

Increasing the Contribution of Specially Protected Natural Areas to the Socio-Economic Development of Regions

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Abstract

The article considers the issues of increasing the contribution of protected areas to socio-economic development based on tourism development. The relevance of the problem, the general state of tourism development as a whole, including that in protected areas, is presented. Information is provided on the development of ecotourism in the CIS countries (Belarus and Kazakhstan), as well as in China. An analysis of the regulatory framework in the field of ecotourism, including the implementation of the national project “Ecology” and federal projects is given. The research based on the Smolenskoye Poozerye NP is described with the aim of developing a Methodology for assessing the contribution of protected areas to the socio-economic development of the region. Calculations using the example of the Smolenskoye Poozerye National Park are given, as well as recommendations for the further development of ecological tourism in the protected area.

Keywords

Protected Area, Tourism, Ecological Tourism, CIS, PRC, National Project, Federal Project, Assessment Methods, Calculations

1. Tourism Development, Including Ecotourism

Specially protected natural areas (SPNA) have environmental, scientific, cultural, aesthetic, recreational and health significance, which is obvious and directly defined by the current legislation. However, at the same time, doubts arise and are voiced by experts about the effectiveness of using SPNA in terms of economic indicators of their activities, their role in the socio-economic development of

regions. To assess the role of SPNA in the economy of a region and the country as a whole, it is necessary to identify the types of economic activity most characteristic of a specific SPNA and calculate the income received by the budgets from this activity, as well as assess the profit of enterprises operating in the SPNA or in the zone of its influence. A methodological apparatus is required to carry out such calculations

1.1. General Assessment of Tourism Development

In recent years, the role of both the tourism industry as a whole, and ecotourism, and tourism in other areas in specially protected natural areas (SPNA) in the economy of many countries has been growing.

According to some estimates, the cost of services related to tourism and travel in the world is estimated at almost 10 trillion US dollars. In some countries, tourism revenues approach 14% of their GDP. Thus, in France they are estimated at 8.5%, in China—at 11.3%, in Spain—at 14.3%. At the same time, due to changes in consumer behavior associated with trends in eco-consciousness and restoration of the ecosystem of Man and Nature, the contribution of ecotourism is very large. Ecotourism, including visiting SPNA, brings very tangible benefits. According to some estimates, back in 2015, the cost of ecotourism was estimated at 600 billion US dollars (Shevchuk, 2024). Now this figure has increased significantly. This is due to the formation of a new culture of travel to natural areas: the desire of people to spend more free time in nature, to visit unusual and simply attractive and beautiful natural areas, to see rare natural objects and the animal world of territories unaffected by economic activity, as well as the development of a comfortable infrastructure for travel, transport accessibility of these territories. In addition to providing opportunities for recreation and studying nature, tourism in protected areas can contribute to the physical, mental and cultural well-being of a person and improve public health.

The cost of medical services provided in protected areas through nature tourism is estimated at 8% of the total world GNP in 2017 (Shevchuk, 2024). A direct consequence of the increase in tourism activities in protected areas was the consideration of ecotourism as an important tool for implementing the principles of sustainable development and conservation of biological diversity. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) links ecotourism in protected areas with increased efficiency of protected area management based on the principles of sustainable development, since it creates financial conditions and sources for the protection of nature and biodiversity in such areas, as well as provides an opportunity to implement entrepreneurial initiatives and create new jobs for the local population in economically underdeveloped and depressed regions.

The contribution of tourism to the Russian economy has also been consistently increasing in recent years and now amounts to about 4% of the country's GDP (Vedomosti, 2022). A significant part of this contribution comes from ecotourism and people visiting various categories of specially protected areas. All Russian

protected areas of various levels, including reserves in terms of specially designated areas, tourist and ecological trails, are important tourist destinations, which is confirmed by statistical data on the growth in the number of visitors to such areas.

However, the real significance of ecotourism in Russia has not yet been assessed or measured in economic indicators. There is also an opinion that protected areas remove significant territories from economic circulation and create big problems for the local population and business due to a direct ban on economic activity, and thereby slow down the economic growth and development of regions.

At the same time, there are no estimates of the contribution of protected areas to the socio-economic development of regions. This situation leads to a lack of understanding of the need for investment in this area of development of protected areas and the justification of their volumes both for individual territories and for the country as a whole. In particular, this is a factor that hinders such an area as international cooperation of national parks in promoting transboundary ecological, active, health, scientific and educational tourism in natural areas.

In this regard, it is very important for the development of tourism in protected areas to have methodological documents that provide the necessary calculations for the economic assessment of the activities of protected areas and the effectiveness of possible investments.

2. Main Part

2.1. The State of Protected Areas in Russia

The flow of tourists visiting protected areas largely depends on the infrastructure development that meets modern requirements and the transport accessibility of such areas. Therefore, investments are required in measures that prevent and eliminate the negative consequences for protected areas from their mass visits. The latter circumstance is associated with the need to conduct research to assess the permissible recreational capacity of protected natural areas and, accordingly, to finance such research.

