

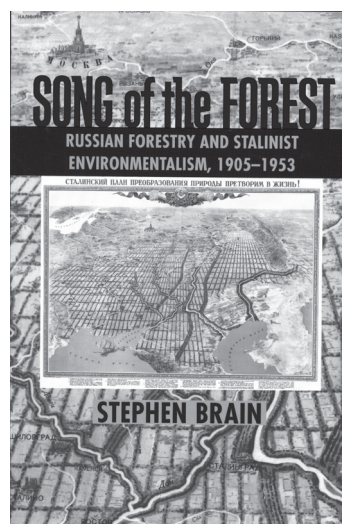
# РЕЦЕНЗИИ И АННОТАЦИИ

## Forestry Management and Soviet Environmentalism

*JONATHAN OLDFIELD*

University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK, Jonathan.  
Oldfield@glasgow.ac.uk

On one level, Stephen Brain's *Song of the Forest*<sup>1</sup> provides a detailed and thoroughly engaging examination of Russian forestry theory and practice during the first half of the twentieth century set against the hinterland of the late tsarist period. More generally, the work is part of a broader agenda within Russian environmental history, which aims to move away from generalised depictions of Russian and Soviet history as one of environmental disaster in order to explore the nuances of environmental thought, policy and practice. Chronological in its structure, the book moves briskly through the origins of Russian forest management in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, while simultaneously underlining the significance of German forestry practice and associated thinking in helping to shape the Russian approach. However, it is suggested that by the end of the nineteenth century, while economically effective, these Western European approaches to forest management were increasingly viewed as detrimental to the regenerative capacities of Russia's forests, as well as the productive involvement of Russia's rural population in the forest-management process. The subsequent development of a self-conscious Russian approach to forest management, as it unfurled during the course of the next fifty years, forms the main focus of the book. What emerges is a fascinating insight into the changing role and nature of forest management in state policy and practice played out on the backdrop of social revolution and, most intriguingly, the industrialisation policy of Stalin from the 1930s to his death in 1953.



<sup>1</sup> *Brain S.* *Song of the Forest: Russian Forestry and Stalinist Environmentalism, 1905–1953.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011. 232 p.

A key strand of Brain's argument concerns his exploration of the form of environmentalism that emerged out of the turmoil of Russia's social transformations during the early to mid-twentieth century, dwelling in particular on the programme of environmentalism that became apparent under Stalin in connection with his efforts to manage, regulate and protect vast areas of forest during a period of rapid industrialisation. More specifically, Stalin's environmentalism emerges as a largely pragmatic response to the pressure of economic growth on forest resources and this forms part of the main narrative of Brain's analysis.

A central figure in the story of Russia's evolving system of forest management is the Russian forester G.F. Morozov (1867–1920) and his influential conceptualisation of forest communities. The work of Morozov and his followers is advanced as a predominantly Russian school of thought in contrast to the aforementioned influential German-led initiatives within forestry practice during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the same time, it should be noted that Morozov's conceptualisation competed with a range of hybrid approaches towards forest management during this period. Nevertheless, given the importance of Morozov's school of thought, it is worthwhile dwelling on some of its key features. Morozov worked as a professor at the St. Petersburg Forest Institute and was influenced greatly in his general approach to forests by the Russian soil scientist V.V. Dokuchaev (1846–1903). Indeed, taking inspiration from Dokuchaev's approach to soil, Morozov conceptualised the forest as a complex community consisting of interrelated natural phenomena incorporating elements such as climate, soil and relief. This 'community' approach ensured that subsequent management techniques were similarly tailored to the specificities of the particular forest 'stands' in question, thus placing an emphasis on detailed local knowledge in order to identify and classify different 'stand types'. Thus, the establishment of stand types embodied a subjective element which ensured that the scope for classificatory variation was considerable; this process also required no little skill, and these factors helped to undermine the credibility of the approach within some circles. The Russian forester, and Morozov's colleague at the Forest Institute, M.M. Orlov, was a consistent opponent of the method and general approach advanced by Morozov and promoted his own organisational approach towards managing forests based on soil productivity (*bonitet*). This eschewed Morozov's detailed and context-specific method in favour of identifying and assessing the productivity of a given stand of trees, with the most productive stands logged most frequently. As Brain notes, a key strength of this approach was its relative simplicity and quick application. Brain moves on to capture the complex nature of the debates over management systems as they ebbed and flowed during the early part of the twentieth century. Morozov died in 1920, yet his general approach to forestry management, which had acquired significant influence, provided a backdrop to state forestry policy as it evolved during the Soviet period, falling in and out of favour.

