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## Land Use and Social Change among the Dolgan and Nganasan of Northern Siberia

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## **Land Use and Social Change among the Dolgan and Nganasan of Northern Siberia**

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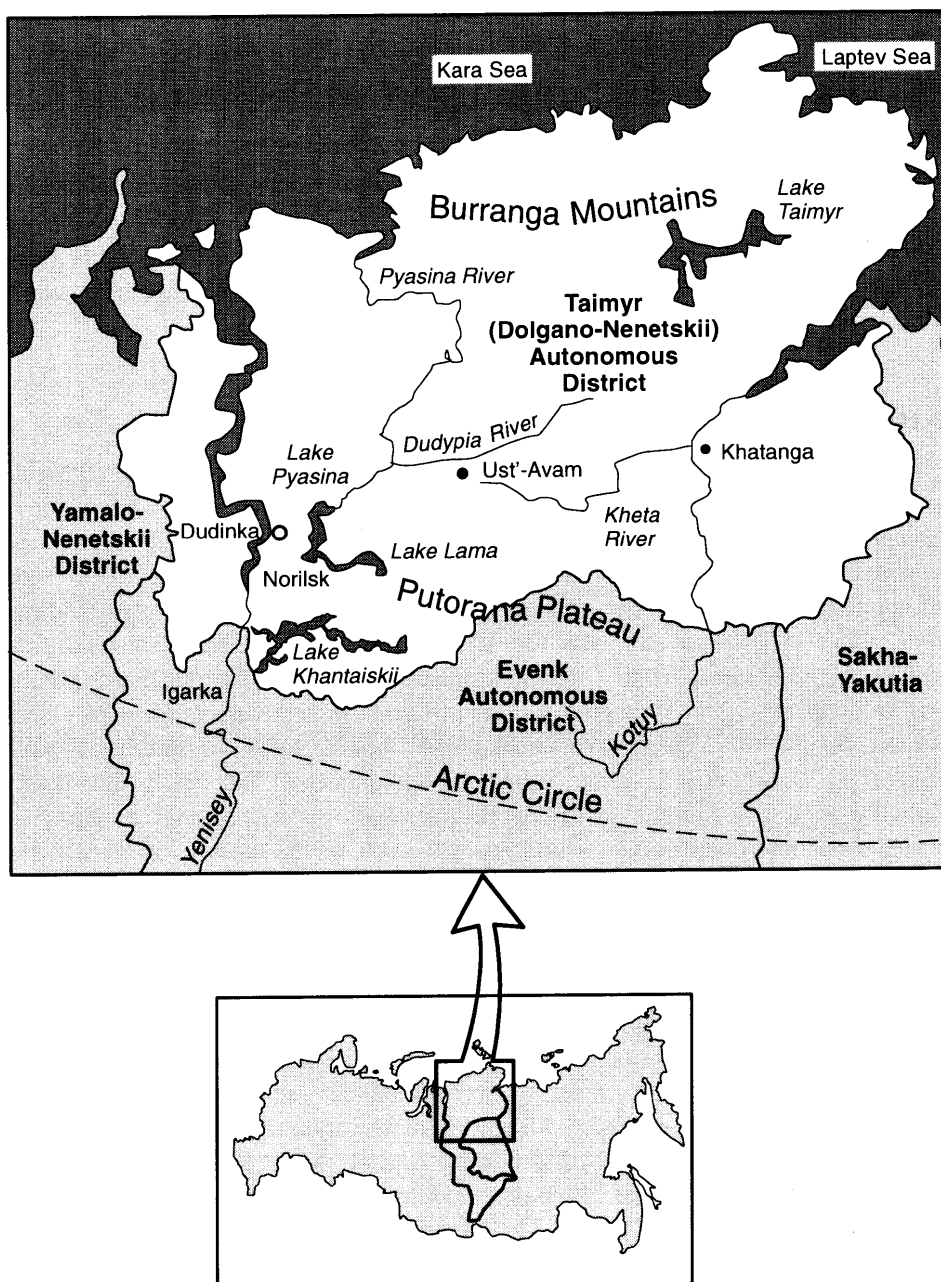
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### **INTRODUCTION**

This research investigated the strategies that native people in the Siberian Arctic are employing in response to the collapse of socialism and the planned economy in Russia. Information was collected to characterize, compare, and contrast two types of households – those that maintained use-rights to state enterprise lands and those that claimed family/clan holdings. Family/clan holdings came about in response to calls for self-determination by indigenous political leaders on the national level.<sup>1)</sup> In the Taimyr Autonomous District, these private land holdings have gone through a number of forms since the inception of this land-tenure type in 1992. These types are described briefly below. From the regional perspective, family/clan holdings were part and parcel of the newly developing capitalist economic system, involving the members in the regional economy as producers of traditional products and rational users of the tundra. Ironically, the other strategy-maintaining use-rights to state-enterprise lands-involved decreasing contact with the regional economy. The management of what remained of the state enterprise system allowed native hunters to continue to use the hunting territories allocated to them during the Soviet period, and kept them on the employment rolls even though the hunters did not receive regular salaries. This strategy allowed the hunters to practice household subsistence foraging, occasionally turn in products for putative remuneration, receive ever-decreasing allotments of fuel and equipment, and maintain eligibility for state pensions upon retirement.