In total, there are 295 federal specially protected natural areas in Russia (108 state nature reserves, 63 national parks, 60 federal sanctuaries, 17 natural monuments, 47 dendrological parks and botanical gardens) and almost 12,000 natural areas of regional significance of various categories (see **Table 1**). The share of area specially protected natural areas of federal, regional and local significance in the total area of the country is 14.3 percent (Environmental Protection in Russi, 2024).

The costs of maintaining specially protected natural areas in 2023 amounted to more than 18 billion rubles (see **Figure 1**), including 12,457 million rubles for federal protected areas and 5262 million rubles for regional protected areas. Of course, these volumes are not comparable with the amount allocated for the maintenance of national parks in the United States, so protected areas are always faced with the task of finding extra-budgetary funds (Environmental Protection in Russi, 2024).

Table 1. Number of specially protected natural areas by category.

Category of protected areas	Number of protected areas (as of 2023)
Protected areas of federal, regional and local significance (units), including:	11 930
Protected areas of federal significance, of which:	297
State nature reserves	107
National parks	70
State nature sanctuaries	62
Natural monuments	17
Arboretums and botanical gardens	41
Protected areas of regional and local significance, including	11 633
Nature parks	121

Source: (Environmental Protection in Russi, 2024).

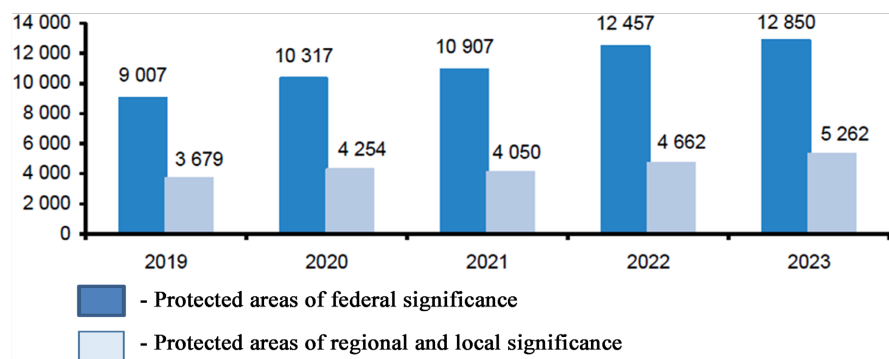


Figure 1. Costs of maintaining specially protected natural areas, million rubles. Source: (Environmental Protection in Russi, 2024).

The most suitable protected areas for the development of ecological and other types of tourism corresponding to these territories are national parks (NP). At the federal level, options for strategies for the development of ecological tourism in protected areas were developed, but most of the documents were not of an applied nature.

2.2. Strategic Directions for Tourism Development in Protected Areas in Russia

According to the Concept for the Development of the System of Specially Protected Natural Areas of Federal Significance for the Period up to 2020, educational tourism in protected areas is a specialized type of ecological tourism, the main purpose of which is familiarization with natural and cultural attractions closely related to nature. In the Strategy for the Development of Tourism in the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2035, significant attention is paid to the development of ecological tourism in specially protected natural areas located within all

federal districts (Concept, 2011; Development of ecological tourism in specially protected natural areas).

Many strategic documents provide for measures in the field of tourism: consolidation and maintenance of achieved results; reorientation of part of the consumer demand of Russians to domestic tourism; attraction of foreign tourists; implementation of the strategic role of tourism in spiritual development, education of patriotism and enlightenment; ensuring an increase in the quality of life of the population.

In accordance with the strategic directions of development of the Russian Federation implemented by the Government of the Russian Federation on the basis of the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of May 7, 2018 No. 204 “On national goals and strategic objectives of development of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2024”, within the framework of national projects and state programs, measures for the development of infrastructure for ecological tourism in national parks should be provided for implementation. The national project “Ecology” notes the directions for the development of ecological tourism, including the federal project “Conservation of biological diversity and development of ecological tourism” (Decree of the President, 2018).

However, the existing volumes of funding for protected areas are incomparable with the potential of Russian natural territories and lag significantly behind foreign analogues. For example, the United States invests about \$ 2.6 billion from the state budget in the development of national parks, and receives about \$ 18 billion back into various budgets, which is orders of magnitude higher than the income generated by Russian protected areas (Shevchuk, 2024).

In this regard, it is necessary to build mechanisms for Russian national parks that will enable these territories to develop and at the same time participate in the socio-economic programs of the regions of the location and the country as a whole, bringing indirect income to the budgets.

Today, there are a number of strategic documents and projects that are aimed at developing tourism in general, including environmental tourism.

We can note the National Project “Tourism and Hospitality Industry”, which, in accordance with the Decree of the President of Russia dated July 21, 2020 “On the national development goals of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2030”, implements the national goal “Opportunities for self-realization and development of talents” (Decree of the President, 2020).

The Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of May 7, 2024 No. 309 “On the national development goals of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2030 and for the future up to 2036” sets target indicators and objectives, the fulfillment of which characterizes the achievement of the national goal “Environmental well-being”. The national project includes areas for the conservation of forests and biological diversity, sustainable development of specially protected natural areas and the creation of conditions for ecological tourism in all national parks [Decree of the President, 2024; Federal project, 2014]. The federal project “Conservation of biological diversity and development of ecological tourism”,

which is part of the national project, defines measures to improve the efficiency of public administration in this area and the preservation of natural and cultural heritage in the course of the development of educational and ecological tourism in protected areas. RUB 1126.80 million was allocated for the implementation of this federal project in 2022 (Ministry of Natural Resources of Russia & Lomonosov Moscow State University, 2023). However, protected areas, primarily national parks, can and should repay for their activities, through the development of ecological tourism.

For a long time, the legal framework for ecotourism in Russia did not comply with international practice, so a bill was needed to address the urgent prospects for the development of this industry in the country. There was no single regulatory legal act governing the implementation and development of ecotourism in the Russian Federation until March 2023. Federal Law No. 77-FZ of March 18, 2023 “On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation” introduced fundamental changes aimed at developing recreational activities, including tourism, in specially protected natural areas [Federal law, 2023). According to the provisions of the law, recreation in national parks and reserves is allowed to be organized within the permissible tourist load. It is calculated separately for each such object.

The load will be approved by the federal authorities in charge of the territory. At the same time, only those tourist infrastructure facilities that have the least possible negative impact on the environment can be used. The Government of Russia, regional and local authorities – depending on the status of the protected area, it has the right to determine the specifics of recreational activities, lists of non-capital buildings, and improvement facilities.

It is prohibited to change the sizes, location and boundaries of protected areas. The construction of residential buildings in protected areas is also prohibited, but it is possible to create facilities for temporary accommodation of visitors, cultural education, public catering and consumer services. Mandatory approval of the plan for recreational activities of national parks with the Head of the region is provided. For national parks, an institution of agreements on recreational activities has been introduced, as well as a system for planning the development and operation of protected areas in the long term. Agreements are concluded through tenders for a period of up to 49 years. In them, entrepreneurs undertake to prevent harm to the environment and comply with the maximum permissible recreational load. The economic effect of recreational services provided using the existing tourist infrastructure in protected areas, first of all, leads to replenishment of regional and municipal budgets and an increase in the added value of the regional tourist product. In this regard, the task of determining the contribution of protected areas to the socio-economic development of regions becomes very urgent.

2.3. Modern Tasks of Tourism Development in Protected Areas in Russia

Following the Address of the President of Russia to the Federal Assembly on

February 29, 2024, the Government of the Russian Federation was instructed to ensure the creation of infrastructure for ecotourism in all national parks of the country in 2025-2030, including recreation areas, museums, visitor centers, ecological trails and tourist routes, providing for the allocation of additional budgetary money from the federal budget in the amount of at least 30 billion rubles for these purposes (Putin Instructed to Create an Infrastructure for Ecotourism in All National Parks of the Russian Federation by 2030, 2024).

At the meeting of the State Council on the on issue of tourism development held on November 18, 2024, it was noted that the main areas of work in the field of tourism are:

- solving the personnel issue;
- developing infrastructure and attracting investment;
- transport issues;
- developing modern technologies in the field of tourism.

At the same time, M. Reshetnikov, the Minister of Economic Development of Russia, reported on the completion of work on the updated national project "Tourism and Hospitality". It identifies five federal projects, two of which are aimed at developing infrastructure and, above all, increasing the number of hotel rooms (Meeting of the State Council Commission on Tourism, (2024). Foreign experience is useful for understanding the directions of development of ecotourism, including the role of protected areas in providing this segment of tourism.

3. Development of Ecotourism in Individual CIS Countries

3.1. Ecotourism in the Republic of Belarus

In Belarus, the development of ecotourism in specially protected natural areas is considered as a contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In Belarus, the area of protected areas exceeds 1.8 million hectares and continues to increase. The value of Belarusian specially protected natural areas is of international importance, which is confirmed by their corresponding status within the framework of UNESCO, the Ramsar Convention and other international agreements. Specially protected natural areas occupy 9% of the area of Belarus. It is these territories, unique in terms of biological and landscape diversity, that are of the greatest interest for the development of ecotourism. Ecotourism, as a promising direction, is included in the national strategy for the development of the system of specially protected natural areas until January 1, 2030, which was approved by the government of Belarus. The goals of ecotourism in protected areas are to study the natural and cultural heritage, get positive emotions from visiting nature and learning about cultural values in the absence of a negative impact on natural complexes and objects. Ecotourism is considered in the republic as a tool for raising the level of knowledge about the importance of natural heritage and thus contributes to the preservation of natural ecological systems, has significant potential for sustainable development of regions, improving the well-being of the local population, is one of the areas of the green economy and thus makes an important

contribution to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (Strategy, 2019). Ecotourism is one of the most attractive and actively developing options for recreation in Belarus. There are 2319 farmsteads in the country that offer tourists an original village holiday. The following farmsteads can be cited: “Akolitsa”, “Sosnovaya Roshcha”, “Stary Mlyn” (Minsk region), “Belovezhskoye Pomestie” (Brest region), the tourist village “Belye Luga” (Grodno region), etc. (Ecotourism in Belarus).

