

An Introduction to the Russian Far East



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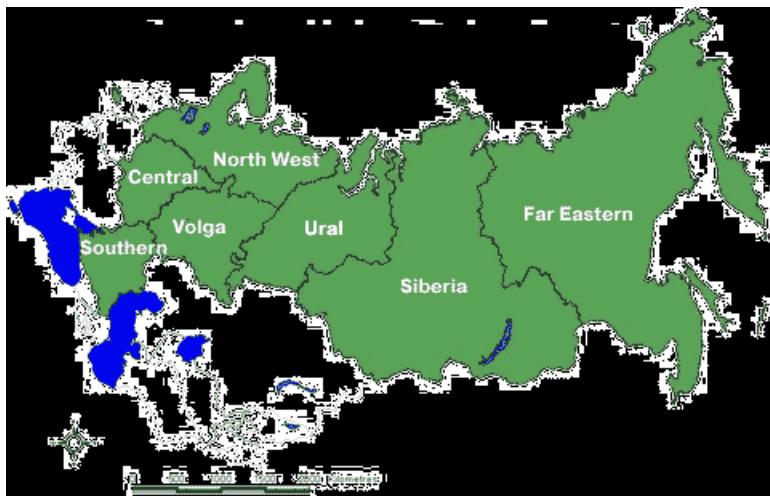
Russia in Asia Faculty Development Workshop
University of Alaska Anchorage
May 23, 2005

by

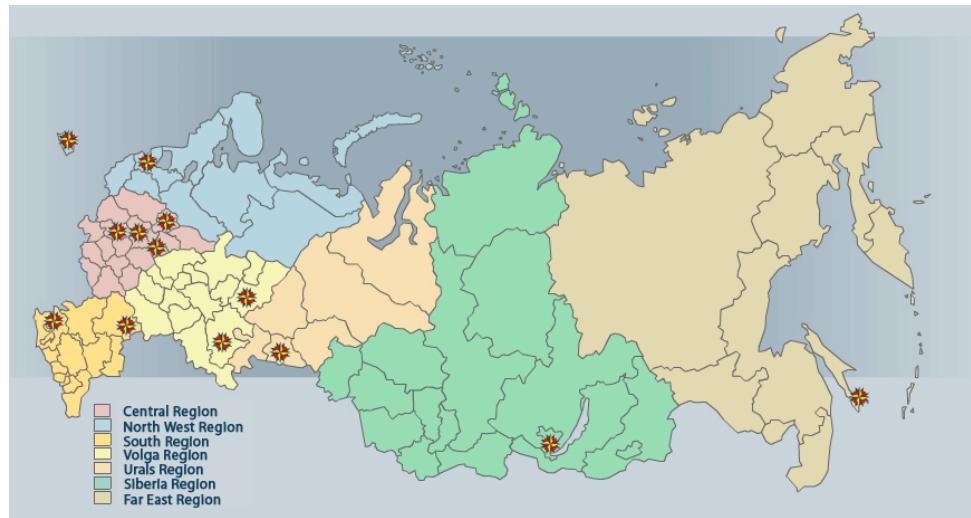
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Russians refer to the eastern part of Russia as the “Far East.” For Russians, the term “Siberia” refers to the central part of Russia. However, many foreigners and some Russians use the term “Siberia” to refer to all of Russia east of the Urals—including the “Far East.”



Source: http://www.acdi-cida.ru/projects/maps/russia_map_e.gif



Source: www.eurasiaroyalrangers.com/russia/images/rr_regions_russia_en.gif

The “Russian Far East” is defined in different ways by different authors and organizations.

A common definition of the Russian Far East includes these ten administrative regions.

Some definitions exclude the Sakha Republic. Others include not only Sakha, but also include Buryatia and Chita (west of Amur)



The Russian Far East is a very large area.

- 6.63 million square kilometers
- 40 percent of the Russian Federation
- More than two-thirds the size of the United States
- More than four times the size of Alaska (1.48 million square kilometers)

Because it is so big, it is difficult to generalize about the Russian Far East.

Across the Russian Far East there is wide variation in almost every measure which we might consider important in describing and understanding the Russian Far East.

- Climate
- Topography
- Vegetation
- Natural resources
- Indigenous groups
- History of Russian settlement
- Population
- Infrastructure
- Level of economic development
- Living standards
- Proximity to other parts of Russia
- Proximity to other parts of Asia
- Proximity to Alaska
- Strategic significance

The Russian Far East . . .



