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**Modern possibilities for the sustainable tourism development in Russian nature protected areas  
with the example of Lake Baikal Region**

Keywords: protected areas, national park, nature preserve, educational tourism

Recent changes of the state ecological, economical, and land policy have resulted in a new vector for protected areas (further PA) development on federal, regional and local levels. Under new conditions the emphasis is paid on tourism availability affecting original conservation goals of total nature preservation. The strategic recreational vision for federal PAs was worked out in the form of educational ecological tourism. Eight federal PAs of Lake Baikal Region have been partly or entirely included in governmental programs for tourism development as the Lake and its watershed are a perspective national tourism destination. Baikalsky Nature Reserve and "Zapovednoe Podlemorie" (a new management unit for Zabaikalsky National Park, Bargusinsky Nature Reserve) are the case study areas.

Due to absence of strategic vision and necessary infrastructure in each establishment the research aim is the analysis of existing development issues resulting in solutions with the use of foreign experience. Other serious challenges as visitation fees, lack of law regulations, service renderings are been revised. For three years specialists from the US Forest Service and the V.B. Sochava Institute of Geography have been invited for experience exchanges and consultations as well as joint field research. One of decision is hiking tourism development and corresponding infrastructure constructions such as visit-centers, trails, equipped campsites, installation of information and regulation signs.

This approach both solves tasks of ecotourism development in the PAs in accordance with the present-day legislation and economic conditions of Russian national parks and nature reserves, and allows preserving unique species, ecosystems, and landscapes.

The analysis of the nature protected area (PA) system in Russia has existed since the Soviet time revealing essential defects in organization and management of these areas in modern conditions. Moreover, different alterations in the internal state ecological, economic, and land policy in Russia entail changing in the development and function trends of PAs of different levels and protection orders. In new economical and political conditions the accent is made not on isolation and conservation of nature territories, but their accessibility for ecological tourism for various groups of people.

The aim of the research is the analysis of existing challenges in development of recreational activity on NPAs in Russia and working out alternatives of their decisions using foreign experience. The investigated territory includes model PAs of the Baikal Region of Russian Federation (RF) in the Republic of Buryatia – Zabaikalsky National Park and Barguzinsky Reserve which merged into one management unit “Zapovednoe Podlemorye”, and Baikal Nature Biosphere Reserve. These NPAs were chosen as model areas as they represent the typical and unique landscapes of Lake Baikal and its watershed, their image and, therefore, politics, methods of recreational development have to meet sustainable ways of implementation.

### **The role of federal NPAs in the preservation process of Lake Baikal**

Russia is the one of the first countries in the world to take official measures on conservation of landscapes, ecosystems and their components on single vast territory. The first PA – Barguzinsky Soboliny Reserve – was established by the Russian government in 1916. Now there are more than 13 thousand PAs of different management levels in Russia. A special role is played by the ones situated within the Lake Baikal Nature Territory (BNT), especially in its Central Environmental Zone (CEZ) (fig.1).

The PAs in Russia have various statuses and corresponding protection regimes. The most important PAs are reserves (the other term is *zapovedniks*), national parks and game reserves of the federal level. With the first reserve establishment, Russia acted in contrary with the world en-

environmental practice and founded on the coast of the Lake Baikal not a national park, but a reserve. It was the primary step to creation of the unique “philosophy” of total nature preservation (Kraskopevtseva 2009). The fundamental difference between reserves and national parks is in their main organization functions. All reserves were established for conservation of rare species, typical and unique landscapes, or representative ecosystems and territories via the total prohibition of human activities of any kind while foreign national parks gave the opportunity to people to visit some unique nature areas and provided tourist service on their lands. After raises and falls the nature preservation grew its roots in the Soviet Union and remained in the Russian Federation after the communist regime collapse. Nevertheless, in the early 1980s the first national parks carrying the same functions as their prototypes worldwide were founded.

