

Date: 11 October 2010  
To: Portsmouth – Severodvinsk Connection  
From: John Brissette  
Subject: Trip Report; 23 September – 5 October

It was an honor to be asked to represent the Portsmouth – Severodvinsk Connection (PSC) as a member of a delegation to Severodvinsk and Arkhangelsk, with a focus on environmental matters. The New Hampshire delegation consisted of Doug Bogen, an activist with much experience on a range of environmental issues; Silke Psula, manager of the solid waste program for the city of Portsmouth; and myself, a research forester with the Northern Research Station of the U.S. Forest Service. What follows are my thoughts and recollections about the trip and some recommendations about potential next steps regarding forests and forestry, my area of expertise.

### Chronology

#### *23-24 September*

We left Portsmouth for Logan International Airport in the afternoon. Due to mechanical problems our flight to Munich, Germany was delayed for several hours so we missed our original connecting flights to Saint Petersburg and Arkhangelsk. It was after midnight when we arrived in Saint Petersburg, where we were greeted by Lyena P. She took us to the domestic terminal and waited with us until our plane for Arkhangelsk left the next morning. Her kindness and instant friendship set the stage for the rest of our trip.

#### *25 September*

Katya Boikova met us at the airport in Arkhangelsk and was our interpreter, host, guide, and friend throughout our stay in Severodvinsk. Instead of arriving Friday evening we arrived mid-afternoon on Saturday and thus missed some of the cultural events planned for Saturday. However, that evening we got back on schedule with a welcoming dinner at the apartment of Yuri Sirazhiddinov, his wife Luba and daughter Valaria. With another daughter living in California and business interests in the U.S., Yuri and Luba are frequent visitors and speak excellent English, as does Valaria.

#### *26 September*

Sunday we went on a field trip to Kurtyaevo, a nature reserve about an hour from Severodvinsk. Katya saw us off but did not join us. Our hosts were Yuri and Lyena Osipov. Yuri is a carpenter and restorer of old wooden structures. Lyena helps him with office management. Much of his work in recent years has been in Norway. Lyena

speaks some English but Yuri very little. With sketches, Yuri explained that many of the old Russian structures are stacked logs (i.e., log cabin style) while in Norway they are timber frame. Kurtyaev is an interesting area with a chapel built over a spring and a stacked log Russian Orthodox church that is undergoing restoration. Completion of restoration is in doubt however because of lack of funds. Yuri and Lyena also took us to visit a friend's newly built dacha that was nearby. We met their friend Olga but not her husband. She and her husband built the house and tend extensive flower gardens around their dacha. The construction and detailed craftsmanship were excellent. Sunday evening we spent with Anatoly and Tatiana Shibalov at their dacha on the shores of a lake. Katya and her friend Nadia joined us there. We enjoyed Anatoly's banya where he treated Doug and I to a traditional, almost ceremonial, Russian ritual.

*27 September*

Monday we went to Arkhangelsk where the focus was on forestry. We first went to the "Northern (Arctic) Federal University" (NAFU), formerly Arkhangelsk State Engineering University. We met several people there, those who shared business cards or with whom I have had email contact include:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Organization</i>	<i>English skills</i>	<i>Email</i>
Demidova, Natalia	Deputy Director of Sciences	Federal Forest Agency, Northern Research Institute of Forestry	Excellent	forestry@ptl-arh.ru
Golysheva, Valentina	Vice Dean for International Relations, Director of the British Centre	NAFU	Excellent	vgolysheva@gmail.com (this is the email address she used with me, not her NAFU address)
Gubnitsyn, Anton	Vice-Rector for International Cooperation	NAFU	Excellent	a.gubnitsyn@nafu.ru
Kalinina, Marina	Deputy Vice-Rector of International Cooperation	NAFU	Some but not sure as she did not stay with us	m.r.kalinina@nafu.ru
Koptev, Sergey	Vice Dean of Information Technology and Scientific Research; Faculty of Forestry	NAFU	Some but hard to determine	koptev@agtu.ru or koptev@atnet.ru
Podoplekin, Anderi (husband of Nadezda below)	Not sure, he arranged for my presentation and has a role in research	NAFU	Good to Excellent	a.podoplekin@narfu.ru (note the addition of "r" in the address, it works and may be needed in the others from NAFU)
Podoplekina, Nadezda	Deputy Director of Ecological Education and Tourism Development	Kenozero National Park	A little, perhaps; she did not talk much	kenkadr@atnet.ru
Podrazhanskaya, Natalia	Head of International Programs Office	NAFU	Excellent; she interpreted during my presentation	n.podrazhanskaya@nafu.ru