Anadyr 1989

The Russian Far East . . .



Vladivostok 2005

The Russian Far East . . .



Chukotka 1989

The Russian Far East . . .



Primorskii Krai, 2005

The Russian Far East . . .

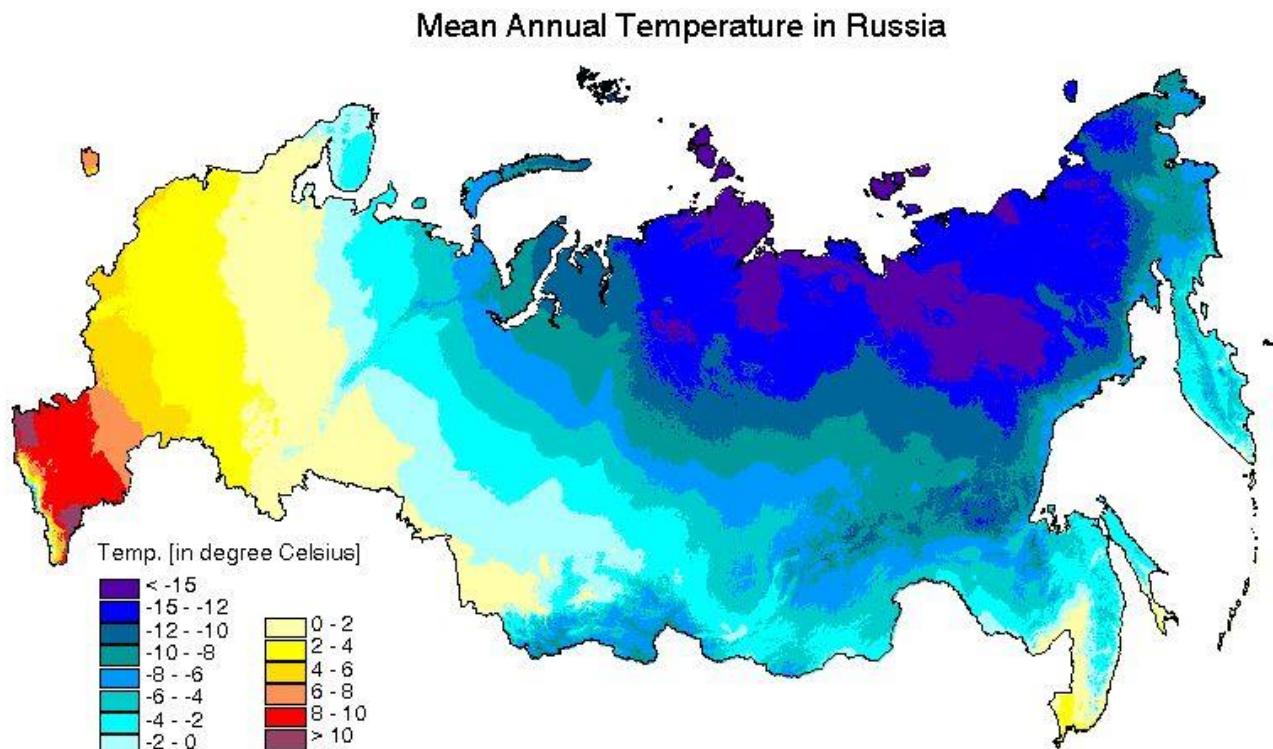


Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii, 2002

Is the Russian Far East part of the North?

It clearly is, by most measures.

Most of the Russian Far East is much colder than other parts of Russia.



Map source: www.iiasa.ac.at/Research/LUC/GIS/img/clim_ru_tmpy.jpg

Because of its cold and remoteness, much of the Russian Far East is included in varying official definitions of the Russian “North.”



Source: Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy, *The Siberian Curse*, page 223.

But within the vast area of the Russian Far East, there is a wide variation in climate.

- The northern and western RFE has a continental climate, with a long dry and very cold winter and a short but warm summer.
- The Southeastern RFE has a monsoon climate with humid summers, dry and warm autumns, cold and dry winters and cool springs.



June 1989-Anadyr, Chukotka



June 1989-Nakhodka, Primorye

But while most of the geographic area of the Russian Far East is cold and “northern,” most of the population of the Russian Far east is concentrated in the extreme south of the region, where the climate is less harsh.