3.2. Ecotourism in the Republic of Kazakhstan

The Republic of Kazakhstan has a significant potential for the development of ecotourism. Dozens of natural parks and reserves are included in the list of territories protected by the state. The new Environmental Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan provides for obligations that tour operators must take into account when organizing excursions to protected areas. Tours must be carefully planned, it is required to use transport that has the least impact on nature, and the solid household waste left behind must be minimized. The total size of protected natural areas in Kazakhstan is 26 million hectares. Among the protected areas are the areas around Lake Alakol, the Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve, the Burabay Nature Park, the Katon-Karagay National Park, the Korgalzhyn Nature Reserve, and the Kyzylarai Mountain Range which are especially popular and well known to foreign and domestic tourists (Ecological tourism in Kazakhstan).

The development of ecotourism in the national natural parks of the Republic of Kazakhstan is carried out within the framework of the state program for the development of the tourism industry for 2019-2025. The Ministry of Ecology, Geology of Natural Resources studied the international experience of a number of countries (USA, Andorra, Australia, etc.), where the main principles for the development of ecotourism were determined. In foreign countries, an integrated approach is used to ensure the preservation of significant natural sites. Based on international experience, a master plan for the development of ecotourism in the Ile-Alatau State National Natural Park was developed, based on the American model of national parks (National Parks Are the Basis for the Development of Ecotourism in Kazakhstan).

In Kazakhstan, a number of private organizations are dedicated to the development of ecotourism. For example, the Avalon company has experience working in the central part of the country (Kyzylarai, Kent, Ulytau, Sarlyk, Buyratau) and in the Northern Tien Shan (Turgen, Kolsay). Work in such projects usually involves cooperation with the local population (training guest house owners, local guides, etc.), development of “soft” infrastructure in specially protected natural areas (marking trails, installing observation posts, building mountain shelters, etc.), as well as comprehensive promotion of the created tourism product, usually in cooperation with the company “Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan”. The main projects in the direction of ecotourism, implemented by the company “Avalona” are as follows:

Introduction of sustainable methods of preserving biodiversity and alternative activities for the local population through the development of ecotourism on the example of the State National Nature Park (SNNP) “Buiratau”;

Conservation of biodiversity in the transboundary region of the Northern Tien Shan;

Development of ecotourism in Ulytau based on local communities;

Ecotourism in Central Kazakhstan: conservation of natural resources of protected areas and creation of economic opportunities for rural regions;

Ecotourism and public awareness in Central Kazakhstan.

3.3. Tourism Development in Protected Areas in China

International tourism based on cooperation between Russian and foreign protected areas, including the BRICS countries, can play a significant role in the development of tourism in national parks. Thus, within the framework of the “Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the People’s Republic of China on cooperation in the field of tourism” dated 03.11.1993, it is first of all necessary to continue to develop the achieved results, and new options for cooperation with the PRC in the field of tourism should be developed, as China one of the main trading partners of Russia in the new geopolitical conditions (Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the People’s Republic of China on Cooperation in the Field of Tourism Dated, 1993).

The creation of a system of national parks in the PRC was proposed in 2013. In the PRC, the equivalent of the term “national park” is also “Natural Attraction Area”. The status of a national park or natural attraction area is assigned by the State Council of the PRC. The Ministry of Housing, Urban and Rural Development of the PRC is responsible for the management of natural parks at the national and provincial level throughout the country.

National Nature Reserve. According to the Regulations of the People’s Republic of China on Nature Reserves, national nature reserves are areas that provide special protection in accordance with the law for representative natural ecosystems, natural habitats of rare and endangered species of wild animals and plants, and natural relics. As of the end of 2021, there are 474 national nature reserves in China, such as the Taikuan River in Shanxi, Zengfengling in Jilin Province, Xilin River in Heilongjiang, Dasha River in Guizhou, etc. (Zhang Shulin & Xu Yun, 2024).

National Park. National parks are established and managed with the approval of the state with the main purpose of protecting large natural ecosystems that are representative at the national level. At present, only 5 national parks have been officially established (see **Figure 2**). For example, the Amur Tiger and Leopard National Park is located in a vast area at the junction of Jilin and Heilongjiang provinces. The park is home to largest and the only breeding colony of wild populations of Amur tigers and leopards in China.