I gave a PowerPoint presentation about the Russian – American project I worked on in Central Siberia between 1995 and 2005. That project was to demonstrate the principles of sustainable forestry in the region. My presentation generated a lot of discussion, mostly about the use of prescribed fire to reduce fuel loads and prepare sites for regeneration. That was an important part of the project in Siberia but, in general, Russians consider fire in the forest to be a bad thing and this past summer's fire reinforced that for them. However, fire is a major natural disturbance factor in the circumpolar boreal forest (i.e., most of Alaska, Canada, Fennoscandia, and northern Eurasia) and prescribed or controlled fire is a useful management tool that Russians in particular have been reluctant to use. After the presentations and questions I had a good conversation about Russian forests and forestry with Natalia Demidova and Sergey Koptev. We did not, however, develop any specific plans for collaboration. I also had a

brief conversation with a graduate student whose research is similar to my own interests. The forestry faculty and international programs office at NAFU provide a number of excellent contacts for future collaboration on forestry projects. Depending on PSC goals for pursuing forestry as an area for cooperation (more later in recommendations section), an ongoing email exchange with some of those we met would be a good approach.

We met Olga Derevia for lunch. We had lunch at an elegant restaurant on the waterfront and were joined by a journalist who interviewed us for an upcoming issue of his magazine, which focuses on health and fitness. We stressed the connection between the environment and human health. After lunch Olga gave us a tour of the waterfront and governmental center of Arkhangelsk.

In the afternoon, we visited the “Institute of Ecological Problems of the North”, which is part of the Urals Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS). The only fluent English speaker we met there was Nikolay Larionov whose title is Advisor for International Cooperation. He did not give us an email address but did provide the institute’s web site: [www.iepn.ru](http://www.iepn.ru). Although the website has an English option, it did not work when I tried it. In addition to Nikolay Larionov, we met with the following people:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Title</i>
Bolotov, Ivan	Vice Director for Research Work
Gorbova, Natalia	Academic Secretary
Podshivalov, Vladimir	Vice Director
Tarchanov (?), Sergey	Forest researcher

Ivan Bolotov gave us an overview of the research done by the institute, which includes earth sciences and biology. Climate change is an important part of their research program. Sergey Tarchanov (not sure of spelling) gave a presentation about plantings of lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*), a North American species, in the region. It grows faster than the native pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) so is considered to have potential for forest products, especially pulp and paper. In 1994 I visited Norway and Sweden where there was similar excitement about plantations of contorta pine, as Europeans call it. Afterward Sergey and I had a longer one-on-one conversation (through Katya) about forest genetics and plantation management. Although he does not speak English, Sergey would be another good contact for follow up collaboration on forestry issues in the region.

28 September

Site visits and discussions on Tuesday focused on solid waste management. Since this is Silke's area of expertise, my comments are limited to some impressions. We visited the Severodvinsk's land fill, which to me looked trashy with lots of refuse on the surface. We were told it is windblown but that most of the material does get buried under soil. The landfill is 29 hectares in size (about 70 acres) and has been in use since the 1960s. A total of 18 parameters are monitored to determine how well the landfill is containing contaminants. The parameters cover soil, water, and air. Apparently it is due to close in 2012 and there is much concern about where to locate a new one or other options for waste management. Because the area is mostly marsh, a new landfill will require a 3 meter foundation at a cost of \$10 million, a very expensive project for the city.