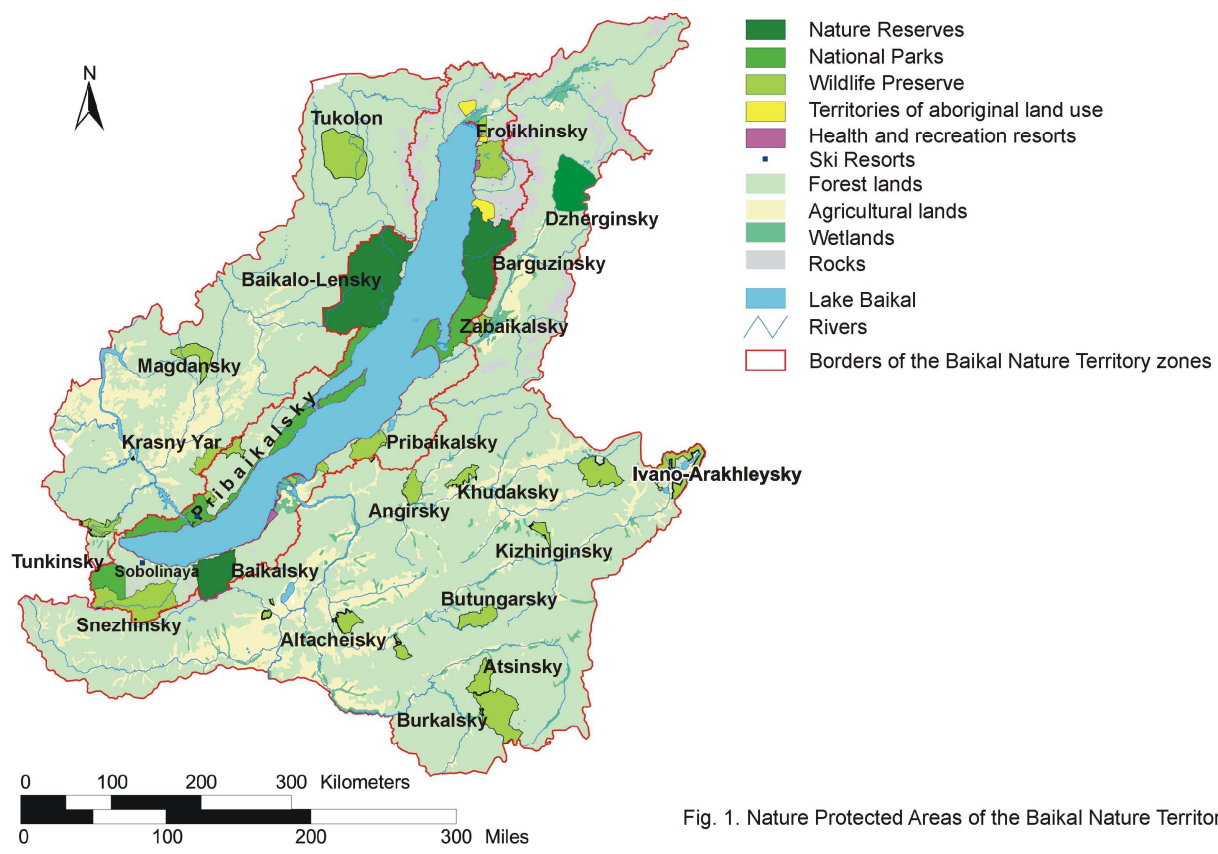


Fig. 1. Nature Protected Areas of the Baikal Nature Territory

Now there are 102 reserves and 42 national parks in Russia, and the strategic development environmental plan of RF until 2020 has intentions to establish additional 11 reserves and 20 na-

tional parks more. Lake Baikal and its watershed with unique landscapes and ecosystems is one of the most uncommon and important environmental area of the world significance. The UNESCO assigned a special status and admitted the Lake as the World Nature Heritage Site in 1996 (Convention..., 1996) as well as the Russian environmental law determined the borders of the BNT as the site with a particular ecological status. The BNT is divided into three zones with different ecological regulations: zone of atmospheric influence, buffer ecological zone and CEZ. (Enactment..., 2000). The last one has the strictest protection regime with prohibition of any industrial development, placement of economic objects and other restrictions. The special attention is paid to development strategies of Baikal costal areas. Moreover, the legislation of the Russian Federation defines limitations and prohibitions on human activity within the water protection zone of Lake Baikal.

There are three reserves (Baikalsky, Baikalo-Lensky and Barguzinsky) and three national parks (Pribaikalsky, Zabaikalsky and a part of Tunkinsky) in the CEZ which have an important role for conservation of Baikal water and land ecosystems. In 2011, Russian government made a decision about introduction of the Federal specific program (FSP) “Development of internal and entry tourism in RF (2011-2018)” (Enactment..., 2011), which was concerned with the subsequent policy of PAs development particularly in reserves. In fact, accepting the program Russian government turned the state environmental system to the side of the world ecologically oriented usage of nature resources in the PAs, i.e. to development of environmental educational and ecological tourism at the territories with ecological functions.