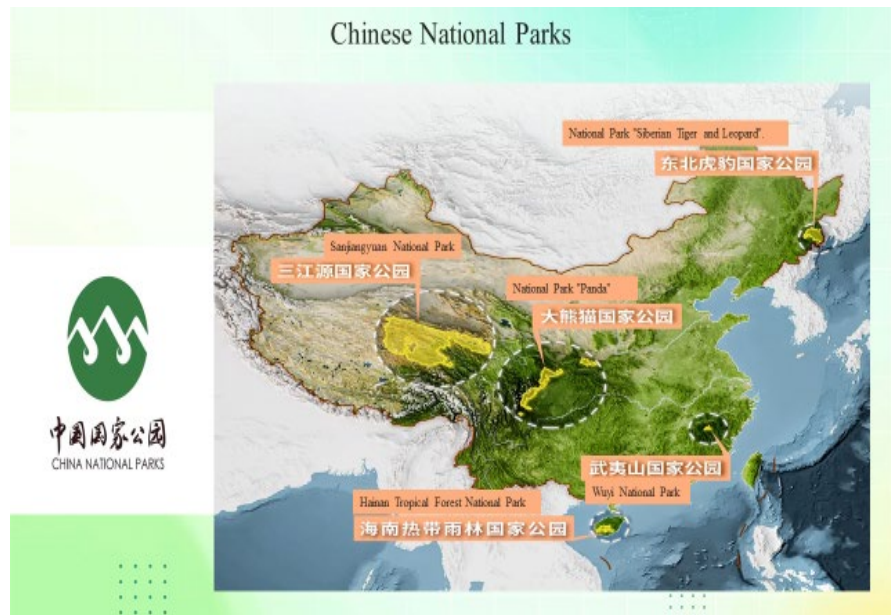


Figure 2. China officially establishes first batch of national parks—Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China (https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2021-10/12/content_5642183.htm).

Local Nature Reserves. In addition to national nature reserves, China also has local nature reserves at the provincial, municipal and county levels to protect unique local ecosystems, species and natural landscapes. China’s national parks have become important natural education bases, and various popular science education activities have improved public understanding and awareness of nature conservation. With the increasing number of tourists, the pressure on the ecological environment is increasing day by day, and it is necessary to balance the relationship between environmental protection and tourism development. The Chinese government has set the task of resolving the contradiction between environmental protection and tourism development. In general, the amount of budget funding for wildlife activities has also increased (see **Figure 3**), although the problem of insufficient funding for nature conservation remains.

The above experience of developing ecological tourism in Belarus, Kazakhstan and China shows that Russian protected areas can also effectively use the natural potential of the territories to attract Russian and foreign tourists.

4. Conducting Scientific Research on the Development of the Methodology for Assessing the Contribution of Protected Areas to the Socio-Economic Development of a Region

4.1. Conducting Practical Research to Assess the Contribution of Protected Areas to the Development of the Region

The deployment of rather ambitious plans and federal projects for tourism development in Russia, including those in protected areas, requires practical work with protected areas, primarily with national parks, on their readiness to participate in

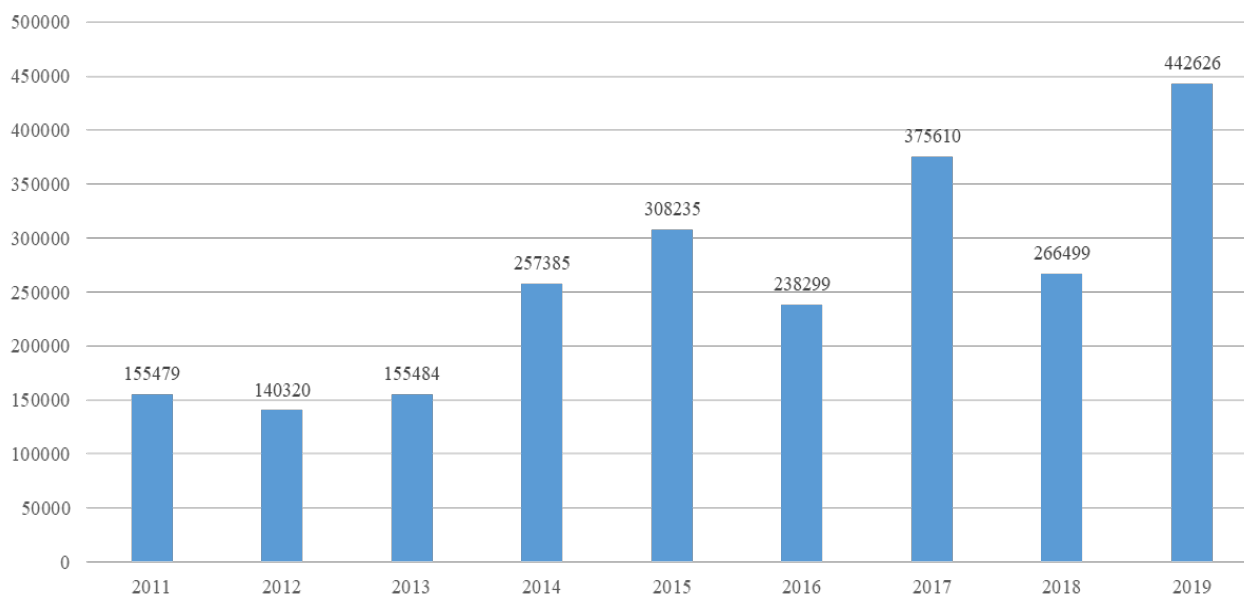


Figure 3. Investment in wildlife conservation in China (10,000 yuan). Source: (China, 2021).

such projects, and an assessment of their long-term development plans.

In order to carry out the task of preparing methodological approaches to assessing the contribution of protected areas to the development of regions, with the support of A.N. Greshnevikov, Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Ecology, Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, and a grant received from the ZAPOVEDNOE POSOLSTVO Foundation (President of the Foundation - N.R. Danilina), a Working Group was formed in 2023 from scientists and specialists of: SOPS VAVT of the Ministry of Economic Development of Russia, the Institute of Geography of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the State University of Management, the Expert Council on Tourism Clusters of the Russian Guild of Managers and Developers, and some experts (see **Figure 4(a)**, **Figure 4(b)**).