We also learned something about other city services. There is a new incinerator for medical waste and a crematory for dead birds and animals. The city has central heating and central hot water. The hot water is a byproduct of electrical generation. Severodvinsk's water supply comes from the Solza River. There are no enterprises along the river (more later) and the water is good except for its color (tannins from the forest and marsh?). Drinking water treatment includes disinfecting and filtering for particles. They use aluminum sulfate to remove the dark color. Waste water treatment is centralized with biological treatment to return it to 90 percent of its original state. After treatment it goes to the White Sea.

After lunch we visited a private recycling enterprise named "Ecology Nord." A LLC, the company started in 2007 and has 30 employees. They recycle a range of materials, including paper, cloth, plastics, and mercury from fluorescent lamps. They sell the recycled materials in Saint Petersburg and Moscow because there are few markets in the Arkhangelsk region. They collect mostly from businesses (in general collecting from residences is not profitable) and some residents bring things to them. They consider themselves a "Waste Robin Hood." Besides the recycling business they also buy rough-cut softwood lumber and mill it into flooring.

The next stop was at the "Information Center" where we met Galina Panchenko. Galina gave us a PowerPoint presentation about nuclear submarine decommissioning at the shipyard. Since this topic was one Doug was most interested in, I will give only my general impressions here. The Information Center started in 2007 with the goal of informing people about the submarine decommissioning process. They hold seminars for local school teachers and school-aged children (like scouts?). The center is supported by "Green Cross", which focuses on "cooperation rather than confrontation." Vladimir Vashenko, whom we met at dinner the previous night, was also there and joined in answering questions.

Dima Ryzhikov gave us a tour of the Severodvinsk museum (which we missed on Saturday because of our late arrival). We were treated to a glimpse of traditional northern Russian life by a re-enactor in the “Russian House.”

*29 September*

Wednesday started with a stop at a small sawmill enterprise owned by a woman. Larissa is a pensioner who, after her husband died, went into the business. Her operation included a head saw (for cutting boards from logs) and an edging saw for squaring up boards. We saw softwood (pine, spruce, fir, larch) and aspen in the log pile.

Next we got a tour of the city with Sergei Borsky, a member of the city council and “Chief of an Organizational Department.” He took us to Yargri Island. He brought roses and we all laid them at the World War II and submarine Kursk monuments. The WWII monument in the city center had flowers throughout our visit. The reverence Russians show at such monuments indicate how grateful they are to those who have died for their country, especially those who fought the fascists (interesting to me that they aren’t referred to as Nazis) during the “Great Patriotic War.”

After the tour we met with several members of the city council. Silke has a great story about one of them, but that is for her to tell.

Later we attended a “round table” discussion on environmental issues at the Knowledge Center. There we met Lyena Dudina (excellent English) and she gave us a tour of the facility. We also met Katerina Urbanavichene (some English) whose card listed her as Director of the complex. Lyena Osipov, who took us to Kurtyaev on Sunday was part of the round table discussion.

*30 September*

Thursday we went to Katya’s school. We were given an overview by Lina (her spelling), either a senior student or recent graduate. Lina is the daughter of Veronika Lyubetseva and granddaughter of Tamara Vagulina. Lina spent a school year in Colorado as part of the FLEX program. I asked her if since both her mother and grandmother were teachers was she going to be a teacher too. She said she has seen teaching “from the inside” and wants to be a journalist instead.

The main program for the morning was student presentations (in English) about a range of environmental issues in and around Severodvinsk. English-speaking teachers from other schools in the city were also invited. Katya had Doug, Silke, and I ask questions of the students about their presentations. We knew about that beforehand but what we didn’t know was that the students were going to ask us questions based on the letters of introduction we sent Katya. It was fun. Then we went to the school library where we

were guests at a talent show by kids from the school and representing the whole range of ages. All the performances were excellent.