For the government, in order to target a high-scaled goal of self-sufficient level of tourism development on the federal protected areas the dual process of management actions is been implemented within the system. First of all, the new type of tourism is strongly suggested to reserves and national parks to be developed and to bring revenues. The idea of the so-called educational tourism was first announced in 2010 and later it was officially determined in the new edi-

tion of the Federal Law on the “Specially protected nature territories” where it is described as “one of the special types of ecological tourism with the main goal of introduction to natural and cultural sightseeings” (Luzhkova 2013). Second, the process of integration has started carrying the massive character during the past several years: the federal states are been enlarged by merging states (oblasts, republics, autonomous regions), scientific and educational establishments. Federal protected areas have become the next category to follow the trend and to have geographically attached units integrated under one general administration despite of difference in categories, historical aspects and sizes. The effective management approach is the main aim of this change. Therefore, it is important to investigate the above-mentioned processes in practice and their influence on the touristic images of the PAs.

#### **Dual process of the Federal NPAs development: educational tourism and integration process**

According to the law currently in force on the PAs in Russia (Federal..., 1995), any kinds of human activity are forbidden in reserves as well as easy access of population which is not reserve workers as opposed to territories of national parks. At the same time eco-educational visiting and work is possible at some limited places.

For the first time Russian government began to speak about development of the educational tourism in reserves and financial assignation of the PAs from the federal budget in 2009. Later the corresponding Federal Assignment Program “Development of internal and entry tourism in RF (2011-2018)” was approved where, in fact, the decision on development of the educational tourism in reserves under the condition of maintenance of sustainable development principles and ecological restrictions was confirmed. For realization of the program the special financing system was worked out for the period of 2011 - 2013. It proposed development and equipment with necessary recreational facilities and infrastructure, building of trails and excursion routes, and acquisition of required equipment. Nine federal reserves were selected on the competitive basis as the model territories, among them there were Baikalsky Natural Biosphere Reserve

(further Baikalsky Reserve) located within the CEZ border (Ministry..., 2011). The successful realization of the Federal Assignment Program on the model territories supposes that in the future all the PAs in Russia closed for public access will be able to become available for tourists from all over the world.

The next step of the educational tourism development in the Russian PAs and particularly in Lake Baikal is passing the FSP “The protection of Lake Baikal and socio-economic development of the BNT on 2012-2020” (Enactment..., 2012). The model NPAs territories of this program are again Baikalsky Reserve and also other federal PAs in the CEZ, such as Barguzinsky and Baikalo-Lensky Reserves and Pribaikalsky and Zabaikalsky National Parks.

It is supposed that both programs and subsidiary financing would give the opportunity to solve main problems of the PAs not only within the BNT but on the state level. They let the PAs raise effectiveness of using their recreational potential and, consequently, their development and independence, conservation and reproduction of biological resources, organization and building of recreational infrastructure and determined ecological routes, tourist visitstion control, monitoring of the unique and vulnerable ecosystem conditions, etc.

Under these conditions the formation of environmental and educational tourism becomes the main PA’s development strategy. At present, it is restrained by the absence of respective infrastructure (hiking trails of different categories, equipped campsites, complicated transport accessibility to places of recreation, absence of toilets, etc.). The other serious issue being an obstacle for development of the educational tourism is lack of the legislation mechanisms for collecting fees from tourists for visiting the PAs, leasing and conceding objects of infrastructure, providing varous types of recreational touristic services.

For the solution of these issues and, at the same time, one of the directions of tourism development under the strict ecological restrictions is development of hiking tourism and organization of the corresponding infrastructure (construction of visiting centers and trails, building toilets

and rest sites at the places of mass tourist crowds, placing information and regulative boards and tablets). Being included in the Federal Assignment Programs since 2011 and, therefore, better financed has allowed the model PAs of Lake Baikal's CEZ (Baikalsky Reserve and Zapovednoe Podlemorie combined Barguzinsky Reserve and Zabaikalsky national Park) to conduct such kind of works. Annually the administration of these model areas invites specialists from the Forest Service (USA) and the V.B. Sochava Institute of Geography SB RAS (Irkutsk, Russia) for experience exchanges, consultations and joint field research.