The Working Group developed and tested the project “Methodology for assessing the contribution of protected areas of federal significance to the socio-economic development of a region” (hereinafter referred to as the Methodology) using the example of the Smolenskoye Poozerye National Park (Smolensk Region). During the assessment, the following areas of the national park’s functioning were taken into account: 1) tourism organization activities; 2) conservation of biological and landscape diversity; 3) scientific activity; 4) educational and awareness-raising activities; 5) organization of events (environmental, educational, cultural, sports and health, etc.); 6) attraction and development of volunteerism.

As a result of the survey (see **Figure 4(a)**, **Figure 4(b)**), analysis of the activities of the Smolenskoye Poozerye NP, consideration of the regulatory framework and practice of organizing tourism in the Smolensk region, the developers of the Methodology presented a refined methodology for assessing the socio-economic effects of the activities of protected areas, a review of international and Russian experience in such assessment (indicators, direct effects, indirect effects,



Figure 4. (a) Field research in the “Smolenskoye Poozerie” National Park; (b) Field surveys in the “Smolenskoye Poozerie” National Park.

multiplier effect for local and regional economies), and proposed measures aimed at increasing the socio-economic effects of the activities of protected areas (Research report, 2023).

4.2. Methodology for Assessing the Contribution of Protected Areas to the Socio-Economic Development of the Region

The Methodology offered by the authors allows assessing the contribution of protected areas of federal significance to the socio-economic development of the region and can be used by government bodies when preparing proposals for the development of protected areas and ecotourism in their territories. The main provisions of the Methodology are as follows: The Methodology is applied to national parks of federal significance and natural parks of regional significance. It is possible to apply some provisions of the Methodology to state nature reserves in terms

of educational activities and educational tourism. The main objective of the assessment is to measure the contribution of national parks to the country's economy using standardized social and economic indicators. The calculation of these indicators corresponds to the methods of economic and social assessment. The economic assessment measures the benefits created by protected areas for human well-being in monetary terms. The social assessment measures the number of jobs and labor income created by activities in parks and activities in other places, but related to parks and the provision of certain goods to park visitors.

The contribution of a national park to social and economic development and the economy is determined at 4 levels: national, regional (subject of the Russian Federation), local (municipal districts) and at the park level. Assessment at the park level means assessing the benefits created by the assessment territory - the park itself and the benefits created by the park's influence zone.

The first part of the Methodology provides an assessment of the contribution of protected areas to the economy of the region and the country. To assess the social and economic contribution of NP to the economy, 5 main indicators and 3 auxiliary ones are calculated. Main indicators: 1) expenses of NP visitors; 2) total income (revenue, economic product); 3) added value (contribution to GRP and GDP); 4) number of jobs created by activities in the NP; 5) labor income. Auxiliary indicators: 6) income (revenue, economic product) from all types of activities on the territory of the NP, including financial receipts to the park itself; 7) costs of business entities for providing services to visitors of the NP; 8) contribution of investments in the infrastructure of protected areas to the economy of the region and the country. In accordance with the proposed methodology: 1) economic contribution describes the gross economic activity associated with the expenses of visitors to the national park within the regional economy; 2) assessments of the contribution of investments in park infrastructure are a tool for economic justification of the assessment of the feasibility of investments in financial support for national parks for the social and economic development of regions.

The methodology proposed by the developers is generally consistent with theoretical developments in the field of economic measurements, including the field of economic assessments of ecosystem services, has been tested in practice and can be used to develop a domestic methodology and technique for assessing the contribution of protected areas to the socio-economic development of the economy of the country and regions. You can see an example of calculating the contribution of the Smolenskoye Poozerye NP to the regional economy, performed by O.E. Medvedeva, one of the main authors of the Methodology (see **Table 2**).

For reference: Gross added value per visitor is 2941 - 5294 rubles/person. The contribution to the regional economy is approximately 0.24% - 0.43% of GRP.

This is comparable in order of numbers with the contribution of the tourism sector to the country's GDP, which indicates the acceptability of the proposed methodological approach and that it can be applied to other protected areas.

Two types of economic measurements were used:

Table 2. Approximate assessment of the contribution of the Smolenskoye Poozerye NP to the economy of the Smolensk region. Source: Research Report, 2023.

Indicator	Volume of funds
Total income, billion rubles	1.4
Intermediate consumption, billion rubles	0.9
Gross value added/contribution to GDP, billion rubles	1.0 - 1.8
Local budget revenues, million rubles	51.0
Regional budget revenues, million rubles	267.2
Extra-budget funds, million rubles	502.1
Labor income, billion rubles	1.3 - 2.2
Jobs, thousand people	3.1 - 5.3

1. Macroeconomic assessment of the national park's contribution to the social and economic development of the region.

2. Assessment of the economic efficiency of investment projects to justify investments in the development of the park's territory and assess the effectiveness of management decisions made for the national park.