- About 9% live in Vladivostok.
- Almost one-third live in Primorsky Krai.
- Almost two-thirds live in Primorye, Khabarovsk, and Amur.

Population of the Russian Far East, 2000 (thousands)

| Region | Population | % | Cum. % |
|--------------------------------|-------------|---------------|--------|
| Russian Far East: TOTAL | 7098 | 100.0% | |
| Primorsky Krai | 2158 | 30.3% | 30.3% |
| Khabarovsk Krai | 1507 | 21.1% | 51.4% |
| Amur Oblast | 998 | 14.0% | 65.4% |
| Republic of Sakha | 974 | 13.7% | 79.1% |
| Sakhalin Oblast | 591 | 8.3% | 87.4% |
| Kamchatka Oblast | 378 | 5.3% | 92.7% |
| Magadan Oblast | 227 | 3.2% | 95.9% |
| Jewish Autonomous Okrug | 198 | 2.8% | 98.6% |
| Chukotka Autonomous Okrug | 69 | 1.0% | 99.6% |
| Koryak Autonomous Okrug | 29 | 0.4% | 100.0% |

Source: Newell, *The Russian Far East*, page 7, citing Goskomstat.

Despite the wide variation across the Russian Far in climate, topography, landscape and vegetation, it is clearly and instantly recognizable as *Russia*.

Those familiar with European Russia will recognize *Russia* in the people, in the architecture, and in innumerable other obvious and subtle ways.

The Russian Far East . . .



Khabarovsk, 1989

The Russian Far East . . .



Anadyr, 1989

The Russian Far East . . .



Susuman, Magadan Oblast, 1989

The Russian Far East . . .



Magadan, 1989

The Russian Far East . . .



Vladivostok, 2005

The Russian Far East . . .



Vladivostok, 2002

The Russian Far East . . .



Vladivostok 2005

The Russian Far East



Anadyr 1989

The Russian Far East . . .



Vladivostok 2005

The Russian Far East . . .



Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii 2000

The Russian Far East . . .



Vladivostok 2005

The Russian Far East . . .



Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii 2000

The Russian Far East . . .



Vladivostok 2002

The Russian Far East . . .



Vladivostok 2002

The Russian Far East . . .



Magadan 1989

The Russian Far East . . .



Magadan 1989

The Russian Far East . . .



