An Environmental History of Russia

The former Soviet empire spanned eleven time zones and contained half the world’s forests; vast deposits of oil, gas, and coal; various ores; major rivers such as the Volga, Don, and Angara; and extensive biodiversity. These resources and animals, as well as the people who lived in the former Soviet Union – Slavs, Armenians, Georgians, Azeris, Kazakhs, and Tajiks; indigenous Nenets and Chukchi – were threatened by environmental degradation and extensive pollution. This environmental history of the former Soviet Union explores the impact that state economic development programs had on the environment. The authors consider the impact of Bolshevik ideology on the establishment of an extensive system of nature preserves, the effect of Stalinist practices of industrialization and collectivization on nature, the rise of public involvement under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, and changes to policies and practices with the rise of Gorbachev and the breakup of the Soviet Union.

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Under Stalin, the nation embraced a series of large-scale projects to transform nature to operate in a “machine-like” – and planned – way, including the creation of forest defense belts to prevent any future draught. “Land, you will never suffer from draught.”