Extended field research took place in the central Taimyr lowland settlement of Ust'-Avam (see Figure 1 and Photo 1), Krasnoiarskii Krai (territory). Currently, both Dolgan and Nganasan inhabit Ust'-Avam and the surrounding tundra, along with a minority of non-native individuals from republics of the former Soviet Union. Ethnographic work and participant observation were combined with socio-demographic survey and archival research to evaluate the costs and benefits of each land-tenure strategy.

Given their remote location in the Central Siberian Arctic, and the dismantling of the beneficent and authoritative factory-state in the early 1990s, the Dolgan and Nganasan are more isolated now than at any time in the last 30 years. Subsistence



**Figure 1.** Map of the Taimyr Autonomous District



**Photo 1.** The Ust'-Avam settlement from the south  
Ust'-Avam is at the tundra-taiga transition zone.  
Photograph by John P. Ziker, 1997

hunting, fishing, and gathering now provide the main source of nutrition for local households, whereas prior to the breakup of the Soviet Union, meat and fish were sold in the local store, and households that were net producers were supposed to purchase what they needed for their own consumption. With growing local importance of a subsistence economy and non-market distribution of food products, land tenure has to some extent reverted to informal communal use, rather than following formal ownership procedures through family-clan holdings. In this way, land tenure, an important variable in the native agenda of self-determination, has changed in unexpected ways in Dolgan and Nganasan settlements since 1991.

## BACKGROUND

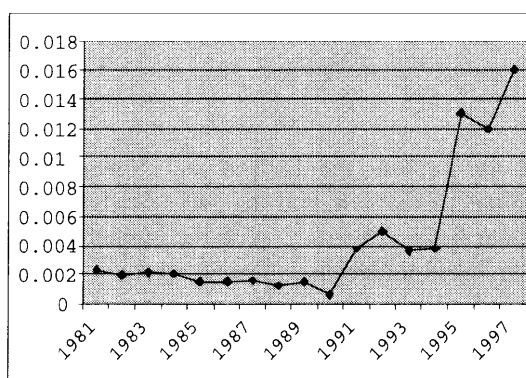
At the turn of the century the Dolgan and Nganasan were semi-nomadic reindeer herders, hunters, fishermen, and trappers occupying adjacent territories on the Taimyr peninsula in Arctic Siberia.<sup>2)</sup> With the implementation of Soviet power, land use became formalized under the collective system, and the native peoples in the region were integrated into the planned economy as workers. Soviet power asserted its control of the Taimyr Peninsula in the 1930s with nationalization of trade, collectivization of personal property and reindeer herds, and repression of bandleaders and shamans. The collectivization process was devastating for these native populations.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the state invested heavily in central points of residence for the Dolgan and Nganasan, as it did among other small-numbering peoples of

Siberia. The result was a series of settlements with state farms and hunting enterprises that provided mechanized transport and fuel, as well as incentives for production of meat, fish, and fur. Domestic reindeer herds were decimated by disease in the Central Taimyr Lowlands, and in Ust'-Avam the last reindeer was slaughtered in 1978. Notwithstanding this loss and the resulting collapse of traditions surrounding and supporting reindeer herding, the communities at Ust'-Avam and other nearby settlements experienced economic improvement during the 1970s and 1980s through better salaries and special access to goods and services. Work focused on the tasks of hunting and fishing, generating food, and sewing the decorated components for boots. These products were supplied to the regional economy under management of the District Agricultural Bureau and the Territorial Hunting Department. Approximately 50% of adult males in Ust'-Avam worked as staff hunters in the government hunting enterprise (*gospromkhoz*) Taimyrskii. They received good salaries and were well respected in the community, as were the women that worked in the *gospromkhoz* sewing facility. Most of the remaining working-aged adults were employed with the *gospromkhoz* as laborers and technicians, as well as with the school, clinic, post office, and store.

In comparison with other Soviet workers, indigenous Siberian people had relatively high standards of living during the last two decades of the Socialist period [Ziker 1998a]. For example, in the 1980s, a staff hunter in Ust'-Avam could make 4000 rubles in a good winter trapping season – a salary equivalent to that of the annual salary of a senior Academy of Sciences researcher. With the collapse of the planned economy in 1991, their financial situation changed rapidly.