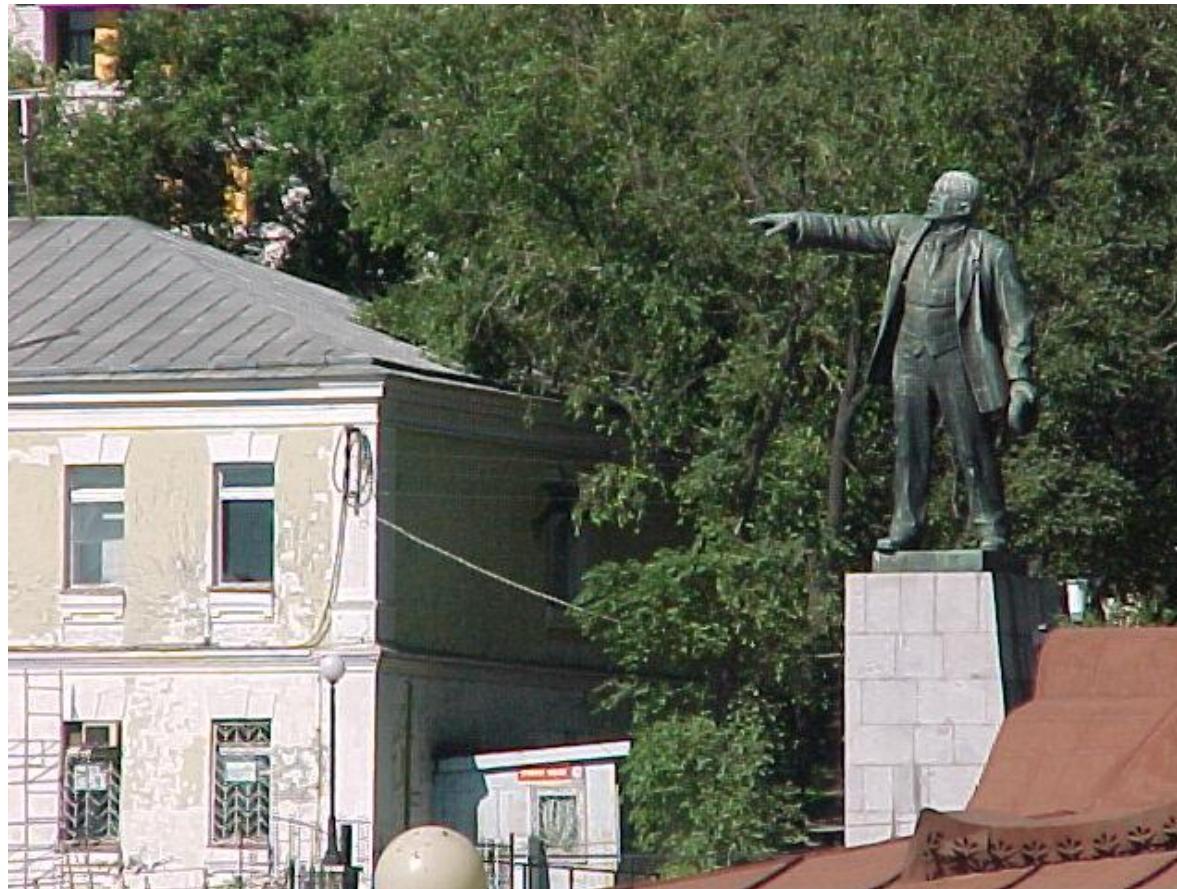
Anadyr 1989

The Russian Far East . . .



Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii 2000

The Russian Far East . . .



Vladivostok 2002

What matters about the Russian Far East?

What should be the topics for a workshop on “Russia in Asia”?

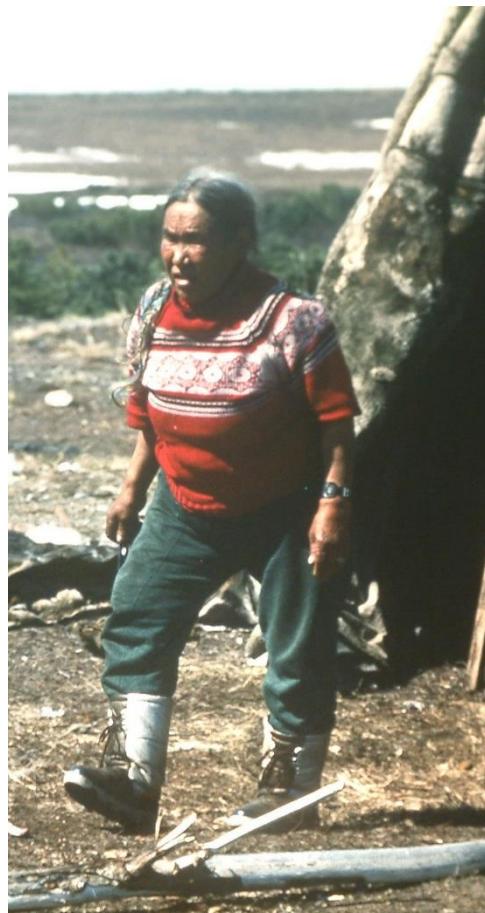
There are many different answers—far too many to cover in a single workshop.

The Russian Far East is part of Russia, part of Asia, part of the Pacific Rim, and part of the North--and may be seen from all of these perspectives and many more.

Part of what matters in the Russian Far East is the experience of the many indigenous peoples—who have faced the challenges of indigenous peoples everywhere--compounded by the effects of the Soviet period and its aftermath.