### **Educational tourism: current stage in Baikalsky Reserve. Pros and cons**

Baikalsky Reserve was established in 1969 for conservation of the Khamar- Daban mountain range with the humid taiga. Its northern border stretches along the Lake Baikal shoreline for 40 km and its total area is 165,724 square kilometers. Kabanskii and Altacheiskii Federal Game Reserve are managed by the administration of the Preserve (Luzhkova 2013). It is located relatively far from the Capital or Russian megapolis, however, it is in the middle of the road between Irkutsk (600,000 citizen) and Ulan-Ude (410,000 citizen), where the interest to the Reserve has been growing within the local population. Thus, it causes certain issues of the annually raising flow of tourists visiting the Reserve itself and the shore of Lake Baikal. Most of tourists come from Irkutsk, its satellites, and Ulan-Ude or other Russian cities, as well as from foreign countries. For the comparison the total number in 2010 was did not exceed 1500 visitors and in 2012 more visitors were registered. At the same time, the administration of Baikalsky Reserve started thinking of the ecotourism development in the beginning of the century. In 2007, the first conception of recreational infrastructure development for receiving some special tourist groups (students, schoolchildren, scientists, international expeditions, etc.) was worked out. After including the Reserve in the FSP in 2011 a new plan of Baikalsky Reserve development and organization of recreational infrastructure on its territory for attracting tourists was elaborated. The Preserve received financing of 180 mln rubles (apr. 4.5 mln EURO) as a part of the Model Territories As-

signation program and additional assignments within the other FSPs. For improvement of the work in the recreational sphere the Reserve staff actively collaborates with scientific and Russian and foreign non-governmental organizations, carries out a number of joint volunteer projects (including international) on ecotourism management and development on its territory, involves grants and sponsor supports from different firms for conducting some ecological actions (General..., 2013).

Over the past years the PAs administrations realized the necessity of interaction with organizations which have professional and expert skills for development and management of recreational processes on protected lands. This kind of work became possible just during last three-five years when the Russian government started paying more attention to the problems of preserved territories, increased financing and implemented special federal programs. Moreover, now there are additional opportunities for these territories for enlargement of internal and international connections, grant and special program supporting of environmental projects. When the period of planning and constructing of the infrastructure for the educational tourism development and Baikal Reserve established connection with some foreign agencies such as the USA Fish and Wildlife Service, the USA Forest Service, the company “Denaje” (France), non-government organizations “Tahoe-Baikal Institute” and “Great Baikal trail”, scientific establishments, for example the V.B. Sochava Institute of Geography SB RAS, and others.

Reconstruction of existing and building of new objects of recreational infrastructure for successful realization of the FSP on the territory of Baikalsky Reserve is planned (table 1). As it was proposed the highest of tourist flow would be directed to the buffer zone limiting confrontations with the regulations of strict protection of the area.



Table 1. Infrastructure of Baikalsky Reserve

Object type	Existent objects (before 2011)	New planned objects in addition to existing (after 2011)
Information visit-centers	Tsentralny (Tankhoi village) Dulikha Protoka Sredniaya	In addition: Visit-center on the shore of Lake Baikal (Tankhoi village)
Ranger station	Mishikha Vydrinnaya Taiozhny Samkhak Altachei Kabansky	Remodeling of six ranger station
Expositions	Nature museum Ethnical village Model "Baikal on palm"	In addition: Entrance exposition
Winter huts and campsites	43 objects	In addition: temporary houses on the trail "Bear Corner", Campsite in Tankhoi village
Ecological trails	Trail along the Osinovka river "Bear Corner" Trail along the Vidrinnaya river	In addition: Wheel-chair accessible trails Cider Alley and Upland Swamps, five more trails
View points and towers		Installation of web-cameras

The original infrastructure was designed as accommodations for the Reserve workers and some scientific research groups. Now some of those objects, mostly in the buffer zone of the Reserve, are adapted for tourists, for instance, visitor-centers "Mishikha", "Omuliovy" and others. Currently, the work is continued on some new constructions very actively. Some of the new objects have already completed, for example, the temporary houses were installed, the trail "Bear Corner" has almost been built, and the web-camera has already been functioning since last summer.

