

Importance and value of small rivers

The programme of restoration of hydrological territories of the park is under way in the Belovezhskaya Pushcha

By Sergey Smirnov

The restoration and stabilisation of the water regime of reclaimed forest ecosystems is being carried out under the *Small Streams — Great Influence* international project that is being financed by the Coca-Cola Corporation.

The project is directed at the preservation of stocks of moisture in the Pushcha forests by working on the small and seasonal waterways — the streams and small rivers. "In one sense, this project is an innovative one for the Belovezhskaya Pushcha, as it is the first time when it has paid attention to the small waterways, which at first sight seem insignificant, but are, in fact, of great importance from the point of view of their influence on the ecological regime," said the Director of APB-BirdLife Belarus public organisation, Victor Fenchuk.

Since the 1960s, a number of swamplands around the Belovezhskaya Pushcha area were drained and transformed into agricultural land. As a result of the economic activities during the present time, the level of ground waters in different parts of Pushcha decreased by 0.2-1.5 metres. Climate change and this deficiency of water have led to the considerable weakening of forest plantings.

The stabilisation of water project, in natural areas of Plyanta, Borushichi and Teplukhi starts now in Belovezhskaya Pushcha. Water-retaining constructions will be erected. These will, mostly be in the form of simple dams, made manually using local materials like stones, trunks of fallen trees and soil. Engineering projects will be only developed if needed. The construction work outlined by the project is planned to be carried out during this year.



Water is protected in the Belovezhskaya Pushcha

Mobile phone tourism

By Vladimir Samsonov

The most attractive tourist areas of Grodno, the city which has been announced the Cultural Capital of Belarus for 2014, will be designated their own QR-codes

Grodno is getting ready to realise the whole complex set of actions aimed at raising its tourist attractiveness. During 2014, commemorative plaques will be placed at temples, and sculpture compositions, made at the international plein-air of sculptors, will be established in the central city of the region.

In February, the first thematic billboards are planned to be established in the city. Portraits of famous cultural workers like Yanka Kupala, Vladimir Korotkevich, Vladimir Mulyavin, as well as of the most significant historical sites of the city, will be depicted there. New banners — 'The Cultural Capital of Belarus Welcomes Guests' and 'Welcome to the Cultural Capital of Belarus' — will also be erected.

The city also plans to place 30 fixed decorative and information tablets with signs in Belarusian and English. These will be placed near the most significant objects as the sightseeing tour unfolds. They will also contain special QR-codes which, when scanned with a mobile phone, will take tourists to information and tourist resources online, where further information about the location or artefact can be obtained. This information will also be available in a range of languages.

Volunteer races to rescue

Almost every corner of Minsk reminds us of the forthcoming Ice Hockey World Championship, with preparation works embracing all areas — including volunteering. Regular volunteer, Yegor Zhukovsky, tells us more about these free-will helpers, who always accompany the sporting events.

By Yan Zhur

"I graduated from Minsk's State Linguistic University and translation is actually my major specialty. At the moment, I'm a part-time student at the Department for Qualification Enhancement and Re-training, at the Belarusian State University's Journalism Institute — specialising in sports journalism," the young man tells us, adding, "I began as a volunteer in 2009 and, since then, it's become my hobby. Every year, I attend major tournaments, and the European Football Championship, hosted by Poland, was my last trip so far (I worked in Wroclaw then). This year, I've already participated in the Christmas International Amateur Ice Hockey Tournament (for the Prize of the President of Belarus) as a volunteer-guide for the Canadian team. Of course, I'm now anticipating the World Championship, hosted here in Minsk in May."

Was it a difficult task to get through to our championship?

I have rich experience and faced not much problems. However, strict demands are placed on volunteers. They need to be communicative, decent, hard-working, diligent and to know foreign languages.

What will your responsibilities be?

I'll be working as a team guide, and my major responsibility is to accompany the team at all times — to the hotel, training sessions or for a meal. I have to ensure that no problems arouse for the sportsmen. They, as well as other delegation members, should feel comfortable. I need to help them in any situation, however strange that might be.

How are you preparing for the championship right now?

Meetings and preliminary preparations have been organised. The recent Christmas International Amateur Ice Hockey Tournament was a part of them. It was announced at all level that the event was a key stage in our preparation.

Did you attempt to join the volunteers at the Sochi Olympics?

the World Championships, as I wished to help my native country. More over, we are not hosting such events regularly. I will have the chance to visit an Olympics, in Rio de Janeiro, for example. The only problem would be how to reach it.

Aren't volunteers provided with accommodation and travel tickets?

Of course not. We travel at our own expense. We may receive an invitation, but would need to cover all costs ourselves. However, Sochi is an exception. An Olympic village has been organised there, with places set aside for volunteers. I love the Sochi volunteer team's preparation. The Russians sent their young people to Vancouver to generate experience for the Olympics. They also visited London, and have prepared a special programme which will make it possible to develop Olympic skills and generate knowledge (necessary for efficient working), under the guidance of experienced coaches. I think we need to follow this path. There are volunteers who have gone to Sochi. After their return, they will share their experience with the rest of us.



Yegor Zhukovsky has already worked as a guide-volunteer

Actually, volunteers are involved everywhere, and precise scheme of actions is developed. They will help to check tickets, assist journalists, meet guests at the airport and help them check-in at the hotel.

I was debating whether to choose Sochi or Minsk. Theoretically, it was possible to attend both events, but volunteers either work or study. Accordingly, it's hardly possible to take such a long break. As a result, I chose



Tourists to hear native language

By Svetlana Semenova

Ice Hockey World Championship guests to be offered excursions in Arabic, Chinese and Japanese

Over 230 tour guides are ready to show guests of the 2014 IIHF World Championship around Belarus' tourist sites, with excursions offered in several foreign languages. "Our Belarusian excursion guides can communicate with tourists in English, as well as Arabic, Chinese and Japanese," notes Belarus' Deputy Sports and Tourism Minister, Cheslav Shulga.

The National Tourism Agency and the official tour operator of the 2014 IIHF World Championship, TsentrKurort, have developed more than 40 tourist routes in time for the world tournament, served by over 1,300 tour guides and interpreters, who have all taken training courses.

Audio guides in Chinese will soon be offered on double-decker tour buses around Minsk, with Mr. Shulga explaining, "We view China, Japan, Thailand and Singapore as serious markets for tourism, so we are keen to offer visitors from these countries something special."