Cost of living has multiplied relative to average income. One striking indicator of the transition's economic impact on the native people of the Avam tundra is the cost of bread, an important food item in Russia and in the North.<sup>3)</sup> Figure 2 shows



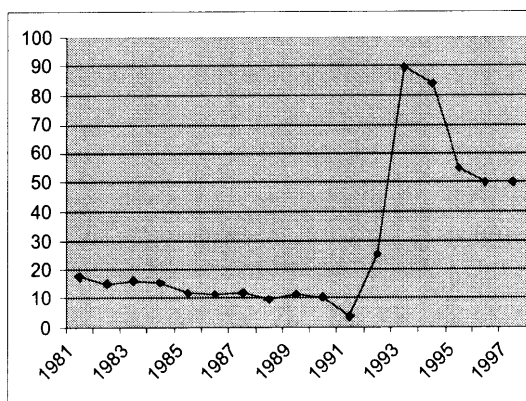
**Figure 2.** The cost of one loaf of bread (1 kg) as a proportion of the average salary of all Taimyr rural enterprise workers (1981-1997)

the cost of a 1-kg bread loaf at the Ust'-Avam bakery in proportion to the average salary of all rural-enterprise workers. The average salary figures come from the Taimyr District Agricultural Bureau's published reports on economic performance. I determined the cost of one loaf of bread from informant interviews, as well as my own observations. These data show a 10-fold increase in the real cost of this staple food since the early 1990s.

Another indicator is the increase in the cost of snowmobiles and spare parts. Since the loss of the domestic reindeer herds in the 1970s, snowmobiles have been used in production, mainly for transportation to hunting cabins, but also to check fishnets on distant lakes, trap-lines, and during the pursuit of caribou. During interviews with hunters of the Avam area, they often mentioned the rapid increase in the price of snowmobiles and spare parts since 1991. The most widely used snowmobile in Russia is the *Buran* ("snowstorm"), produced in the Perm Province.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the government hunting enterprise gave snowmobiles to professional hunters for five seasons, at the end of which time the machines were written off (*spisany*) the enterprise's balance sheet and became personal property of the hunters. In addition to these "plan" snowmobiles, before 1991, hunters received snowmobiles as prizes and, in some cases, purchased them with personal income. Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, no one in the Ust'-Avam tundra has purchased a snowmobile. Spare parts are not regularly available, and those that are ordered or brought in by speculators are expensive and of dubious quality. Figure 3 shows the cost of Russian-made snowmobiles in relation to average monthly income. The price of a *Buran* snowmobile has gone from less than 10 average monthly salaries to over 50, but there are none available for sale in native communities, and there is no way to finance the purchase.

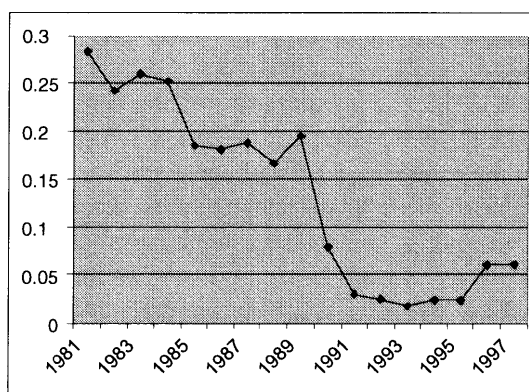
As an indicator of the value of the native hunter's contribution to exchange



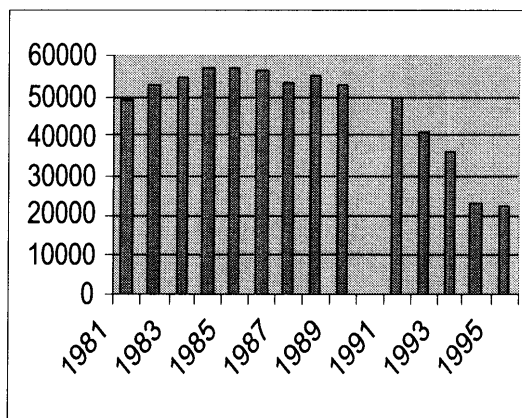
**Figure 3.** The cost of one buran snowmobile in terms of the average monthly salary of all Taimyr rural enterprise workers (1981-1997)

with the larger economy, I calculated the average price of an Arctic fox pelt in terms of the average monthly salary of all Taimyr rural enterprise workers (Figure 4). The average cost of the Arctic fox pelt was determined from actual receipts kept by Avam hunters and, in my 1995 through 1997 fieldwork, through informant interviews.