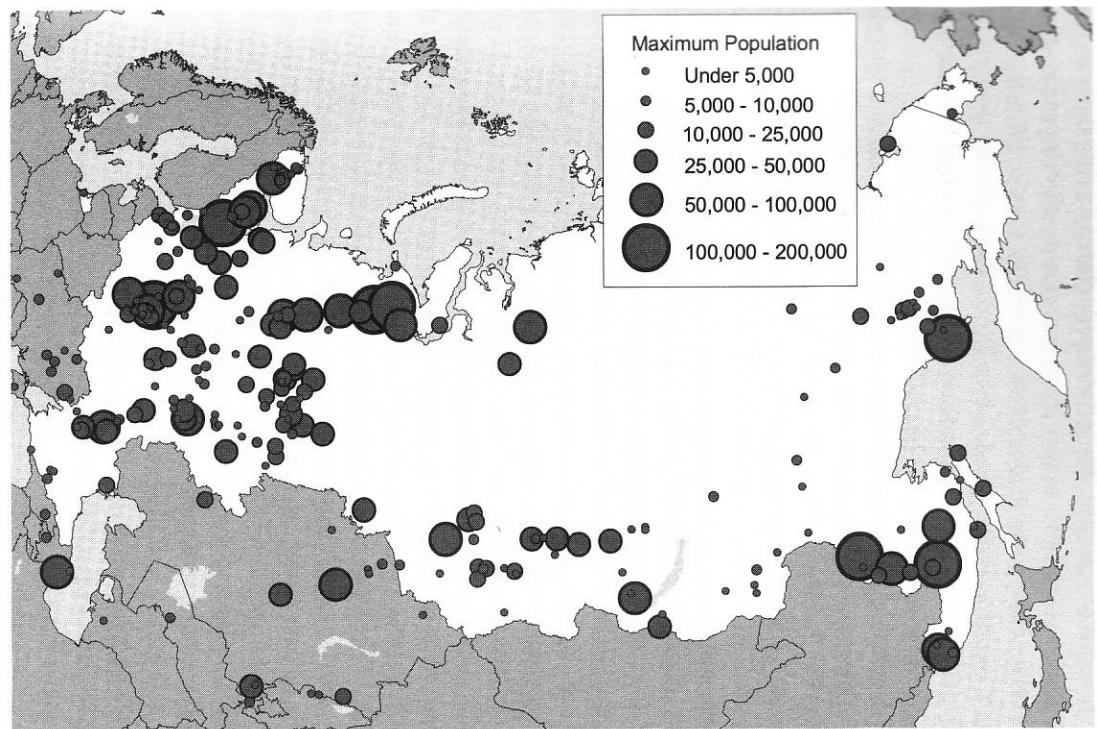
Chukchi man and woman,
Chukotka 1989



Map source:
land.sfo.ru/eng/images/maps/aborb.jpg

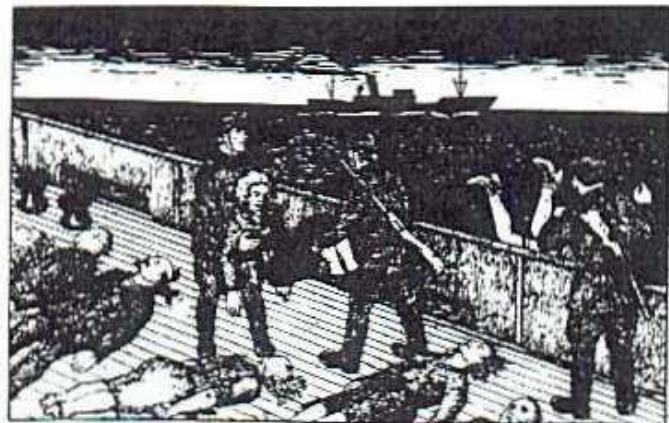
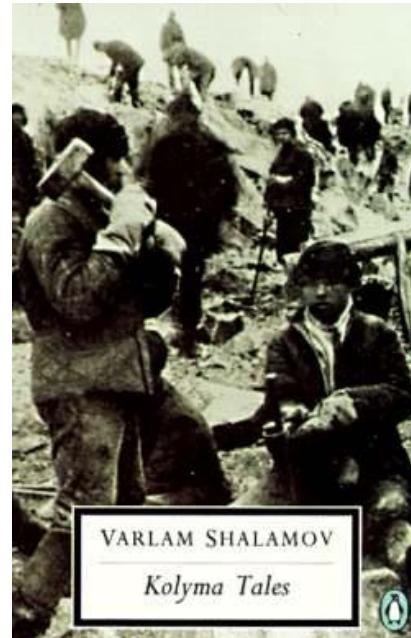
Part of what matters in understanding the Russian Far East—and the broader history of Russia and humanity—is the experience of the GULAG. Many of the settlements and economic developments of the Russian Far East had their origins in camps of the GULAG.

Peak GULAG Population in Cities and Towns of the Soviet Union, 1923-1960.



Source: Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy, *The Siberian Curse*, page 85, citing data in M.B. Smirnov, *Sistema ispravitel'no-trudovykh lagerey v SSSR 1923-1960: spravochnik* (Moscow, Zven'ya, 1998).