After lunch we were greeted by one of Katya's students, a young girl about 10 who wanted to interview us. She had waited patiently outside the restaurant and in English asked how we liked Severodvinsk and other questions. She is Nadia's (who was with us at the Shibalov's dacha on Sunday) daughter. We later learned that Nadia didn't know about the interview and was pleased that her daughter took the initiative to do it.

After that we were treated to another talent show, this one at an extracurricular music school. Tremendously talented children, including Lina who played the piano.

We stopped by a newspaper office for an interview. The staff was all very young.

*1 October*

Friday we met with the Vice Mayor of Severodvinsk and a few other officials (unfortunately no cards were exchanged). We learned that Severodvinsk will be a pilot city for an initiative using the internet for enhanced citizen input. I asked two questions related to forests and forestry:

1. Who is responsible for city trees and landscaping, and the natural coastal forest on Yargri Island?
2. Who has responsibility along the Solza River where Severodvinsk gets its drinking water?

Regarding question 1, we were told that there is a department with that responsibility (City Planning, Land Management on a city organizational scheme we were given but that information is out of date so the title might have changed). Furthermore, each city official (department head and vice mayor) has responsibility to observe the cleanliness and condition of infrastructure in a section of the city. They report what they see to the mayor at weekly (?) staff meetings.

Regarding question 2, that responsibility rests with the federal government. Because the forest along the river is under the federal jurisdiction, the vice mayor said the city has no input into what happens there. However, he also said that their water supply comes from a "Special Protection Zone." From my work in Siberia I know that that term is from the Russian Forest Code (<http://www.forest.ru/eng/legislation/forestcode.html>), and means that in addition to there being no enterprises along the river (as mentioned earlier), there is no commercial harvesting.

We visited a newly renovated school for early grades. It was the original school built in the city in 1939. The renovation cost 1.3 million rubles with an additional \$1 million

spent on equipment (interesting mix of currency in what was done locally and what was purchased, apparently imported). We had lunch in the school cafeteria. The quality of the renovation appeared excellent. The color scheme was fun and apparently selected to encourage learning.

After the school we were interviewed at a local television station. Like the newspaper, the staff was very young. Some interesting questions like how we use the internet in our work and what kinds of cars we drive.

We finished the day with young mothers at a “Sling Club.” The moms use slings to carry their children close and in front. They were so pleased we came. Our visit was filmed, including Silke demonstrating putting on a sling and carrying a doll, for a news segment that was to run the following week.

Our visit to Severodvinsk ended with a party at the Knowledge Institute. Many of those who hosted us during the week were there to say goodbye. It was a pleasant evening with many heartfelt toasts and conversations.

### *2 October*

After a very short sleep, Katya shepherded us to the airport in Arkhangelsk and saw us off to Saint Petersburg. There we were once again greeted by Lyena P. After getting us settled in our hotel in the heart of the city we spent the rest of the day at the Hermitage. Lyena’s friend Valentina Churilina works there and was waiting to let us in a side entrance. She had audio devices for us and later took us to lunch in a café for the staff that is not open to the public. She certainly made us feel like privileged guests. We were among the last to leave and at closing time were rushed along by museum workers anxious to get home. The art works at the Hermitage are overwhelming but probably at the top of my list was not a piece of art but the library room in the czar’s family quarters. The woodwork was spectacular. Alexandra (Sasha) Gordienko joined us for the tour of the Hermitage and spent the rest of our time in Saint Petersburg with us. Sasha is a college student majoring in linguistics and international cultural exchange. She is a friend of Alex and visited Oyster River High School a few years ago.

