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**Review: The Russian Far East: A Reference Guide for Conservation  
and Development**  
By Josh Newell (Ed.)

Reviewed by [Laura M. Calkins](#)  
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Josh Newell (Ed.) *The Russian Far East: A Reference Guide for Conservation  
and Development*. Second Edition. McKinleyville, CA: Daniel & Daniel,  
Publishers, Inc., 2004. 466pp. ISBN:1880284-75-8. US\$59.95. (paperback)  
Acid-free paper.

The Russian Far East (RFE) is a massive yet little-known ecological preserve, buffered from the industrial revolution and resulting environmental depredations both by its remote geography and by the relative political and economic isolation of the Soviet Union, of which it was a part until 1991. Now part of the Russian Federation, the RFE is enormous. It covers 6.6 million square kilometers, stretching from the Laptev Sea and Arctic Ocean in the north to the borders with China and Japan in the south. It includes at its extreme southern tip the great port of Vladivostok on the Sea of Japan, and takes in the Sakhalin and Kuril Islands as well as the Kamchatka Peninsula and the Russian side of the Bering Strait. Westerners tend to think of this area as the eastern part of Siberia, but for Russians and most Asians, "Siberia" is the vast mid-continent region west of the RFE. With volcanic mountains, Arctic tundra, massive stretches of forest and temperate ocean littorals, the RFE is, as editor Josh Newell claims, "the most biologically diverse region of the largest country on earth" (p. vii).

It is also one of the world's last great expanses to be both broadly, although lightly, populated and relatively understudied. Since the early 1920s the entire region has been isolated from international interactions by a political "Polar Curtain" imposed by the Soviet government based in Moscow, some 9000 kilometers to the west. Soviet-era scientists, scholars, and bureaucrats worked assiduously to survey, catalog, and control the peoples and natural assets of the RFE, but only since the mid-1990s have European, American, and Asian scientists and tourists gained entrance to this fascinating region.

This reference guide would be invaluable to anyone fortunate enough to visit Russia's Far East, but its organization is also welcoming for non-experts who need to study the RFE from afar. An initial "overview" section sets out the environmental complexity of the region, while the ten subsequent chapters provide economic profiles, ecological data, and revealing photographs of each sub-region. Each chapter also includes special sections on regional ecology, legal issues, indigenous peoples, and "biodiversity hotspots." One

chapter profiles the immense Republic of Sakha, which at 3.1 million square kilometers encompasses one quarter of the Russian Federation's land area; it is approximately five times the size of the US state of Texas (p.227). Another RFE region, or oblast, is the "Jewish Autonomous Oblast" which lies along the Amur River on the border with China. Stalin as a relocation zone for European Russia's urban Jewish minority created this Oblast in the 1920s (p. 180); but now miners and oil field workers have replaced Jewish refugees.

As a reference volume, this work scores well across most categories of interest to both general and specialized readers. The data is fresh, most of its generated in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Photographs have been carefully selected, and the publisher has permitted adequate space for image reproduction. A compelling array of data appears in the graphs, charts, tables and appendices. These figures are well placed, so as not to intrude upon textual sections. Quantitative data on the basics like population density and the distribution of mineral deposits is here, of course, but so are eclectic items like historical data on timber harvesting during a period of Japanese occupation (p. 401) and contemporary fish catch quotas in RFE waters (p. 424).

The utility of reference works often hangs on the variety and accuracy of their maps. This volume delivers on both counts by presenting 53 maps, including several in full color (pp. 13-21). Each chapter opens with a full-page political map of the RFE region under consideration, and additional maps detailing natural resources, land use, and fishing waters are provided. There is even a map detailing the locations from which tens of thousands of tons of king crabs are illegally harvested each year and shipped to Japan and the United States (p. 57).

This reviewer found few faults. However, the following observations might prove useful to a future edition. Western readers typically have scant knowledge of Russia's expanses east of the Urals; the further east, it seems, the less we know. It would be beneficial to regularize the presentation of anthropological background information and political history, in line with the other sections in each chapter. Also, keen readers will doubtless be spurred to further reading. Inclusion of a list of journal and press articles, United Nations agency and other official reports, and reliable websites would facilitate the researches of students and specialists alike.

The range of data packed into this volume is quite simply astounding. A quick search for related titles produced no similar publication that compares to the resources presented in *The Russian Far East*. This volume is very highly recommended for universities, colleges, and research bodies

interested in East and Northeast Asia, post-Soviet Russia, biodiversity, international trade and economics, and contemporary environmental issues. The fact that preservation of the RFE's "frontier" forestlands, which are profiled here in rich detail, is one of our planet's last natural defenses against global warming should in itself merit the purchase of this book for most major collections.

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