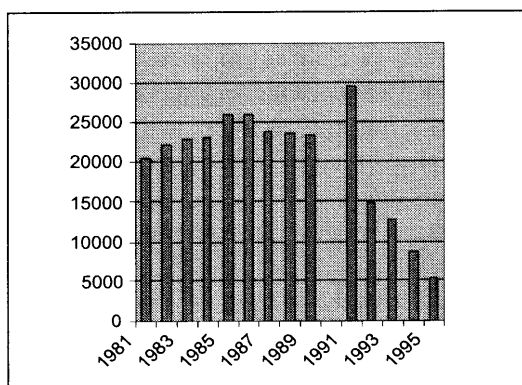
A significant drop in production has characterized the Taimyr District's state enterprise system in the 1990s. Since 1991 there has been a significant reduction in the numbers of domestic reindeer held (Figure 5), and quantity of caribou meat, fur-bearing animals, and fish (Figure 6 and Photo 2) turned into the bureau. In



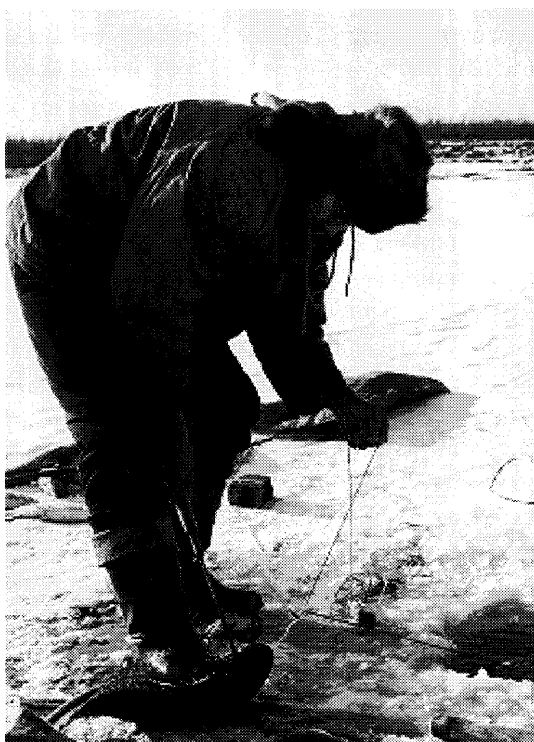
**Figure 4.** The average value of an arctic fox pelt in terms of the average monthly salary of all Taimyr rural enterprise workers (1981-1997)



**Figure 5.** Number of domestic reindeer:  
All state enterprises of the Taimyr agricultural bureau (1981-1995)



**Figure 6.** Fish (100 kilograms):  
All state enterprises of the Taimyr agricultural bureau (1981-1995)



**Photo 2.** Burbot fishing on the Avam River  
Dolgan fishermen treat river and lake burbot differently. On lakes it is a sin to beat the burbot on the head, while on rivers this practice is acceptable.  
Photograph by John P. Ziker, 1996



addition, broad-based activities that occurred in a number of state enterprises close to Dudinka and Norilsk such as chicken, milk-cow, and vegetable farming have been completely eliminated.<sup>4)</sup> These reductions translate into greater inactivity and reductions of cash income in the region's native villages. Concomitantly, increasing food imports from abroad have been required to meet the needs of the Taimyr Region's urban populations.

The Dolgan and Nganasan are now merging into one native population in Ust'-Avam and two other settlements with mixed Dolgan and Nganasan populations.<sup>5)</sup> There are many marriages between people of Dolgan, Nganasan, and Russian descent, and thus, a large number of children of mixed ancestry. Most, if not all, people under the age of 35 in Ust'-Avam now speak Russian as their primary language. As a likely result of years of labor under the state hunting enterprise and the ethnic assimilation process, there is no observable difference between Dolgan and Nganasan land tenure strategies in the Ust'-Avam area.

## LAND TENURE

The 1992 Russian presidential decree directing Russia's regions to design procedures to return land to Siberian natives was intended to protect traditional economic activities and territory. Despite the opportunities offered by regional regulations for the issuance of family/clan holdings, the majority of native households living in 17 remote settlements in the Taimyr District have not taken claim to the land. Since 1992, only 50 family/clan holdings have been formed in the region's native communities, and many of these are now defunct.

In the Taimyr Autonomous District, only people of aboriginal descent can create family/clan holdings (*semeino-rodovoe khoziaistvo*). Individuals of non-aboriginal descent can claim land for peasant-hunting holdings (*krest'iansko-promyslovoe khoziaistvo*). Family/clan holdings have a number of advantages over peasant-hunting holdings. Native individuals with 5 years' professional hunting experience can create family/clan holdings. Non-native individuals are required to have 10 years' professional hunting experience. Peasant-hunting holdings are granted only by lease, and they must pay land taxes. Family/clan holdings are granted in a number of forms and are never required to pay land taxes or lease payments. Despite the advantages, both types of holdings were required to make arrangements to pay taxes on profits from any sales, to open a commercial bank account, and to have the agreement of the Committee on Land Resources, the Agricultural Bureau, the Association of Peoples of Taimyr, and the state enterprise in their area. Up to 11 documents had to be prepared in order to complete the land claim.

