

## Report from the field—June 2009

### Onguday Region



*The Karakol Valley in Onguday Region, Altai Republic*

I spent a very interesting couple days with Danil Mamyev in mid-June in Onguday, so that he could clarify his current strategy and needs for us. Onguday is one of ten regions of Altai Republic, located in the center of her territory. In the center of Onguday is the Karakol Valley, considered by the Altai people to be the umbilicus of Planet Earth. Danil is an expert in land use, and in 1992, was able to get “Nature Park” status for the valley. Although the designation provides no tangible protection for the valley, it adds weight to determined indigenous efforts to prevent commercial development there.

Essentially, to reach a critical mass of land ownership necessary to protect the integrity of the Uch Enmek Nature Park in Karakol Valley, Danil asked for \$33,000 in funding. His strategy is outlined below. Thus far, he has received a total of \$12,000 for this—\$7000 from Jackie Stratton’s fund-raising efforts (administered by Altai Mir University), and \$5,000 from another source (please take credit if it’s yours!) The remaining \$21,000 is needed before the end of 2009 to complete the job. Danil believes that protection of this specific valley is critical for the health of the whole planet—and he certainly has the credibility and cultural foundation to validly make that claim.

There is a new Russian Federal law: #131 “Land self-management for traditional development”—that actually helps the situation: There are four villages in the Karakol Valley, but the agricultural land in question is scattered through the whole valley. Under this law, the villages are permitted to self-organize in culturally appropriate ways, which means that they can make a single collective to manage the lands. However, each land-share



*This wall-sized map shows the status of land registration in the Karakol Valley*

holder would individually have title to his/her land, which means that there is no current way to prevent sale to people outside of the traditional culture. But still, the village's self-organized administration will apparently have considerable authority over land use IF the villagers can actually get title to the lands.



*Each individual's set of land registration documentation is more than a centimeter thick*

*Danil's strategy*

1) Title to traditionally used agricultural land was legally promised in 1992, but a couple of half-hearted programs only succeeded in creating huge confusion and disorganization in the land registration records. Danil has been working nonstop on this issue for quite a number of years, but the villagers had lost hope, so they have not been cooperating with Danil's efforts on their behalf.

Because the opportunity really DOES end in December 2009, Danil used his hard-earned land use expertise this past winter to gather information about the status of all the land parcels in the valley and create a map of the status of all the agricultural land. Many people discovered that land that they thought they owned had been traded for less valuable land without their knowledge. But nonetheless, the map now provides clarity of information to village administrators that had been previously unavailable.

When the \$12,000 in international funding actually arrived in late May 2009, it was a "wake-up call" to the villages about the global importance of their valley. So they have now agreed to at least meet with Danil.

2) The second big problem was that, for some of the very valuable lands allocated to villagers, NO documentation had been provided and with the chaos in the system, requests for documentation had gotten nowhere. Danil and his team have spent months, painstakingly documenting ownership of these most vulnerable lands. To date, they have completed documentation for 136 of ~230 of these most vulnerable land parcels. These lands must still be surveyed and registered, however.

3) The next step (this week) is to meet with the administrators of first village (Bichiktu Boom), to work out a collective agreement creating land use restrictions or "easements" to prevent land sales for such uses as industrial development or mining, in exchange for Danil's financial and professional help with the surveying and registration. Danil's team is starting with the village that is lowest in the valley and therefore at greatest risk, and will proceed to the other villages as time and funding allow.

4) Then, with the agricultural land secured, village administrators can focus on protection of the most sacred sites. When all this is set up, Danil expects that legal requests from village administrators to designate sacred sites will have to be respected. This will set a legal precedent that will facilitate the protection of culturally valuable sacred sites all over Russia.



*Standing stones in Karakol Valley*

**For this, \$21,000 is still needed by Danil before the opportunity for agricultural land registration expires at the end of 2009.** I know that miracles don't have a size, but still, the world needs this miracle. We've proven the power of intentions and of mutual support, so please contribute however you can.