As the result of the collaboration and consultations between representatives from Baikalsky Reserve administration, Russian scientific and non-government organizations and the foreign establishments, the following algorithm was developed for the territory. It can be used as guidelines for the decision-making process on other PAs in Russia in order to work out strategy

for development and management of the ecological educational tourism: 1) identification, planning and design of main objects such as permanent constructions (visit-centers, ranger stations), routes and trail area, comfortable campsites; 2) carrying out scientific justification on the geoecological basis according to the functional zoning of the PA, component analysis of the landscapes (soil, flora, and fauna) disturbed by recreational activity, analysis of potential anthropogenic load, and assessment of resistance and acceptable changes of ecosystems; 3) working out the preliminary specification for building the infrastructure including calculations for the future maintenance; 4) constructing trails, campsites and other objects for accommodation of tourists and their recreational activities; 5) equipping other corresponding tourist infrastructure (information boards, etc.), 6) offering tourist services to visitors. Such approach not only solves the task of ecotourism development on the PAs in accordance with the present-day legislation and economic conditions of existence of Russian national parks and reserves, but also allows preserving unique natural systems, landscapes, habitats and flora and fauna species.

Recreational development of the PAs due to organization of ecological educational tourism has certain pros and cons. It is clear on the example of introduction of educational tourism in Baikalsky Reserve.

Pros from the educational ecotourism:

1. Demonstration of certain parts of the Preserve and its buffer zone delivers conservation messages to the tourist on importance of such regime of preservation. Positive experience of visitors helps growing the positive image to the particular PA and the system in general.

2. Solving employment problem. Infrastructure development and the increasing tourist flow gives additional jobs to the reserve workers as well as the residents of the nearest settlements.

3. Organized tourism and controlled visitor flow allow regulating the anthropogenic load on the territory and quickly react to degradation of the local ecosystems and landscapes.

4. Collaborative approach for development of infrastructure objects, for example, connecting different specialists for design of excursion routes in the future gives an opportunity to decline the anthropogenic pressure on ecosystems and minimize it even if the tourist flow is rather high.

5. It is the step forward for self-development and self-organization as a tour operator in the national and international market of the ecotourism services.

6. It is the opportunity for organizing and holding different arrangements of the local, regional, Russian, and international scale.

Cons from the educational ecotourism:

1. Raising tourist flow causes certain littering of the territory and intensification of the anthropogenic load.

2. As certain percentage of local population does not accept the policy of recreational development of the PA it can cause the confrontation with the residents of the nearest settlements.

3. Insufficient objectivity of the PA administration. Not every manager is able to see the border between the educational ecotourism and earning money on the large visitor flow with damage to nature.

4. The peculiarity of nature and other conditions (high humidity, remoteness from large urbanization centers, long-term winter, etc.) puts the Reserve in strong dependence on FSPs, sponsor support and external financing as constructed infrastructure demands for continuous amortization and maintenance. Even larger tourist flow does not bring enough revenues to make recreational infrastructure and the Reserve itself self-sufficient.

#### **Integration: crucial reasons, pros and cons. Example of Zapovednoe Podlemorye**

The three PAs on the eastern shore of Lake Baikal were the first to experience the new for Russia management experiment of merging federal reserves and national parks. The Order of the reorganization was signed on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011 in the Ministry of Nature Resources and

Ecology (Zabaikalsky..., 2013). The new establishment of the united administration or one management unit received the name of “Zapovednoe Podlemorye” which is literally translated “protected land by the sea”. The total combined areas amounted 745,063 ha including 53,831 ha of aquatic zone (Informational..., 2013). Later in 2012 similar processes happened on the Taimyr peninsula to unite four reserves and the Far East to combine administrations of the “Kedrovaya Pad” reserve and “the Land of the Leopard” national park (History..., 2013; Zapovednyy..., 2013).

Territorially and geographically the separate units remained their statuses and functions of reserves and national parks but the management departments were utilized. Therefore there is one department of protection, recreation and environmental education, science, forestry, etc.

While the Barguzinsky Reserve receives small attention for the recreational development and therefore less visitors (1945 in 2012, approximately 1000 in ten months of 2013), it retains its status of the strictest protection, allowing visitation of two trails and three ranger station and keeping the rest of the territory pristine. The Preserve keeps its image of the wilderness being interested only to certain groups of ecotourists. At the same time Zabaikalsky National Park acts as a vanguard for tourism in the area. The staff documented 26381 visitors in 2012 and nearly 26000 during ten months of 2013 (Informational..., 2013).

