Approximately 5,400 miles around the globe from the PCT, in south central Russia near the Mongolian border, sits magnificent and ancient Lake Baikal. Known as the Blue Eye of Siberia, the Pearl of Russia, and the Galápagos of Russia, Lake Baikal is the oldest and deepest freshwater lake in the world. Although remote (with only a handful of towns and villages nearby) and somewhat protected by a scarcity of roads and rugged, mountainous terrain, this unique natural resource (see sidebar for details) is increasingly threatened by pollution, industrial development, proposed nuclear plants and oil pipelines, habitat destruction, wildlife poaching, gold and uranium mining, and the effects of regional economic hardship.

In an effort to protect Lake Baikal and its biodiversity, a number of international and Siberian organizations, including the Great Baikal Trail Association (GBTA), are hoping to develop an eco-tourism economy for this otherwise isolated and depressed region of Siberia. Critical to their work is the construction of Russia’s tourism economy for this otherwise isolated and depressed region.

Critical to their work is the construction of Russia’s tourism economy for this otherwise isolated and depressed region. Known as the Blue Eye of Siberia, the Pearl of Russia, and the Galápagos of Russia, Lake Baikal is the oldest and deepest freshwater lake in the world. Although remote (with only a handful of towns and villages nearby) and somewhat protected by a scarcity of roads and rugged, mountainous terrain, this unique natural resource (see sidebar for details) is increasingly threatened by pollution, industrial development, proposed nuclear plants and oil pipelines, habitat destruction, wildlife poaching, gold and uranium mining, and the effects of regional economic hardship.

Approximately 5,400 miles around the globe from the PCT, in south central Russia near the Mongolian border, sits magnificent and ancient Lake Baikal. Known as the Blue Eye of Siberia, the Pearl of Russia, and the Galápagos of Russia, Lake Baikal is the oldest and deepest freshwater lake in the world. Although remote (with only a handful of towns and villages nearby) and somewhat protected by a scarcity of roads and rugged, mountainous terrain, this unique natural resource (see sidebar for details) is increasingly threatened by pollution, industrial development, proposed nuclear plants and oil pipelines, habitat destruction, wildlife poaching, gold and uranium mining, and the effects of regional economic hardship.

In an effort to protect Lake Baikal and its biodiversity, a number of international and Siberian organizations, including the Great Baikal Trail Association (GBTA), are hoping to develop an eco-tourism economy for this otherwise isolated and depressed region of Siberia. Critical to their work is the construction of Russia’s tourism economy for this otherwise isolated and depressed region.

Critical to their work is the construction of Russia’s tourism economy for this otherwise isolated and depressed region. Known as the Blue Eye of Siberia, the Pearl of Russia, and the Galápagos of Russia, Lake Baikal is the oldest and deepest freshwater lake in the world. Although remote (with only a handful of towns and villages nearby) and somewhat protected by a scarcity of roads and rugged, mountainous terrain, this unique natural resource (see sidebar for details) is increasingly threatened by pollution, industrial development, proposed nuclear plants and oil pipelines, habitat destruction, wildlife poaching, gold and uranium mining, and the effects of regional economic hardship.

In an effort to protect Lake Baikal and its biodiversity, a number of international and Siberian organizations, including the Great Baikal Trail Association (GBTA), are hoping to develop an eco-tourism economy for this otherwise isolated and depressed region of Siberia. Critical to their work is the construction of Russia’s tourism economy for this otherwise isolated and depressed region.

Critical to their work is the construction of Russia’s tourism economy for this otherwise isolated and depressed region. Known as the Blue Eye of Siberia, the Pearl of Russia, and the Galápagos of Russia, Lake Baikal is the oldest and deepest freshwater lake in the world. Although remote (with only a handful of towns and villages nearby) and somewhat protected by a scarcity of roads and rugged, mountainous terrain, this unique natural resource (see sidebar for details) is increasingly threatened by pollution, industrial development, proposed nuclear plants and oil pipelines, habitat destruction, wildlife poaching, gold and uranium mining, and the effects of regional economic hardship.

In an effort to protect Lake Baikal and its biodiversity, a number of international and Siberian organizations, including the Great Baikal Trail Association (GBTA), are hoping to develop an eco-tourism economy for this otherwise isolated and depressed region of Siberia. Critical to their work is the construction of Russia’s tourism economy for this otherwise isolated and depressed region.