### *3 October*

Lyena and Sasha took us to Peterhof, an imperial palace of the czars. On the way we were met by Kostya, Lyena’s nephew (and/or Godson). For me it was the highlight of our visit to Saint Petersburg. The weather was almost perfect and the grounds of the palace, with a canal leading to the Gulf of Finland, were stunningly beautiful. The symmetrical gardens and arbors were expertly tended and the fountains an interesting mix of statues and natural materials including stone, mosses, and grasses. We had a most pleasant picnic lunch of sandwiches, sweets, chocolate, and tea that Lyena and

Sasha brought. My meager contribution was a box of Junior Mints that Sasha and Kostya thought were good (or maybe they were just being polite!). After several hours at Peterhof we visited the Cathedral of Saints Peter in Paul in Petrodvorets, the town outside the gates of the palace. It is a beautiful Russian Orthodox church with great views from the upper level that is accessible for 30 rubles (about \$1.00).

#### *4 October*

Our last full day in Saint Petersburg we spent almost entirely at the Russian Museum. Lyena had to work but Sasha joined us, as did a friend of hers, an engineering student. Like the Hermitage, the Russian Museum is a great place to wander and take in works done by some of the world's greatest artists. My favorites were the woodland landscapes by Ivan Shishkin. I also liked the very large painting "A Knight at a Fork in the Road" by Viktor Vasnetsov. Again, we were almost the last to leave and had a host of workers rushing us back to where we left our coats.

Lyena joined us after work and we went to another part of the city where she and Silke visited Lyena's church then we went to dinner at one of Lyena's favorite restaurants. As we were boarding a metro car, I was pick-pocketed. That was the only negative event of the entire trip for me. Fortunately, we were able to get to the internet quickly and I sent an email to my wife Linda within about 30 minutes of the theft. Linda canceled the credit cards that were stolen. By then I did not have much cash left so the thieves (it was a group of at least three) got little for their crime. We had another great meal, over a week of great meals. Sasha said goodbye at a metro station and Lyena returned with us to the hotel where she arranged for a taxi to take us to the airport the next day.

#### *5 October*

After breakfast and a walk to the river for some last photos, a taxi took us to the airport. Our flights home were all on time and we arrived back in Boston when expected. Since we landed at Terminal E, we were the last to get on the bus for Portsmouth and since it was nearly full there were some anxious moments about whether we would all get on. We did.

### Impressions and Recommendations About Forestry

The best connections for forestry are in Arkhangelsk, at NAFU and at the RAS institute. There are more English speakers at NAFU than RAS. We didn't spend much time in the forest, just Kurtyaevo and the coastal forest on Yargi Island, so it is difficult to compare the forests there with ours in the Seacoast region of New Hampshire. From previous trips to Russia, I think the forests of the region are more like those in eastern Canada and northern Maine than those near Portsmouth. The city of Severodvinsk has a lot of parks and street trees, as well as the forests on Yargi Island. Those conditions fall under

the forestry sub-discipline of “urban forestry.” Staff of Portsmouth’s Urban Forestry Center would have many common interests with those in the department in Severodvinsk responsible for trees and parks.

My recommendation is that PSC develop a vision and mission relative to forests and forestry. Such an effort would define goals and set sideboards for future work. A key question to answer when developing such a vision and mission is where are the interests in forests centered: On the two cities or their respective regions? If desired by PSC, I would be happy to serve on a subcommittee developing that mission and vision.

### Final Thoughts

Most of all, I thank PSC for their generosity in funding the trip and for the detailed planning by Alex, Katya, Lyena, and others that made our visit to Russia both successful and pleasurable.

I also thank Doug and Silke for being such amiable travel companions. I think we made a great team with our diverse mix of professional expertise and personal interests. I enjoyed their company and look forward to working with them on a presentation about our adventures.

The connections and friendships made in such a short time were truly amazing and a sure sign that PSC is strong and thriving. The value of the professional and personal benefits from such exchanges cannot be quantified. The connections we made between individuals, our respective communities, regions, and countries are important to all our futures and we are all better people for the experience.