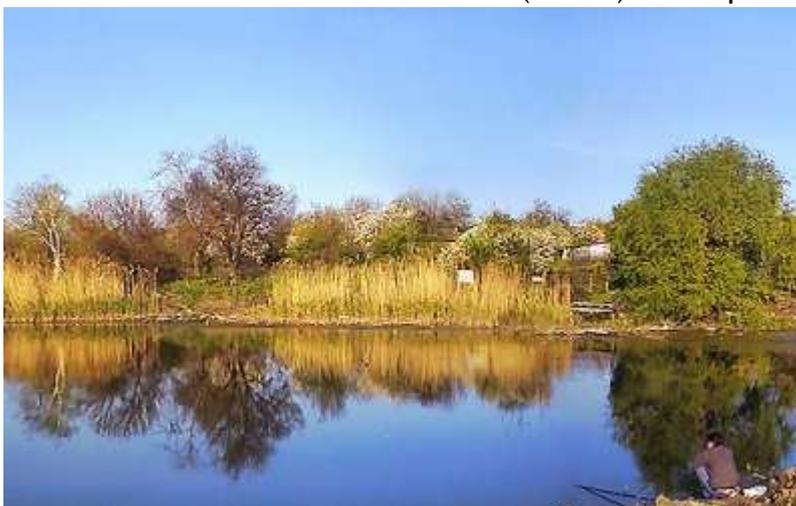


The unique Karasun Lakes under threat

The case

The Karasun Lakes are a chain of natural water bodies, remnants of the now dry Karasun River in Krasnodar Region, Russia. One of the largest lakes is on the outskirts of the city of Krasnodar and pressure for large scale construction and development right on its coast from the local authorities is very strong. As natural water bodies the lakes are federal property and are subject to protection and regulation by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology of the Russian Federation. The local authorities however have decided to change their status to 'ponds' - artificial water bodies, though the national legislation does not provide for such changes. The Environmental Watch on North Caucasus (EWNC) has repeatedly informed the public about attempts of the local authorities in Krasnodar to take over and 'reconstruct' the Karasun Lakes. The organisation recently sent an address to the minister of the nature resources demanding quick action from federal authorities and law enforcement agencies to stop the destruction of the unique water bodies.



The change process

Until 2006 the lake between the streets of Stavropolska and Seleznyova in Krasnodar enjoyed the best environmental status among the system of interconnected Karasun lakes. It was nurtured by springs, its waters had natural flowage and were exchanged, therefore the lake was inhabited by a variety of fresh water species. After the implementation of the 'Karasun Plus' project by the local authorities all that was destroyed. Now it is a fetid swamp covered with debris and construction soil, and the vegetation on its shores is gone. This is the story which the EWNC used as an illustration of the harm done to nature by the controversial 'Karasun Plus' project. After its implementation one third of the lake was drained. But things did not stop there.

Recently the EWNC received information about intentions of the local administration to change the status of lakes into 'ponds'. The Russian national legislation does not envisage such a mechanism of changing the status of water bodies from the federal water resources, whether lakes or rivers; moreover it cannot be done on municipal level.

The EWNC therefore sent an address to the federal authorities - to the Minister of natural resources and ecology of the RF Yuri Trutnev, to the head of the Federal agency of water resources Rosvodresurs Marina Silvestrova and to the

director of the Rosprirodnadzor, the nature protection agency, Vladimir Kirilov - informing them of the attempts of the Krasnodar administration to commit an illegal act changing the status of the Karasun lakes.



‘The possibility of transforming the Karasun lakes into ‘ponds’ would inevitably lead to destruction of the water bodies and would deprive the citizens of their right of access to them’, EWNC wrote to Mr. Trutnev.

EWNC informs that on 7 July 2011 a session of the working group on the ‘reconstruction’ of the Karasun lakes took place in the administration of Krasnodar. The main outcome of this session according to the minutes was a decision to assign the deputy head of

the legal department of the Krasnodar administration Mikhail Frolov with the task to ‘study the procedure of giving the Karasun lakes the status of ponds’.

This abuse of geography and the attempt to describe a natural water body, a lake with the term ‘pond’, which stands for an artificial water body constructed on small rivers with dams, is clearly demonstrating the intellectual and professional level of the Krasnodar officials. It is also a legal nonsense. The EWNC appealed to the minister of natural resources and ecology to take measures preventing the Krasnodar administration from appropriation of water bodies of the federal water resources - the Karasun lakes and their subsequent liquidation.

In addition, the heads of supervisory agencies were requested to deal with the project of the so-called ‘reconstruction’ of the Karasun lakes, implemented since 1999 by order of the vice-mayor of Krasnodar № 534 ‘On reconstruction, landscaping and improving the ecosystem the Karasun lakes’, as well as to take measures for compensation of the damages caused to the State and the environment by the destruction of the Karasun lake under ‘Karasun Plus’.

The outcome

This intervention is one of a series of campaigns of EWNC and partners that voice concerns of the public over misappropriation and destruction of natural resources. The organisation used successfully all legal measures available to prevent the local authorities from changing the ownership of the lakes into municipal and perhaps later into private property, denying the public the right to use this common resource. EWNC informed both the federal authorities and the law enforcement agencies represented by the public prosecutor of Krasnodar about the illegal activities. The outcome of this effort is not final and depends on the future efforts of the organised public and the federal authorities and law enforcement agencies.

Lessons learned

The experience of the EWNC and the public in Krasnodar is by no means unique for the country and the region. The experts of EWNC have developed impressive capacity to address various legal issues and communicate with authorities on all levels - local, regional and federal.

After Dmitry Shevchenko, EWNC