Zabaikalsky National Park is located in a typical mountain-taiga area. Within the park there are the following major mountainous places: Svyatonosky Range, Barguzin Range, Chivyrkuisky Isthmus and Ushkany Islands. With its pristine wilderness and unique ecosystem located on the Lake Baikal World Heritage site, Zabaikalsky National Park is one of the few areas in Russia that fully meets the criteria of UNESCO specially protected natural areas. The UNESCO defines these areas as «unique, well preserved natural ecosystems and landscapes located in a compact territory, of a sufficiently large surface area» (Zabaikalsky..., 2013).

The territory of the park is divided into six zones: 1) Protected zone, 2) Strict protection, 3) Recreational usage, 4) Visitor service, 5) Traditional land management, 6) Educational tourism (Zabaikalsky..., 2013) (fig.2). The zone of strict protection is the largest, basically demonstrating the conservation approach of the Park to limit access to certain areas. At the same time it is intersected with narrow stripes of the educational tourism zones represented by proposed long hiking trails. This fact shows the tendency of development of environmentally friendly hiking tourism within two zones. Most of the impact is concentrated on the attractive shores the Holy Nose peninsula and isthmus with the specifically determined recreational use zone. Such zoning represents the balance between the visitor demand for usage of the shoreline and strict preservation of inland ecosystems.

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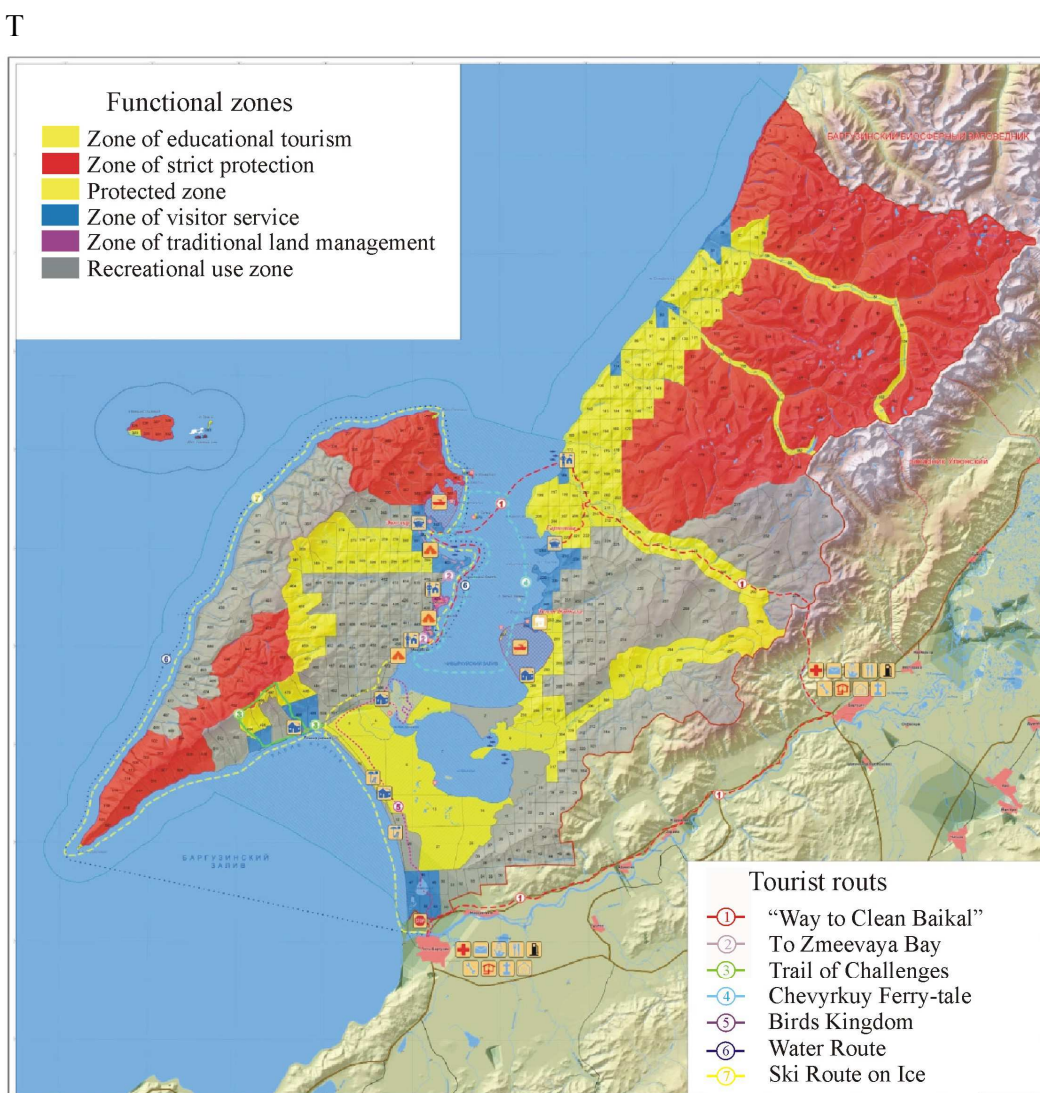