It is difficult for us to comprehend the scale of human suffering during the GULAG period in the Russian Far East.



ИЗ БОРТА ЕЁ БРОСАЕТ В НАБЕЖАВШУЮ ВОЛНУ... НА КОРМ РЫБАМ - СБРОС КОНВОЕМ МВД ТРУПОВ ЗАКЛЮЧЕННЫХ, ЧУБЫХ И УМЕРШИХ В ТРЮМАХ ЛАРХОДА. В ОХОТСКОЕ МОРЕ ПРИ ЭТАПЕ С МАТЕРИКА В БУХТУ НАГНЕВО - ГОР. МАГАДАН...

Source: www.jezuici.pl/parakow/pismo1/2004/01/kolyma2d.jpg

Source: www.gulag.hu/baldaev/images/gulag064.jpg

The history of the GULAG is everywhere—but it is not obvious to the visitor and we will not recognize it or remember it unless we consciously strive to do so.

“One by one, we invalids were carried ashore on stretchers and left on the beach in tidy rows. The dead were also stacked neatly so that they could be counted and the number of death certificates would tally. Lying on the pebbly shore, we watched our comrades being marched off toward the town.”

-Eugenia Semyonova Ginzburg, writing about the arrival of her prisoner transport ship at Nagaev Bay, Magadan, in *Into the Whirlwind*.



Magadan, Nagaev Bay, 1989

This memorial to victims of the Gulag now stands on a hill overlooking Magadan and the road to the Kolyma.



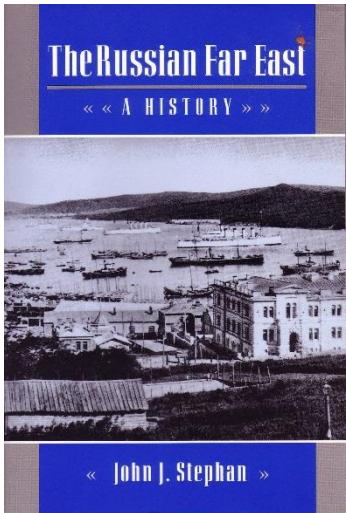
To historian John Stephan, what matters in the Russian Far East is “what went wrong?”

“What went wrong in the Far East? Why did it not develop like British Columbia or Hokkaido? How did such a rich land and littoral, settled by such talented and hard-working people, and bordering on such dynamic economies present a spectacle redolent of a Third World basket case?

Geography, demography and economics provide partial answers. Beneath unfulfilled potentials runs an undercurrent of tragedy that cannot be ascribed to any ideology, party or regime.

The tragedy has a Russian-Soviet mother and an Asian-American father. Both parents wrought havoc on the region with the best of intentions: oppression in the name of progress, militarization in the name of security, homicide in the name of race or class, ecocide in the name of growth. . . .”

[John Stephan, *The Russian Far East: A History*, page 3.]



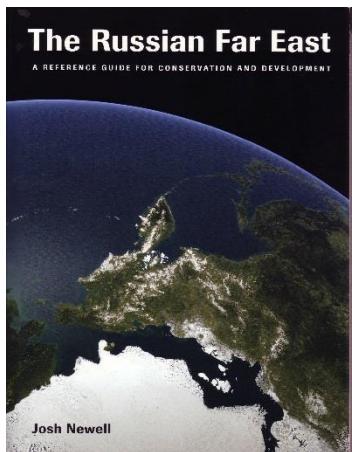
To geographer Josh Newell, what matters about the Russian Far East is the environment.

“The reader may ask, “Why all the fuss about the RFE?” Quite simply because there RFE is the most biologically diverse region of the largest country on Earth. Its preservation is crucial not only for the plants and animals that depend on healthy ecosystems, but for ourselves, who do likewise!

The region is a vital storehouse of natural resources that will inevitably be tapped, particularly as globalization and foreign investment further integrate its economy into the larger North Pacific economy. . .

[There is a growing] responsibility for the international community to work with Russians to ensure sustainable development, but also the responsibility to protect what should remain intact.”

[Josh Newell, *The Russian Far East: A Reference Guide for Conservation and Development*, page vii.]



Alaskans bring special perspectives to the question of “what matters about the Russian Far East?”

