

Putin Backs Ecotourism Spending

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Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on Thursday backed spending on creating conditions for ecological tourism in Russia's national parks after hearing that U.S. parks earn \$14.5 billion a year.

Putin agreed for the federal budget to allocate at least 5 billion rubles (\$160 million) over the next five years to build accommodations, restaurants and other things necessary to attract tourists to the parks.

Environment and Natural Resources Minister Yury Trutnev, whose ministry sponsors the plan, said the budget would recoup the spending when people flock to national parks and nature reserves to explore the country's "most beautiful places." He mentioned that Americans pay \$14.5 billion per year to visit their national parks.

U.S.-based Yellowstone National Park, which is home to more than 500 geysers, the majority of geysers in the world, receives 2 million visitors every year, Trutnev said. In Russia, Kamchatka's Valley of Geysers, the world's second largest concentration of the hot springs, with about 90, attracts 3,000 tourists a year, he said.

Putin also suggested that the Cabinet ask the State Duma to amend the legislation on national parks to allow for more tourism as soon as this fall.

Russia has a total of 211 national parks and nature reserves, but they now largely exist to prevent any economic activity in the areas, Trutnev said.

“The function of environmental education and tourism is carried out insufficiently,” he said.

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