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## Youth of the Russian Far East Lead in the Fight Against Climate Change

*By Maksim Sorokin*

### SYNOPSIS

*The United Nations has emphasised the indispensable role of young people in preserving the earth's environment and sustaining the ecology of the planet. In this respect, youth activism across the [Russian Far East](#) is contributing to increased public awareness on environmental and ecological concerns, especially regarding climate change issues and the mitigation actions needed. More effort must be exerted to deal with the looming climate crisis.*

### COMMENTARY

In recent years, alongside [increasing public anxiety about the ecological situation](#) in the Russian Federation, the role of Russian youth in addressing climate change has risen dramatically. Amidst the cumulative impact of environmental activism across the country, attention has been drawn to the Russian Far East as a region that is well-differentiated and rich in natural resources and covering over 30 conservation areas.

In the assessment of the publication [National Ecological Rating of the Regions of Russia \(2023\)](#), the ecological situation in the Russian Far East can hardly be regarded as reassuring. Forest fires, typhoons, earthquakes, floods, and other disasters have adversely affected its ecology to a significant extent. It is worth recalling, for example, the 2020 [environmental disaster in Kamchatka](#), which caused a massive die-off of benthic marine organisms.

Negative environmental assessments of the Russian Far East have bolstered environmental activism among the younger generation across this region, which has become the centre of gravity for youth advocacy in the cause of sustainable development and environmentalism.

Essentially, among the crucial mechanisms of youth engagement in this part of the country are their participation in government-sponsored forums and events along with energetic social media campaigns. Both are used to communicate their ideas on climate change to bigger audiences like state authorities, businesses, and the wider Russian populace. Many youth-led organisations regularly conduct eco-oriented events at regional and local levels to educate targeted audiences, such as university students and school children.

### **Youth of the Russian Far East Lead in State-level Forums**

Russian youth in the Far East actively participate in state-level forums and related events. Kamchatka has become a venue for the annual [Ecosystem: Protected Territory National Environmental Youth Forum](#), which was initiated last summer. Even though this forum attracted Russian youth from across the country, the majority of the participants represented regions of the Russian Far East. This year, it is expected to gather over 450 young activists, with 90 representing Kamchatka territory, which indicates that the youth of the Far East play a critical role in the event and accounts for a disproportionate share of the proposals and ideas presented.

Furthermore, the forum provided the youth of the Far East with a unique opportunity to share their ideas with President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation. On his [visit to the Kamchatka territory](#) in September 2022, Putin spoke and met young activists at the forum. After the meeting, it was noteworthy that the Presidential Executive Office and the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs [issued instructions](#) based on proposals made at the event.

Accordingly, therefore, among the achievements of the youth of the Russian Far East are:

- i) the revival of the young naturalists' movement, and
- ii) the establishment of a national environmental youth movement.

Going ahead of the implementation of these initiatives, the 2023 Ecosystem: Protected Territory National Environmental Youth Forum announced that it will commemorate the [launching of the young naturalists' movement](#). Similarly, the establishment of a national environmental youth movement will inevitably be an indispensable agenda item during the event.

Another state-sponsored event that youth of the Russian Far East actively participate in is the Youth Eastern Economic Forum, first held in 2021. In September 2022, one of the sessions of the [event](#), which attracted the leaders of youth-led organisations and environmental volunteer movements in the region, focused on the discussions conducted at the earlier forum held in Kamchatka in August-early September 2022.

### **Activities of Young Environmental Activists**

Besides the state-level forums and related events, young activists usually join diverse youth-led organisations that address issues associated with climate change. Such organisations commonly operate within institutes of higher education and comprise university students from different educational backgrounds.

The city of Vladivostok, capital of the Russian Far East, with the Far Eastern Federal University (FEFU) located there, is an excellent example. So far, three major youth-led organisations in the university have raised environmental concerns. They are the [Model UN of the Russian Far East, FEFU ECO Team](#), and [Razdelny sbor](#) (meaning, “separate collection”; an allusion to the separate collection of waste as part of environmental protection efforts). They operate under the auspices of the university, and their activities focus on eco-oriented events for students and the outside audience.

Keeping pace with the times, these organisations also actively use social media platforms to undertake public awareness education on the challenges posed by climate change. Thus, the Model UN of the Russian Far East annually conducts “Earth Hour”, joining the worldwide movement aimed at addressing environmental issues, with FEFU students and others across Vladivostok also taking part.

In 2019, the annual [Earth Hour at FEFU](#) gathered more than 120 participants and attracted the state-sponsored TV station to provide media coverage. The event succeeded qualitatively, with an enthusiastic audience learning more about ecological problems and the phenomenon of climate change.

FEFU Eco Team and *Razdelny sbor* are exclusively eco-oriented organisations that – along with the hosting of university-level events such as eco-quizzes, round tables, and guest lectures – also use social media platforms to enhance knowledge about environmentalism, separate collection of waste and ways to mitigate climate change.

It is worth highlighting that *Razdelny sbor*, jointly with FEFU ECO Team, established the culture of separately collecting waste on the FEFU campus and is currently the [leading branch](#) of the *Razdelny sbor* movement in Russia, even though Vladivostok joined it only in 2018.

## **Geopolitical Circumstances and Problems Faced**

Considering the novelty of environmental activism in the Russian Far East, the youth of the region can be said to have achieved modest results in addressing climate change issues.

Unfortunately, however, the war in Ukraine may have an impact on the development of the youth-led organisations. The Russian Government recently labelled [World Wildlife Fund \(WWF\)](#), [Greenpeace](#), and Sustainable Development Solutions Network, as “undesirable organisations”, which effectively bans them from operating in the country. Accordingly, the WWF branch in Vladivostok that had worked closely with Model UN of the Russian Far East was closed, which is an indication of how the youth environmental movement may suffer from political decisions.

In the current geopolitical circumstances, young Russian environmentalists are constrained from entering the global arena and gaining support from international organisations. With decreasing interest from the government, lack of financial assistance, and the consequent need to be self-reliant, the prospects for youth-led organisations are for the moment bleak.

## Conclusion

Youth-led eco-activism in the Russian Far East is a novel phenomenon that has grown rapidly in the last five years. It has accomplished many objectives and stands at the head of state-level eco-activism; promoting sustainable solutions and leading in the formation and development of the national youth environmental movement.

The Russian Far East is at the heart of youth-led eco-activism and is likely to remain so in the future. But there are challenges ahead, one of which is the lack of funding and the consequent need to be self-reliant. Another is the movement's current isolation from international partners, which has closed the doors for international cooperation. These challenges are priority issues for the youth activists to address.

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