To locate family/clan holdings in the Taimyr District, I spent a few weeks in the spring of 1997 in the Government Archive of the Taimyr Autonomous District and the Dudinka City Committee of Land Resources. I reviewed 110 district decisions (*postanovlenie*) in which land was taken from or assigned to newly

formed holdings. Many of these decisions were made for non-native (peasant) hunting, trapping, and fishing holdings. Approximately 50 were family/clan holdings for native households, and most of these were close to the regional capital, Dudinka, or the Noril'sk Industrial District. The remainder of this section looks at why there are so few family/clan holdings among the 15,000 native people.

Proximity to the regional capitol appears to have been a major factor in the location of family/clan holdings (Table 1). Most of the family/clan holdings registered in Dudinka district are within 100 kilometers of Dudinka or Noril'sk. Of the holdings in areas discontinuous with the urban centers, only those on the Piasina River have decent access to markets. Three holdings, located on the Piasina River, are more than 100 kilometers from Noril'sk. The river historically has significant summer traffic with tugboats and barges, 150-ton freighters, and small aluminum boats that provide some ability to get goods to the Noril'sk market.

Four holdings are located near the community of Volochanka. Transportation to Volochanka is expensive because of its location in the Central Taimyr lowlands – river transport is possible during a short period of the summer from Khatanga. However, there are a number of villages that provide meat and fish in that eastern county of the Taimyr District. As a result, access to markets is difficult for these

**Table 1.** The source of land for each family/clan holding in Dudinka District (1992-1997)

| The Source of Land                            | Number of Family/Clan Holdings |
|---|--------------------------------|
| <b>Continuous with City of Dudinka</b>        |                                |
| Yenesei State Farm                            | 11                             |
| Tukhard State Farm                            | 9                              |
| Piasino State Farm                            | 5                              |
| (Agrofirma Piasino after 1993)                |                                |
| Land Resources of the City                    | 2                              |
| Potapova Experimental-Production Farm         | 1                              |
| Shelmovskii Government Reserve Fund           | 1                              |
| <b>Discontinuous with the City of Dudinka</b> |                                |
| Government Hunting Farm Taimyrskii            | 4                              |
| Volochanka State Farm                         | 4                              |
| Khantaiskii State Farm                        | 4                              |
| <b>Other</b>                                  |                                |
| Fund of Redistribution                        | 3                              |
| Not Specified in the Archive                  | 2                              |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                  | <b>46</b>                      |

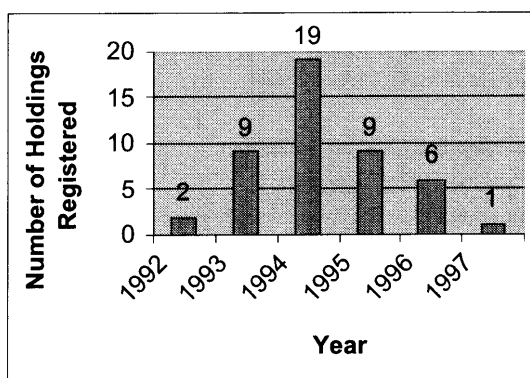
holdings, and they are used generally for subsistence foraging. One family/clan holding near Ust'-Avam, and the holding on the Putorana Plateau, are in similar transport situations to that of the Volochanka holdings. There is virtually no large-scale transportation available to these holdings except by air.

Figure 7 shows the number of family/clan holdings registered per annum in Dudinka district. The rate of family/clan holding formation has decreased significantly since 1994.<sup>6)</sup> Because of this dynamic I felt it was important to investigate hunters' motivations for claiming or not claiming family/clan holdings.

In my structured survey of Ust'-Avam hunters in 1997. I asked: "Why did you claim a family/clan holding?" And, for those without family/clan holdings, "Why did you not claim a family/clan holding?" I asked these questions to 25 individuals who are hunters in the Avam tundra (Table 2). I interviewed at least one hunter from each of the 17 hunting territories in the government hunting enterprise (*gospromkhoz*) "Taimyrskii," as well as the heads of 3 family/clan holdings, and 2 individuals who work at surrounding state enterprises. In all but 3 cases, these individuals are the leaders of the hunting brigades or holdings. These professional hunters represent approximately half of those in Ust'-Avam, and according to my observations, are generally the most active native hunters in the area. Twenty-two of 25 respondents were not associated with family/clan holdings. First, I review the responses of those that have family/clan holdings.

Three individuals with family/clan holdings were asked the question "Why did you claim a family/clan holding?" One individual stated that he hoped to live better. This individual alone admitted entrepreneurial motivations in claiming a family/clan holding. The reality is that taxes consume all his profits, however, and his holding is barely active.