In the second part of the Methodology, the developers evaluate the economic efficiency of investments in the development of protected areas (see **Table 3**). When evaluating investments in protected areas, the authors propose calculating three types of efficiency. Key indicators: 1) net present value; 2) benefit/cost ratio; 3) payback period for investment costs; 4) internal discount rate. The Methodology provides an algorithm for calculating the indicators, a form for submitting materials for calculating the main indicators of the ecological and economic efficiency of the project. An example of calculation for the National Trails of Russia project is given.

Table 3. Commercial and budgetary efficiency of investments in the development of the Smolenskoye Poozerye non-profit partnership with an investment of 8 billion rubles. Source: Research Report, 2024.

Indicator	Volume of funds
<i>Net present value of the project (NPV) for 10 years, million rubles</i>	831.6
<i>Project payback period, years</i>	6 - 8
<i>Payback period of budget investments, years</i>	9
<i>Benefit-cost ratio for the entire period</i>	1.07 - 1.18
<i>Jobs, thousand people</i>	3.1
<i>Amount of deductions to off-budget funds for 5 years, billion rubles</i>	2.47
<i>Amount of tax payments to the consolidated budget for 5 years, billion rubles, including:</i>	1.86
<i>to the regional budget</i>	1.55
<i>to local budgets</i>	0.3

Reference: Return on commercial investments is 12% - 16%, budget investments - 10%. Overall, the project can be characterized as acceptable and economically feasible.

5. Book—“Assessment of the Contribution of Protected Areas to the Socio-Economic Development of the Region. Methodology and Techniques” (See Figure 5)

5.1. The Main Content of the Book

The results of the scientific research conducted in the Smolenskoye Poozerye NP and the draft Methodology are presented in the book—“Assessment of the contribution of protected areas to the socio-economic development of the region. Methodology and techniques”. /Ed. by A.V. Shevchuk. M., Publishing House “Roliks”, 2024. - 230 p. Authors: Shevchuk A.V. (SOPS), Medvedeva O.E. (GUU), Tolstoukhova I.S. (ES on tourism clusters of the NP “Russian Guild of Managers and Developers”), Kochergin A.S. (NP “Smolenskoye Poozerye”), Nekrasova M.A. (expert), Dobryansky A.S. (Institute of Geography of the Russian Academy of Sciences), Artemenkov A.I. (expert). The publication of the book will help to develop a methodology and method for assessing the role of protected areas in the development of the country’s regions and effectively fulfill the instructions of the President of Russia on tourism development (Shevchuk, 2024).

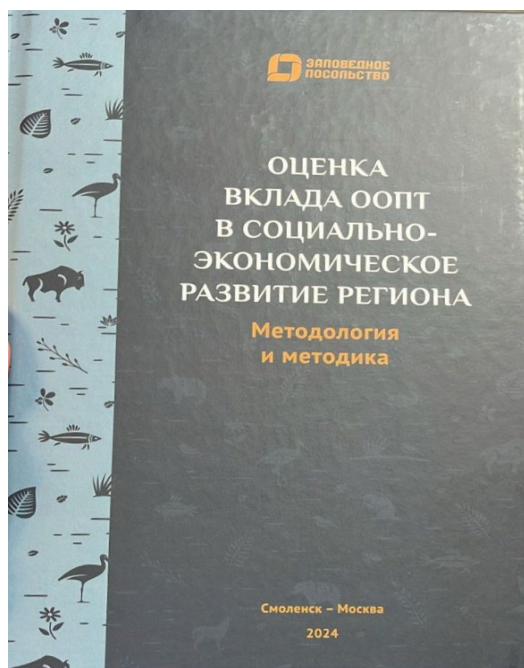


Figure 5. BOOK: “Assessment of the contribution of protected areas to the socio-economic development of the region” (2024).

The scientific level of the publication corresponds to the current state of science in this field of knowledge. The authors systematically research and present domestic and foreign experience in assessing the role of protected areas in the

development of regions based on ecotourism.

The work for the first time forms three basic directions of cost assessments of protected areas and the ecosystem services they generate. The proposed approach to the classification of cost assessments of protected areas allows us to systematize the research conducted according to the applied methodology and choose the most appropriate approaches and methods from different positions for solving applied problems. In particular, this study developed an approach to macroeconomic assessments of the contribution of protected areas to the socio-economic development of the region, which makes it possible to obtain indicators comparable with similar indicators in other sectors of the economy. A methodology for assessing the social or socio-economic and budgetary efficiency of investments in the development of protected areas is also proposed in the book and the authors use various analytical and information materials. Taking into account the importance of using the most modern and innovative technologies, the authors highlighted the following subsections in the book:

- analysis of international and Russian experience in studying the socio-economic effects of protected areas;
- analysis of data collected and summarized for the study, including spatial data for use in GIS;
- analysis of meetings held, in-depth interviews with stakeholders;
- a list of measures aimed at increasing the socio-economic effects of the activities of the Smolenskoye Poozerye NP, including the “Comprehensive concept of the project for the development of the territory of the Smolenskoye Poozerye NP” and “Possible business models for the development of the Smolenskoye Poozerye NP”, which provide analytics and present innovative approaches used in the field of ecotourism.

The material presented in the book allows employees of state executive authorities, specialists, the population, students and young people to obtain analytical and methodological information on assessing the role of protected areas in the development of regions, as well as to use the practical recommendations offered in the publication in their activities.

