

The forest has served the people for centuries and it continues to serve them. In my view the forest is not merely a source of timber. It is first and foremost a complex ecological organism with environmental protective and water regulating functions. Since it is a habitat for wildlife it is without question important for recreational purposes. These are the considerations that have given rise to the Ministry's principal fields of activity. Foremost among them is protecting the forest from natural disasters, preeminently from forest fires. As a rule, as much forest is destroyed by fire annually as the area being cut over, which is of the order of one and a half million hectares. Reports indicate that as of yesterday, 878,000 hectares had been engulfed by fires.

The second area of concentration is protecting the forests against infestation by pests.

What we need is regeneration and protective afforestation, along with the planning of an integrated forest management programme, so as to derive full value and extract all of the forest products. By this I mean the procurement of medicinal raw materials, berries, mushrooms, nuts and other bounties of nature. The possibilities here are immense, since the forests of Russia occupy more than a billion hectares, amounting to more than 95 percent of the nation's forest resources. But in Russia there is a one-sided and I would say, predatory approach to forest resource utilization. Up to now, the calculating of felling areas in the Archangel, Vologda, Perm and Irkutsk oblasts, the Komi Republic Karelia and the Krasnoyarsk Krai has been done in Moscow by logging departments of Union subordination. In this connection, to provide for the creation of integrated logging enterprises a transfer of lands administered by the USSR Ministry of the Timber Industry took place four years ago. Today, these account for about 200 million hectares of forest-covered areas. What is known as the "take and rule" principle came into being. At long last, the senseless felling of cedar forests is being painfully brought to an end. In the past thirty years alone, the area occupied by cedars has shrunk