Another individual with a family/clan holding stated that the main reason for starting a family/clan holding was to feel more liberty. Being one's own boss is a



**Figure 7.** Number of family/clan holdings registered per annum in Dudinka County (1992-1997)

reason why many individuals in the U.S. start businesses too. This family/clan holding was the only active one in the Avam tundra and the two members were constantly shuttling back and forth from their hunting territory on the Piasina River to Noril'sk, where they sold their fish and meat, to Dudinka, where they had to deal with the tax police and regional hunting authorities.

The third individual with a family/clan holding stated that he did not know why he started a family/clan holding. Upon cross checks with other informants in his community (150 km from Ust'-Avam), I discovered that he received capital equipment from the government hunting enterprise when he made his land claim. The equipment he received was already lost or broken by the time this interview took place in 1997. Currently, the head of this holding has returned to "work" for the government hunting enterprise by contract during certain seasons, and his family/clan holding is inactive.

Five of the 22 responses to the question "Why did you not claim a family/clan holding" dealt with the concept of the family/clan holding. Three of these individuals said that they did not understand what a family/clan holding was, or how it could actually work. These responses point to the lack of information and crumbling infrastructure in the region. The other two individuals said that they doubted that it was possible for them to take a family/clan holding. This response underscored the difficulties associated with getting the necessary approvals, completing the paperwork, and dealing with government officials.

**Table 2.** Reasons for claiming or not claiming family/clan holdings, results of interviews, 1997

| Reason   | Number of Responses |
|--|---------------------|
| <b>No Claims</b>                                 |                     |
| Money  | 10                  |
| Problem with Concept                             | 5                   |
| Intention to Make Claim                          | 2                   |
| Listed as Member of Inactive Family/Clan Holding | 1                   |
| Land is Poor                                     | 1                   |
| Non-Local  | 1                   |
| Too Much Paperwork                               | 1                   |
| Does Not Know                                    | 1                   |
| <b>Claims</b>                                    |                     |
| To Live Better                                   | 1                   |
| Liberty  | 1                   |
| Does Not Know                                    | 1                   |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                     | <b>25</b>           |

Two individuals without family/clan holdings expressed intent in claiming a family/clan holding. One of these individuals expressed his interest in claiming ancestral lands in order to protect them from Russian expansion. After making several statements on the relative position of the Taimyr natives in regional society, that informant expressed his doubts about the reality of claiming the land. The other individual stated that he initiated the paperwork for making a land claim, but was not clear about its status. He stated that he had not yet been approved because something was missing. Again, both of these responses pointed to the difficulties associated with getting the necessary approvals, completing the paperwork, and dealing with government officials in the distant capital.

One respondent is officially listed as a member of a family/clan holding, but he did not quit his job with the government hunting enterprise, and the family/clan holding has never been active. In fact, the head of that holding has not visited the land since his claim was approved in 1994. This hunter's opinion on my question was: "We took the land because our hunting spot was there. We don't know anything; there is no result." Again, this response pointed to the lack of information and crumbling infrastructure, with the absence of a middleman for the hunter/fisherman/trapper actually producing goods, it turned out to be close to impossible for the hunter to deal directly with organizations that sell goods in urban markets.

Money was the main factor in not starting a family/clan holding for 10 respondents. There were three kinds of problems these informants associated with money. The first of these had to do with the absence of enough money to start the family/clan holding. Four informants mentioned the lack of starting capital as the main reason for not claiming land. The second aspect of money as a factor for not claiming a family/clan holding was generally phrased, "it's not profitable." Five informants stated that family/clan farms are not monetarily advantageous and that was the main reason for their not claiming one. Their concerns were probably justified since two of four family/clan farms in the area are inactive, a situation that is similar in other parts of the region. The third problem informants associated with money had to do with obtaining supplies, such as gas, coal, and consumables, along with conducting the distribution and marketing. Five informants mentioned these infrastructural problems as a first or second reasons for not starting a family/clan holding.

One informant stated that he had no reason to make a family/clan land claim. He clarified that the land is poor (i.e., resources are migratory). In addition, he mentioned the problems with obtaining supplies and marketing his production.

Another individual stated that he had no right to lands there since he was not local. He clarified that he "never thought about it." He is married to a local woman, however, and there are prior instances of family/clan holdings being granted to native and non-native men married to a woman from a Taimyr native community. He could apply for one, if he really believed there would be some kind of benefit.

One individual mentioned overwhelming paperwork as the main reason for his not making a land claim. It is true that it took several weeks, if not months, to

complete the paperwork and get the approvals necessary for starting a family/clan farm in the Taimyr District. This process must be conducted in Dudinka, difficult for hunters that spend months on end in the tundra.

One individual stated that he did not know why he did not decide to start a family/clan holding. This individual spends most of his time in the bush, and has rarely visited the regional capital or Noril'sk. It was not surprising that claiming a family/clan holding was not in his interests.