Brain's analysis of the period from the 1920s to the 1950s highlights the way in which the competing understandings of forest management were typically linked to particular administrative agencies, as well as broader trends within Soviet society. For example, Morozov's general approach, with its emphasis on local knowledge and the careful application of management techniques to specific stand types, was influential during the early — to mid-1920s, and yet faced increasing pressure from industrial groups which favoured the more straightforward clear-cutting techniques found in countries such as Germany. The tension between forest conservation and the needs of the economy was reflected at the administrative level as, for example, in the relationship between the People's Commissariat for Agriculture (Narkomzem) and the Supreme Soviet of the Economy (VSNKh); the former dealing with cultivation issues and the latter with logging and processing activities. Various other administrative bodies

were created, or else acquired management responsibilities, for certain aspects of forestry policy during the Stalinist period as priorities shifted, thus complicating oversight in this area. Somewhat inevitably, the underperformance of the forestry sector during the early stages of the first five-year plan strengthened the position of industry and resulted in the promotion of VSNKh and the industrial lobby more broadly. However, rather than a gradual increase in the strength and influence of the industrial lobby during the 1930s to the detriment of forested areas, as might be expected, the state reasserted the importance of conserving forested areas. This approach was linked to a complex array of factors, yet a key element was the historically-rooted notion of ‘forested land being healthy land’ and an acknowledgement that forests played an important role in regulating natural systems. This emphasis was simultaneously reflected in the establishment of, for example, the Main Administration of Forest Protection and Afforestation (GLO). As Brain notes, such changes ensured that Morozov’s ideas had at least some room to ‘breathe’.

The Great Stalin Plan for the Transformation of Nature internalised much of the tension between the ‘technocratic ecologists’ and the industrial lobby groups. The project’s efforts to influence the climate of a significant area of southern European Russia in order to facilitate agricultural development via the establishment of vast forest shelterbelts embodied certain conservationist elements. At the same time, the intervention of Lysenko and his advancement of the universal ‘nest-method’ in order to accelerate the process of shelterbelt creation undermined the local and intensive method of forest management espoused by Morozov and his followers in favour of a generalised, and ultimately largely ineffective, approach. It would seem that a reversion to a more differentiated approach was likely following a series of critical scientific expeditions to review the progress of the plan. However, the death of Stalin brought a relatively swift end not only to the plan, but also to the broader current of technocratic environmentalism within the Soviet forestry sector.

Ultimately, Brain’s effort to both resist and question easy characterisations of Russian approaches to the management of the wider environment opens up a stimulating debate over the production of state forestry policy during the first half of the twentieth century and the associated complex interaction of competing factions within academic, government and economic circles. It is a thought-provoking reading and a very welcome addition to the developing field of Russian environmental history.

## К теории структуры и устойчивости сообществ<sup>2</sup>

*А.К. СЫТИН*

Ботанический институт им. В.Л. Комарова РАН, Санкт-Петербург, Россия;  
astragalus@mail.ru

Геоботаник Станислав Михайлович Разумовский (1929–1983) строил строгую и непротиворечивую концепцию динамики растительного покрова, начиная с дипломной работы «Отношения дуба и ели в Московской области» (1951–1952). Время показало,

<sup>2</sup> Рецензия на книгу: *Разумовский С.М. Труды по экологии и биогеографии (Полное собрание сочинений)*. М.: Тов-во научных изданий КМК, 2011. 722 с.