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Russian Team Studies Tahoe, Wild Horses

Frank Mullen, Staff , Final Edition

Siberians learn from Nevada

## **Group hopes studies here can help improve environment at home**

By Frank X. Mullen Jr.

### RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL

Last week, Russian visitors from the territory of Genghis Khan studied Nevada's wild horses, tested streams for nutrients and examined the desert and Sierra to learn techniques to improve the environment of their homeland. The visitors were scientists and businesspeople attached to the Tahoe-Baikal Institute, a cooperative venture between the United States and Russia.

We got pretty close to the wild horses in the Virginia Range," said Eugeniya Pyzhikova, who works with Buryat State University in the Republic of Buryatia in Siberia. "We've seen them in the wild and in captivity. In the Pine Nut Range we saw them from far away. They seemed to be just enjoying their freedom." She said an island in Lake Baikal also contains wild horses and the surrounding area has problems with pollution and overgrazing. Her university works with the local people to change age-old grazing practices that turn grasslands into sand dunes, she said.

"The area near Lake Baikal is the land of Genghis Kahn," she said. "Traditionally, people would herd horses, cattle, sheep and goats from one place to another, leaving when the land became exhausted." But with few people in the area, the land had time to recover. Now, she said, industrialization has brought more people - and more cattle - to the area. With Russia's economic collapse, people put more of their savings into cattle, increasing the overgrazing problem.

While in northern Nevada, the Russian team tested waterways near horse and cattle grazing lands. They found that cows, which tend to stay around water sources, cause more damage to the stream banks than horses, which tend to drink and move on. "When we saw horses drinking from creeks, we didn't see much impact except for hoof prints," said Anastasia Sourkova, a graduate of Linguistic University who now works for an eco- tourism firm in Russia.

"The water looked clean, had good overhanging branches and there was no sign of erosion on the banks. There was an abundance of insects and animals, including frogs and dragonflies and water-striders." Areas extensively used by cattle had fewer nutrients in the water and showed signs of bank erosion and other damage, she said.

The Tahoe-Baikal Institute participants also saw captive wild horses at a ranch near Fallon and talked to northern Nevada cattle ranchers and federal range managers. They visited members of the Washoe Tribe and talked about similarities in the cultures of the Siberians and the American Indians. They learned about Nevada, they said, and Nevadans learned about Lake Baikal, the sacred sea of Siberia. The lake is so large that Lake Tahoe could be tucked into one of its coves. Baikal is about two or three times the width of Tahoe. If a map of the Siberian Lake is overlaid on

a map of California, the Siberian Lake stretches from Los Angeles to Sacramento. It's the world's largest, deepest and oldest freshwater lake. It's nearly 500 miles long and contains 20 percent of the world's unfrozen fresh water. The lake is so biologically diverse that many of the 1,500 plant and animal species found at Baikal exist nowhere else on Earth.

Yet, there are many similarities between Tahoe and its giant Siberian counterpart. Both are ancient lakes that are threatened by modern development. "Aside from the technical aspects of the trip, the Russian participants also learned more about the role of citizens to find out for themselves what the environmental issues are," said Gary Cook, of the institute. "That citizen involvement is something that's just getting started in Russia."

Marilyn Newton/Reno Gazette-Journal (Photos not available)

OBSERVING: Anastasia Sourkova, left, and Eugeniya Pyzhikova study wild horses in Fallon as the horses study them. "We got pretty close to the wild horses in the Virginia Range." Eugeniya Pyzhikova/Buryat State University/Marilyn Newton/Reno Gazette-Journal (Photos not available)

VISITING: Eugeniya Pyzhikova, one of a group of scientists and businesspeople attached to the Tahoe-Baikal Institute, studies wild horses at Fallon.  
text from graphic/map.

A tale of two lakes

Lake Baikal in comparison to Lake Tahoe (stretches from Sacramento to Los Angeles)

Lake Tahoe

Surface area: 310 sq. miles

Volume: 96.9 cu. miles

Length at longest point: 21.6 miles

Width at widest point: 11.9 miles

Depth at deepest point: 1,656.8 ft.

Age: 2 million years (in present state: 11,000 years)

Lake Baikal

Surface area: 19,556 sq. miles

Volume: 14,292 cu. miles

Length at longest point: 395.2 miles

Width at widest point: 49.34 miles

Depth at deepest point: 5,370.6 ft.

Age: 20 million years (in present state: 2-3 million years)

Tahoe-Baikal Institute

J. Kurowski/Reno Gazette-Journal

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