In sum, there was insufficient time and money, and little apparent benefit for residents in the Ust'-Avam community in pursuing official land grants under current regulations and economic conditions in the Taimyr region. Most hunters were busy hunting. They did not have the time or the political capital necessary to push their land claims through the system or to market their production. In addition, there was little competition for hunting grounds, still officially held by the government hunting enterprise "Taimyrskii." Those individuals with family/clan holdings made little, if any, material gains. Although material gain in the formal economic sense was not the goal of the 1992 presidential decree mentioned above, it was the implicit goal for at least some of those individuals creating family/clan holdings in the Taimyr District, as well as the City Committee on Land Use and Management.

The creation of family/clan holdings is best interpreted in terms of Russia's overall process of privatization and state-enterprise devolution. In 1992, two family/clan holdings were registered by decision of the city of Dudinka. As part of this and other early decisions regarding family/clan holdings, the city cited existing Soviet-era law. One piece of Soviet-era legislation cited in the Dudinka decisions was a law of the Soviet of People's Deputies of the Taimyr Autonomous District "about a program of development for villages and hunting/trapping holdings in the region under conditions of economic transition to market relations." This regional decree was issued December 25, 1991 with the goal of increasing individual responsibility for the condition, protection, and rational use of hunting and trapping resources. From the regional perspective, family/clan holdings were to conduct effective use of land. This orientation differs from the intent of the April 1992 presidential decree, which was to protect traditional lands and economic activities, supporting self-determination. Despite the 1992 presidential decree, the regional government retained the "rational use" criterion.

During my review of the decisions of the City of Dudinka that created these family/clan holdings, I identified three forms of land grants assigned to the native people. These three types are all classed as family/clan holdings, but the specifics of the city decisions have different implications. Lifetime inheritable property; leased property, and unlimited (continuous) use property were the three types of land grants issued. The type of property was not specified in all the archival documents. Nonetheless, I identified a shift in the type of property available to the native people of Dudinka district as time proceeded.

These three forms of ownership were not granted simultaneously. Lifetime,



**Photo 3.** John Ziker (left) with Dolgan, Nganasan, and Russian residents of the small settlement Kresty-Taimyrskii, 150 kilometers west of Ust'-Avam  
Photograph by John P. Ziker, 1997

inheritable ownership was granted to 8 holdings from May 1992 through June 1993. Lifetime, inheritable ownership was secured with a document called a government act (*gosakt*), which was symbolized with a certificate of ownership. Ironically, the certificate that in effect granted private ownership of land displayed the insignia of the R.F.S.F.R., a political unit that did not condone private property. At least two family-clan heads that received these certificates had received low-interest loans from the Taimyr District and were involved in sales of country food to regional markets. Particularly proud of the *gosakt* and confident in the economic potential of their holding, the lifetime inheritable ownership allowed them to pass these holdings on to their descendants. The holdings were to maintain "effective use" of the land and to follow ecological demands and measures, regulated by the City Committee on Land Use and Management and local village administrations.

Unlimited (continuous) use ownership was granted to seven holdings from January 1995 through December 1996. Less impressive than the *gosakt*, unlimited (continuous) use ownership was more limited in the rights it conferred. The City Committee on Land Use and Management city committee was to conduct management work and required the holding to follow rational use of natural resources and ecological requirements. This form of ownership was not automatically transferable to descendants.

After President Boris Yeltsin's showdown with the Supreme Soviet of the R.F.S.F.R. in 1993, certificates of ownership with the Soviet insignia were no longer used in the Taimyr District. From April 1994 through April 1997, nine family/clan holdings were granted leases (*arenda*). The most significant difference between holdings granted on leases and those that received the other forms of ownership is that the lease specifies a termination point for the land tenure, usually 10 years. While no land payments were required because of the 1992 decree, "effective" use of the land was required and regulated by the City Committee on Land Resources and Management. The Dudinka government favored lands grants with lease agreements. City representatives pointed out to me that the lease arrangement was more logical, since some of the holdings were becoming inactive after a year or two, and it was easier to reassign the land granted with a lease than the other forms. Occasional subsistence hunting was not sufficient for effective use. Interpreted as a lapse of effective or rational use of the land, the administration reasoned that others should have the chance to use the land, if they wished.

This system is quite different than collective bargaining and corporate land claims arranged in Alaska and Canada, and appears to be an erosion of rights on the regional level that were to be granted the native peoples of Siberia with the 1992 decree. Changes in the Dudinka leadership occurring with the events of 1993 and elections in 1996 appear to have disfavored continued empowerment of the Taimyr's native people. Obviously, regular contact with the regional center is important, at least at the initial stages of making the land claims. From the perspective of native people in remote settlements increasing cost of living and transportation made regular travel to the capital close to impossible.

