



Why Altai?

Summer is idyllic here in Altai—lush temperate forests, sparkling glacier-fed rivers, majestic peaks. Since perestroika, tourists have flocked here. But many don't come for the natural beauty—they come for the spiritual power of this land.

The ancient wisdom of the Altai people recognizes their homeland, in the exact center of Eurasia, as the Earth's umbilicus—the place where cosmic life force “feeds” the living planet. The fabled Altai shamans have mystical powers akin to Himalayan yogis. Russian physicists specializing in “subtle” energies confirm the tales experimentally and repeatedly.

Nonetheless, summer visitors rush past the quiet log-cabin villages; past the cows, dogs, and chickens; past the babushkas tending their potato patches; past the boys dragging their drinking water canister up the dusty road from the village pump; past the men chopping wood—a LOT of wood, to survive another long Siberian winter.

Like most Russian citizens, indigenous villagers are literate and well educated; bi-lingual (now that their native languages are no longer forbidden); conservative, devoted to the welfare of their children; able to fix anything with packing tape. Just like usual Russians?

Not really. They just can't seem to get the concept of “owning land.” **Altai people know with every cell of their bodies that they BELONG TO THE EARTH.** They know this despite the ravages of Stalinist re-locations and cultural desecrations. Not everyone was taken. Their mountains, too stark for invaders, protected them.

In the villages, these days they know about the Federal law that they must survey and register the lands where their clans have cut hay and grazed flocks for all of their long recollection. They know that the Russian government can sell any unregistered lands beginning in 2010, but there is a fundamental cultural disjuncture. Certainly this law can't apply to them—they know who is where. And besides, surveying is hopelessly beyond their financial means.

However, it wouldn't have made much difference if they did understand. I discovered very recently that the 10-year legal window for registering their traditional and sacred lands actually ended several years before there was any official structure to accept the registrations.

Only the recognition of outrageous injustice causes some judges to rule contrary to the letter of the law, so that ANY traditional lands can be registered. This is the loophole that Altai Mir University and other concerned international organizations are clinging to, hoping to streamline the procedure and ensure the survival of this heritage by working through collectives to process large blocks of land.

But already, miles of prime riverfront lands have been “leased” to smart businessmen from Moscow and Novosibirsk; and fenced off for tourist complexes. Or a pittance has been offered to purchase land from locals who need cash and can legally own land now (supposedly). **These businessmen know an opportunity when they see one—not only business potential, but sacred Earth energy as well.** Unlike most Westerners, most Russians don't dismiss the power of Earth's sacred places.

Just a few isolated villagers have connected the dots and are setting up the equally culturally unnecessary legal documentation for “collectives.” For survival, they are already collective far beyond any legalities.

The villagers are incredulous that foreigners would come to their aid. I, as the bearer of these funds, with my awkward accent and manners, am seen as some otherworldly entity. It's all just too strange. The saddest part is that even for average Altai people to comprehend this situation, their ancient and sensitive culture must shift. What are they losing in this compromise with privatization? What is the WORLD losing?

The effect of this surveying/registration fiasco is that traditional Altai lands can be “legally” confiscated. For now, the \$20,000 that you, the aware global community, will donate this winter is the surest way to save a tiny portion of the lands at risk. It's what we, with our resources, can effectively accomplish. Other groups are working with other communities.

Based on our experience with Native Americans, the end game of the current path is genocide. We, the global community—EACH of us who recognizes the truth of this and seeks health for mankind—must creatively and collectively and courageously seek real-life solutions that make room for all of humanity's diversity.