Fig. 2. Functional zoning scheme of Zabaikalsky National Park (source: Documentation of “Zapovednoe Podlemor’e”).

mon on its territory: hiking, water (boats and kayaks), mountain, scientific and skiing in winter (Informational..., 2013). Three main hiking trails with the total length of 87 km, two barge hotels, six hut-type of facilities form the main infrastructure of the part. The research shows that this capacity is not enough for the annually growing number of visitors affecting the image of the territory.

At the same time, in 2012 35 mln rubles (0.8 mln EURO) out of 91.5 mln rubles (approximately 2 mln EURO) of the total revenues were received through the Lake Baikal Target program with the main targets of fire prevention and recreational development. Similar equivalent was assigned in 2013, moreover, according to the staff of the establishment, starting from 2015 the program would be mainly oriented on the recreational development. That means that the “Zapovednoe Podlemorye” would face issues similar to Baikalsky Reserve. Thus, both under the current conditions and possible aspects of development joint scientific research with the management focus should be applied to the territory.

### **Role of the international experience exchanges**

In order to improve the infrastructure for the preservation and recreation purposes the joint projects were conducted with the specialists of the USA Forest Service, local and international non-profit organizations (Tahoe-Baikal Institute, Great Baikal Trail) and the V. B. Sochava Institute of Geography (Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Science). In the years of 2011 - 2013 the staff of the Park and later of “Zapovednoe Podlemorye” participated in the trainings, round tables of the mentioned organizations as well as hosted groups of consultants on their territory in order to find the management solutions for the most visited sites: the isthmus, settlement of Monakhovo, trail Monakhovo-Zmееvaya, hot-springs in the Zmееvaya bay and the Ushkani islands, the nerpa seal rookery. The combination of the research and later provided reports has shown the effectiveness of such projects and the need in scientific research prior any infrastructure development.

As the result, the main pros of the merge for the PAs for the tourism development were determined:

1. The main tourist traffic is directed to distinguished zones of the National Park limiting access both to the Preserve and restricted and strictly protected zones of the National park.

2. With the merge the interest to the “Zapovednoe Podlemorye” started growing due to the brand of Barguzinsky Zapovednik as the oldest PA in Russia.

3. Additional financial assignments became more feasible to target.

The Preserve and National Park integrated unit has cons resulted in:

1. The establishment is now ready for the rapidly growing visitation due to the lack of staff, financing and experience in recreational management of a new type of organization.

2. Eventually, Barguzinsky Reserve may become an attractive tourist spot in case of infrastructure development, which would violate with its current regime.

Thus, the image of the territory as a sustainable managed protected area is observed despite the main challenges with the lack of financing and visitor grow due to the administrative approach to solve on-going problems and search for strategic solutions with the support of experiences organizations both locally and internationally.

### **Conclusion**

Protected areas in Russia have been experiencing recent changes in their management however they remain attractive tourist destinations. Most of the visitors are not aware of the difficulties both in educational tourism development and integration process. Their main goal is to experience the nature and learn about the beauty of the land and the Lake by the means of hiking, biking, water tourism and guided tours. Therefore, management attempts for improvement have to stay behind the seen and be used for the sustainable land-use. The joint scientific research and collaborative work with the USA Forest Service showed that educational tourism development in reserves and the process of integration have both positive and negative sides for the functioning

of the administrations and as the result on the land conservation and tourism development. Joint approach in order to distinguish environmentally friendly management solutions should be applied to PAs of various statuses. Both Baikalsky Zapovednik and “Zapovednoe Podlemorye” have become the pilot projects of tourism development in the new era of nature conservation and due to this understanding and responsible management they are open to collaboration with specialists from different backgrounds and countries in order to sustain the unique environment and provide outstanding services.

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