A number of hunting brigades or hunters of the *gospromkhoz* Taimyrskii have abandoned their hunting territories, or *ugod'ia*, in the Ust'-Avam area. In one case, the hunter passed away. In another, the non-native brigadier that worked seasonally at that territory did not return after 1996. The *gospromkhoz* could reassign these open territories, and the capital equipment and buildings on them, to other hunters in Ust'-Avam. Conversely, a family could organize and claim the territories under the regional regulations for forming family/clan holdings. Rather, these territories have now reverted to communal use for all Ust'-Avam hunters. The informal nature of the tenure system for these territories effectively expands the sports hunting territory (*liubitel'skaia ugod'ia*) immediately surrounding the settlement, an area historically within an approximate 20-kilometer radius where anyone could forage. The communal-use area is regulated among the hunters – they decide amongst themselves with whom they will hunt and where, usually making these arrangements before traveling into the tundra.

## CONCLUSION

The establishment of family/clan holdings appears to have had multiple purposes. First, ostensibly family/clan holdings were intended to be lifetime-



inheritable lands protected from industrial development, reserved for native people and their traditional economic activities. Second, family/clan holdings were a unique Russian government solution for aboriginal land claims. The native people were allowed to take land, not as nations on reservations, but as individual families and their kin. Third, as an undercurrent in the administration's practice, establishment of family/clan holdings was the logical continuation of the process of privatization of state farms occurring across rural Russia. If privatization did not lead to rational use, the land could be reclaimed by the state and reassigned. Fourth, in some cases, family/clan holdings were granted for political reasons – i.e., to native members of regional or local administrations, or high-profile native families in the city. With these functions in mind, the distribution of family/clan holdings in Dudinka district is no surprise. Access to transportation services and markets necessary for maintaining rational use of the land (from the perspective of regional officials), and proximity to government and administrative institutions is necessary to establish and maintain the holding.

The changes in the type of family/clan holding available from the administration represent the diminishing position of the remote indigenous communities in regional politics. As the Russian economy has experienced crisis after crisis, and the wars in Chechnia have brought ethnic divisiveness to the forefront, indigenous Siberian self-determination has come under greater scrutiny by the public and government. Regional land grants to native families have become more provisional since the disbanding of parliament in 1993.

Capital-intensive production strategies are not succeeding in the heart of the Taimyr tundra, where thousands of tons of food were provided to urban centers during the Soviet era. Family/clan holdings cannot operate under current economic conditions as producers, distributors, and marketers. Rather, hunters and their families have reoriented to a foraging economy with opportunistic and supplemental exchange in the larger economy. As part of the subsistence economy, non-market reciprocal exchange and altruistic gifting of meat and fish occurs under the tundra code: "Give it, if you have it." As part of the reciprocal exchange arrangements, some land has reverted to communal use with informal negotiations determining hunt locations and party composition. Formal land claims are too costly for hunters and their families, considering their potential economic benefit from sales in urban markets. Without an organization that provides distribution and marketing, the least risky strategy for native hunters in remote communities is to practice subsistence hunting and minimize involvement with the formal economy.

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## NOTES

- 1) As a result of lobbying efforts of the Association of Peoples of the North and international and Russian academic pressure, Boris Yeltsin issued a decree (no. 492) in April 1992 ordering northern regions to design procedures for returning land and property to native Siberian families and communities [Yeltsin 1992]. A large number of Russian and Western scholars and native Siberians have written on the problems faced by native Siberians and the policies and politics surrounding their position in the transition to democracy and free-market [e.g., Aipin 1994; Bol'shakov and Klovov 1997; Chance and Andreeva 1995; Fondahl 1997, 1998; Forsyth 1989, 1992; Grant 1995; Gray 1998; Golovnev and Osherenko 1999; Humphrey 1998; Karlov 1991; Khazanov 1991, 1995; Novikova 1994, 1995; Pika and Prokhorov 1988, 1994; Sangi 1991, 1992; Schindler 1991, 1992, 1997; Sokolova 1990; Ziker 1998b].
- 2) At that time this region was part of Turukhanskii Krai, Yeniseiskaia Gubernia. Representatives of Soviet power arrived in 1923, but it was only in 1930 the Taimyr National Region was created as part of Krasnoiarskii Krai.
- 3) The Soviet government included bakeries along with clinics and schools at the stations established along the Dudinka-Khatanga reindeer trail during the collectivization period in the 1930s. Bread remains an important food item in the Avam tundra (Ziker and Walker forthcoming).
- 4) There was no data reported for 1990. Other years with no data indicate an absence of production.
- 5) Krivonogov [1999] provides survey data that supports this ethnic assimilation.
- 6) These data are based on my review of archival documents and reports results for Dudinka district only. Figure 7 shows the number of family/clan holdings registered in Dudinka district from the inception of regional regulations to implement the 1992 decree, through October 1997.

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