- Proximity to and shared boundary with the Russian Far East
- Historical relationship with the Russian Far East
- Economic competition with the Russian Far East
- Similar geographical, historical and political circumstances
 - Northern and remote
 - Similar natural resources (minerals, fish, timber, oil)
 - History of economic colonization
 - History of political dependence
 - Similar challenges faced by aboriginal peoples
 - Comparisons of Alaska and the Russian Far East can be instructive, for both regions

There is a long history of relationships between the Russian Far East and Alaska.

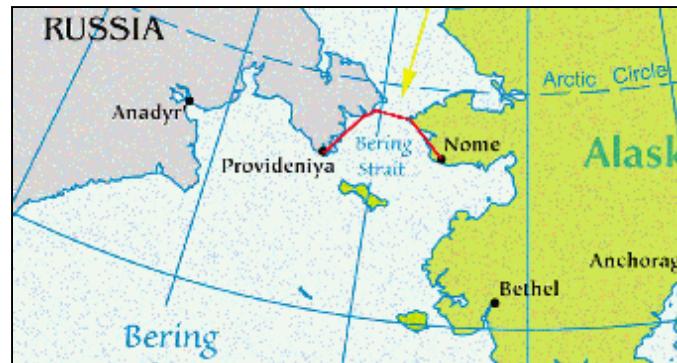
- Siberian Yupik Eskimos regularly visited and traded across the Bering Strait
- 100+ year Russian control of Alaska until 1867
- Regular travel and trade across the Bering Strait into the 1920s
- Delivery of Lend Lease aircraft across the Bering Strait during WWII
- The Cold War and the “ice curtain”
- Glasnost and the melting of the ice curtain
- Scientific, cultural and educational exchanges
- Scheduled air flights
- Business cooperation
- Joint resource management issues (fish, marine mammals, birds)

In 1988—as one of only a few Russian speakers in Alaska—I had an opportunity to go on the “Friendship Flight” from Nome to Provideniya—the first direct passenger flight between Alaska and the Russian Far East in decades.

Anchorage Daily News, June 14, 1988
ALASKANS FLY TO A CELEBRATION IN SIBERIA

“An Alaska Airlines jet circled low over the coastal mountains of Siberia and made a bumpy landing on a gravel runway to kick off an unusual day of celebration in this Soviet gateway to the Arctic. The “friendship flight” of 80 Alaska Natives, politicians, businessmen and journalists stepped off the plane to a smiling crowd of flag-waving children and Soviet officials bearing flowers.

The friendship flight, led by Gov. Steve Cowper and Republican Sen. Frank Murkowski, arrived in Provideniya after a 40-minute flight from Nome across the Bering Strait. An Aeroflot navigator from Moscow helped Alaska Airlines pilots guide the jet across the international date line and into once-forbidden Soviet air space.”



Source:
www.alaska.faa.gov/flt_std/FLY_VFR_RUSSIA/index.cfm

In the morning, I flew from Anchorage to Nome (1 ½ hours).

Shortly afterwards, we continued on to Provideniya.





45 minutes later I saw the coast of Chukotka (and the Russian Far East) for the first time—and the port city of Provideniya.



It was almost unbelievable to look out the window and realize that—
having left Anchorage only a few hours earlier—that I was in Russia.



We were warmly greeted throughout the day.



People waving at our bus . . .



Newly discovered Russian neighbors



With Russian children in Provideniya . . .



In Provideniya we saw—in an physical environment familiar to us as Alaskans—a completely different kind of northern settlement, in a place that had been completely closed and unknown to us.



Provideniya . . .



Provideniya . . .



At the end of our visit came a meeting with speakers from both sides talking about hopes for friendship and cooperation.



Then we returned to the plane, said goodbyes as only Russians can, and flew home to Nome and Anchorage.



Since then—in a world that has changed with amazing rapidity—Alaska contacts with the Russian Far East have become routine.

The giddy excitement of the first visits has been replaced by realization of the significant continuing differences in the circumstances of Russians and Americans, the difficulties of cooperation—including barriers of cost and language—and the realities of Russia's difficult economic and political transformation.

Real links have been established between the Russian Far East and Alaska—of many kinds—but they have not been as extensive or as easy as had been dreamed of.

I am saddened by the challenges faced by many Russians I have met, and inspired by their perseverance.

I am glad for many friendships and I am glad beyond measure for peace between our two countries.