

Book Reviews

Newell, Josh. *The Russian Far East: A Reference Guide for Conservation and Development*. Santa Barbara, CA: John Daniel and Company, 2004. 486 pp. \$99.95 (cloth). ISBN 1-880284-76-6. \$59.95 (paper). ISBN 1-880284-75-8.

Reviewed by **David Ostergren**

School of Forestry

Center for Environmental Sciences and Education

Northern Arizona University

Flagstaff, Arizona, USA

Approximately 15 years after the fall of the Soviet Union, the world still waits to see what will happen in the Russian Federation. Researchers and analysts in politics, business, and the environment realize that whatever role Russia will have in international affairs, the role will be of powerful, long-term consequence. Several analysts report that President Vladimir Putin has a clear vision of Russia as a world power. It is less clear how much the government as a world power will control its own level of democracy or economy. Critics of “Russian democracy” fault the absence of a free press (at least in television), the tight control of regional governments, a questionable human rights record (particularly in the Caucasus), and a continued robber-baron mentality in the emerging industrial leaders. Economically, bureaucratic red tape continues to hamper efficiency, the middle class has yet to emerge outside of Moscow, and natural resource extraction often leaves rural residents impoverished. In many areas the environment is still sacrificed for economic gain. Despite the problems, Russia has extraordinary potential with a highly educated population and an extraordinary wealth of natural resources, including minerals, fossil fuels (e.g., oil at \$50.00 a barrel), ocean fisheries, fresh water, forests, and biodiversity. As one of my Siberian colleagues remarked, “It is only a matter of time before we master our difficulties, solve problems like protecting the environment, and dramatically improve the standard of living. Any so-called western ‘help’ is temporary, very temporary.”

In *The Russian Far East*, Josh Newell and 90 contributing authors have produced an essential reference book to understand how the Russian Far East may develop. One motivation behind the book is a vision that future development will be accompanied by a healthy dose of conservation. The editor/author has worked with Friends of the Earth–Japan and has extensive experience documenting environmental problems and working to develop solutions to those problems. Newell provides insight to difficult environmental problems and offers cautious optimism on the political front. But that is not the intent of the book. The editor’s and author’s intentions are to provide a broad reference text that covers most, if not all, of the issues that will influence development and conservation in the Russian Far East. For this, they must be commended for a superb job. The text is clear and well organized, and the authors represent a wide range of perspective and expertise. The facts and

analysis simultaneously account for the historic influence of the Soviet era while providing up-to-date material on recent developments and a changing economy.

After a well-written overview, the structure of the book allows for quick reference to political subdivisions within the Russian Far East (Krais, Oblasts, Republics, or Okrugs), and then quick reference to topics within each region. Although the emphasis of these topics may vary from region to region, the pieces were written by Russian specialists in most cases and provide rare insight. Within the Overview and then each region/chapter, there is a brief summary of basic facts, and then six topical sections address particular areas. Each chapter includes first, an ecology section that provides information on basic flora and fauna, with the status of the protected area network (e.g., state forests, zapovedniks, national parks), and then a summary of the "biodiversity hotspots" that features natural areas or resources of particular concern. Second, there is a section on the economy that features industry and resources that create an economic foundation for the region. In addition to natural resource extraction, many areas have some industrial capability, and the authors profile a region's potential as well as current activities. Third is a section titled "Toward Sustainable Development" that is, at times, the most optimistic section within each region. Some authors point out the potential for sustainable development under ideal conditions, but nevertheless make a realistic assessment of current policies and potential. Some regions lack any consideration of sustainable development, but the editor fulfills the intention of the book by both providing what does *not* exist, as well as hopeful future scenarios.

The fourth section of each chapter, "Indigenous Peoples," is atypical for this type of reference book. The Russian Far East still hosts a wide cultural diversity along with the biological diversity associated with thinly populated regions. In several cases indigenous peoples have formed or joined nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and work through legal channels to affirm rights to land or resources. Because this information is often left out of a reference book, I wanted more, and perhaps this section could have had some speculation as to how the indigenous peoples will (or could) influence regional politics.

Legal issues comprise the fifth section in each chapter, and here the authors highlight some of the bigger issues to watch in local and regional politics. Although many topics could have been split out in the ecology or "Indigenous Peoples" sections, the legal issues sections insure the reader will note the good, bad, and ugly of what government can do. In several cases there are surprisingly candid statements of misbehavior by government agencies or personnel.

The final section is the "Perspective." In many chapters this is an opinion/analysis section that branches off into particularly contentious topics such as the destruction of the protected natural areas system, energy development on Sakhalin Island, mineral extraction in the far north, or illegal logging practices.

The Russian Far East is a reference book that provides invaluable information to any institution, researcher, agency, NGO, or individuals interested in the future of this part of the world. As the Russian Federation is integrated into the global market place, the Russian Far East will continue to provide a tremendous proportion of raw resources to Eastern Asian countries. In the end, the Russian Far East may irrevocably suffer from two related threats that the authors point out in clear detail. First is an irresponsible rush to sell resources for Western currency and economic gain. While Russians may be struggling to make a living, East Asian businesses are unlikely to independently add any "unnecessary" monitoring or regulations to

protect forests, biodiversity, water, or wildlife. The second threat is chronic underfunding for state agencies. Even when laws exist to protect nature and diligent and reputable individuals staff the government agencies, the agencies lack sheer numbers of personnel, equipment, and/or training to adequately enforce all regulations. Until the federal and regional authorities are able to fund agencies and enforce uniform environmental standards, development in the Russian Far East will likely continue to be more extraction and less conservation.

Diamond, Jared. *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. New York: Penguin Group, 2005. 356 pp. (including maps and photographs). \$44.00 (cloth). ISBN 0-67003-337-5.

Reviewed by **Edwin J. Rossman**
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Tulsa District, Tulsa
Oklahoma, USA

Jared Diamond has written two very accessible books addressing one of the most basic questions about human societies: What is the role of the exploitation of biophysical environments in the sustainability of societies? In *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (1997, W. W. Norton & Co.), Diamond focused on societal success stories in terms of accumulation of wealth. Some societies have flourished and expanded culturally, politically, militarily, and economically. Others have maintained the same level for thousands of years. The subject of this review, *Collapse*, focuses on societal failures. Using a case-study approach, Diamond illustrates how societies, in a variety of ecological settings and historical epochs, have exceeded the carrying capacity of the environment on which they depend. He begins his discussion with his personal experiences with contemporary conditions in the western United States and takes the reader through some classic examples of overconsumption of resources. His examples illustrate human transformation of the environment to the point where resources can no longer support a large human population or complex social organization. Diamond takes advantage of the volumes of scholarly work done throughout the world. He relies on ethnographic and archeological research literature to present his case of the limits to ecosystems. He weaves in his own expertise from his ecological studies of bird populations and his understanding of the intricate interrelationship between resources and populations. The book's voice is a personal one, without losing track of the need for scientific objectivity in drawing conclusions.

Diamond's work is composed for a lay audience. However, the author assumes a degree of sophistication, requiring an understanding of the detailed facets of scientific endeavors and theory development. Some casual readers and observers get lost quickly in how one interprets uncertainty in science in building a body of knowledge. Many opinion leaders in contemporary public forums view scientific explanation as nothing more than taking from the smorgasbord of contradictory evidence and concocting a view that compliments one's self-serving vision of fact. Diamond is able to make his case compelling, yet concise. Without oversimplification, *Collapse* summarizes major themes in contemporary scientific literature. Diamond points out