Critical to their work is the construction of Russia’s tourism economy for this otherwise isolated and depressed region. Known as the Blue Eye of Siberia, the Pearl of Russia, and the Galápagos of Russia, Lake Baikal is the oldest and deepest freshwater lake in the world. Although remote (with only a handful of towns and villages nearby) and somewhat protected by a scarcity of roads and rugged, mountainous terrain, this unique natural resource (see sidebar for details) is increasingly threatened by pollution, industrial development, proposed nuclear plants and oil pipelines, habitat destruction, wildlife poaching, gold and uranium mining, and the effects of regional economic hardship.

In an effort to protect Lake Baikal and its biodiversity, a number of international and Siberian organizations, including the Great Baikal Trail Association (GBTA), are hoping to develop an eco-tourism economy for this otherwise isolated and depressed region of Siberia. Critical to their work is the construction of Russia’s tourism economy for this otherwise isolated and depressed region.

Critical to their work is the construction of Russia’s tourism economy for this otherwise isolated and depressed region. Known as the Blue Eye of Siberia, the Pearl of Russia, and the Galápagos of Russia, Lake Baikal is the oldest and deepest freshwater lake in the world. Although remote (with only a handful of towns and villages nearby) and somewhat protected by a scarcity of roads and rugged, mountainous terrain, this unique natural resource (see sidebar for details) is increasingly threatened by pollution, industrial development, proposed nuclear plants and oil pipelines, habitat destruction, wildlife poaching, gold and uranium mining, and the effects of regional economic hardship.

In an effort to protect Lake Baikal and its biodiversity, a number of international and Siberian organizations, including the Great Baikal Trail Association (GBTA), are hoping to develop an eco-tourism economy for this otherwise isolated and depressed region of Siberia. Critical to their work is the construction of Russia’s tourism economy for this otherwise isolated and depressed region. Known as the Blue Eye of Siberia, the Pearl of Russia, and the Galápagos of Russia, Lake Baikal is the oldest and deepest freshwater lake in the world. Although remote (with only a handful of towns and villages nearby) and somewhat protected by a scarcity of roads and rugged, mountainous terrain, this unique natural resource (see sidebar for details) is increasingly threatened by pollution, industrial development, proposed nuclear plants and oil pipelines, habitat destruction, wildlife poaching, gold and uranium mining, and the effects of regional economic hardship.

In an effort to protect Lake Baikal and its biodiversity, a number of international and Siberian organizations, including the Great Baikal Trail Association (GBTA), are hoping to develop an eco-tourism economy for this otherwise isolated and depressed region of Siberia. Critical to their work is the construction of Russia’s tourism economy for this otherwise isolated and depressed region.
like the U.S. and offers its own outstanding food, traditions, and heritage. Regular amenities we are accustomed to at home are not readily available in the villages of Siberia. For example, houses in the villages have no running water and Internet access is only available in cities (which we visited on just three occasions). For a longtime backpacker and trail worker, however, perhaps one of the most unusual things was the custom of breaking for hot tea each morning and afternoon on the trail. Potential future Great Baikal Trail thru-hikers beware: in the company of the very generous and hospitable Siberians, high-mileage days may have to take a backseat to cultural exchanges."

The goals and ambition of the GBTA are to be admired. Lake Baikal is a natural wonder deserving of protection, and, as PCT-lovers know, there is nothing like observing environmental treasures from the tread of a trail. Of her trip to Lake Baikal, Wilson says "I am incredibly grateful to have gotten this opportunity. I took away just as much, both culturally and professionally, as I gave. The GBTA has made tremendous progress for an organization that is just six years old. They are the pioneers of building sustainable trails for recreation purposes in Russia. I hope we can continue to strengthen our partnership and I encourage PCTA volunteers to join the growing international movement for sustainable trails."

Photos (Clockwise from top left): GBTA volunteers take a traditional tea break on the trail. Trail users, including children, in Arshan navigate a dangerous but popular section of the GBT that is covered in roots and rocks. Suzanne Wilson, PCTA Regional Representative, among GBT trailside sculptures. Trash is a big problem around Lake Baikal and litter control was a topic that the U.S. trail specialists discussed with GBTA volunteers. Bob Birkby of the SCA, GBTA crew leader Natasha Luzhkova, and PCTA’s Wilson completing the construction of rock steps and a retaining wall in Arshan.