5.2. Book Presentation

The book “Assessment of the contribution of protected areas to the socio-economic development of the region. Methodology and Methods” was presented on:

April 5, 2024 at the XI All-Russian Nature Festival “Primordial Russia” as part of the event of the “Zapovednoye Posolsstvo” Foundation (Moscow, in the halls of the Union of Artists of Russia “New Tretyakov Gallery” on Krymsky Val);

November 21, 2024 at the Round Table “Socio-economic issues of tourism development in protected areas” (Moscow, Environmental Council of the PVR).

The main provisions of the book were reported at the Round Table on the topic “Problems and Prospects of Territorial Development of Russia” (Moscow, SOPS VAVT, March 21, 2024); presented at the Round Table “Assessment of the

contribution of protected areas of federal significance to the socio-economic development of the region” (Moscow, SOPS VAVT, December 25, 2023).

The project “Methodology for assessing the contribution of protected areas to the socio-economic development of regions” was presented at a meeting of the Section of Rospirodnadzor on the Arctic and Biodiversity Conservation (18.12.2023) and received support.

The book—“Assessment of the contribution of protected areas to the socio-economic development of the region. Methodology and methods” in pdf version was brought to national parks and state nature reserves for use in the work on the development of ecotourism.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

In Russia, the process of developing domestic tourism in protected areas has also begun. But it is happening spontaneously, there are no uniform management approaches and guidelines. These guidelines should unite different spheres and specialists, and this is also a problem. There are also no funds for targeted support and investments in the development of tourism activities in protected areas.

Currently, the Russian Government allocates significant funds for the development of tourism in the country, accordingly, it is necessary to include or integrate protected areas into this flow. The economic effect of recreational services provided using the existing tourist infrastructure in protected areas primarily leads to replenishment of regional and municipal budgets and to an increase in the added value of the regional tourist product.

The activities of the federal project “Conservation of biological diversity and development of ecological tourism” of the national project “Ecology” (2018-2024) were aimed at the comprehensive development of institutions of the protected area system of Russia, and in the future within the framework of the national project “Ecological well-being” (2025-2030). It is important to understand what role protected areas will play in the development of the regions of their location.

It should be noted that national parks with the development of domestic tourism are becoming points of investment growth throughout the country. They can bring up to 10% - 14% of the gross regional product with a high return if the work is properly organized [1].

The Methodology developed as a result of the study can be applied only to national parks of federal significance and as natural parks of regional significance. This is due to the possibility of using these categories of protected areas for recreational purposes within the boundaries of zones in which such activities are permitted in accordance with the Federal Law on Protected Areas.

In order to implement the main provisions of the Methodology, it is advisable to create an independent organization that would implement its provisions in the practice of pilot national parks and natural parks of regional significance with subsequent scaling of the results.

Given the relevance of cooperation between Russia and China and the need to

develop new options for cooperation with China in the field of tourism, it is necessary to develop a Cooperation Program for Russian and Chinese National Parks based on the promotion of ecological and other types of tourism in natural areas.

It should be noted that on November 21, 2024, a Round Table “Socio-economic issues of tourism development in protected areas” was held in Moscow. Organizers of the event: the Council for Environmental Policy of the PVR, the Russian Ecological Academy, the Ecological and Educational Center “Zapovedniki”, SOPS VAVT of the Ministry of Economic Development of Russia.

The participants of the Round Table were leading scientists in the field of environmental policy, protected area management, tourism development, experts in the field of ecology, public figures, and government representatives. The core group of experts at the Round Table, many of whom participated remotely, was quite broad: employees of national parks and reserves, representatives of the administrations of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, including the Smolensk Region, where research had been conducted to assess the contribution of the Smolenskoye Poozerie National Park to the socio-economic development of the region.

The event was attended by scientists and specialists from the Institute of Geography of the Russian Academy of Sciences, RANEPa, SOPS VAVT, Institute of World Transformations, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Kutafin Moscow State Law University, Ural State Mining University, State University of Management, ITMO University, VNIIEkologiya of the Ministry of Natural Resources of Russia. Representatives of public environmental organizations actively participated in the Round Table: Russian Ecological Academy, Social and Ecological Union, Ecological and Educational Center “Zapovedniki”. There were also representatives of new territories, including the Donetsk Ridge Landscape and Recreation Park (Luhansk region). Well-known scientists and specialists from China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan took part in the round table.

During the event, representatives of legislative and executive bodies of state power, national parks, public environmental organizations, and specialists from foreign countries considered the socio-economic issues of tourism development in protected areas. Leading experts in the field of protected areas, who are actively involved in solving a pressing problem for the economy of the Russian Federation that is assessing the role of ecosystem services created in specially protected natural areas, including those realized through the development of ecological and other types of tourism, made presentations.

During the discussion, the participants discussed a qualitatively new approach to the formation of effective models of sustainable development of national parks aimed at developing national ecological culture, protected area science, and ecological tourism. The participants of the Round Table supported the main provisions of the “Methodology for assessing the contribution of protected areas to the socio-economic development of regions”

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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