to focus on enhancing local capacity to develop the GBT through exchanges and training at both Lake Tahoe and Lake Baikal. In 2003, two exchanges will take place including a “train the trainer” workshop at Lake Baikal on “*Optimizing Visitors Experience on the GBT: Trail Development and Interpretation Techniques*” and a 2-month internship and training session at Lake Tahoe for 2 Lake Baikal trail and protected area specialists. The workshop at Lake Baikal is planned for June??? and will bring 2 USFS trail and interpretation experts to provide 2 training sessions for Russian trail and protected area specialists. The 2 workshops will be based in separate locations differing in visitor stress and landscapes to provide training for different types of technical trail building and interpretation methods. The 2 internships at Lake Tahoe will work with TBI for trail planning, and with the USFS-HT district, Nevada Conservation Corps, and Earth Corps to work on trail crews..

Selenga Watershed Resource Management Program

The USFS has begun work with TBI to synthesize and develop research and policies that work to improve resource-planning efforts in Lake Baikal’s largest watershed, the Selenga River. Over 70% of Lake Baikal’s water catchment area lies in the Selenga watershed. The watershed, an area approximately the size of Spain, is located within the political boundaries of both Russia (40%) and Mongolia (60%) and has a population of

over two million people residing in the major cities of Ulaan Baator (Mongolia) and Ulan Ude (Buryat Republic, Russia).

The TBI/USFS Selenga Watershed Natural Resource Management Program is working with NGOs, government, universities, scientists, and domestic and international businesses to: (1) synthesize and improve existing science, economics, and policy information on the Selenga; (2) identify and study the major pollution sources in the watershed; (3) provide training and forums for local and international experts to learn and trade information on innovative watershed management techniques; and (4) to provide recommendations on how to improve environmental and social conditions in the Selenga.

In 2003, the USFS will sponsor 1 Russian and 1 Mongolian expert to attend a 10-day regional planning workshop in Lake Tahoe sponsored by TBI. The workshop will focus on identifying the tools, methods, and lessons learned from regional planning and land-use management efforts at Lake Tahoe and other large watersheds in the United States, and how they may be applied to the Selenga Watershed at Lake Baikal. USFS sponsored participants will team up with other scientists and policy-makers from Baikal sponsored by other organizations.

For more information about the USFS and TBI projects visit the TBI website at www.tahoebaikal.org or contact Liz Mayhew.

About the Tahoe-Baikal Institute

Tahoe-Baikal Institute is an international partnership founded in 1991 committed to enhancing sustainable economic development, cultural understanding, and the protection of unique watersheds throughout the world. Since 1990, TBI has developed numerous international environmental education, research, training and exchange programs involving students, scholars, and practitioners in science, policy, economics, and other related disciplines. All TBI programs work to: (1) develop environmental leadership skills among young adults and professionals; (2) promote innovative, multi-disciplinary watershed management and protection methods and techniques; (3) promote sustainable economic development, and eco-tourism in particular; and (4) encourage cross-cultural exchange.