

BRIDGE OF FRIENDSHIP

A Progress Report on the Establishment of
Beringia International Park





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Beringia is a region of worldwide significance for both cultural and natural resources. The region provides an unparalleled opportunity for a comprehensive study of the earth — unusually intact geological strata and paleoecological remains may reveal the character of past climates and the ebb and flow of earth forces at the continents' edges. Biological research leads to understanding the natural history of the region and the distribution of flora and fauna. As one of the world's great, ancient crossroads, Beringia may hold solutions to puzzles about who the first people were to come to North America, how and when they traveled, and how they survived under harsh climatic conditions.

INTRODUCTION

On June 1, 1990, Presidents George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev signed a joint statement endorsing the establishment of an international park on both sides of the Bering Strait. The purpose of this report is to explain to the American and Russian peoples the steps taken by both governments to establish the park by the end of 1992. It also affirms the goals of the joint *Beringian Heritage Reconnaissance Study*, released in January 1990.

In describing the effort to establish an international park, President Bush said,

This park will preserve the unique natural, environmental, and cultural heritage of the Bering Sea region of Alaska and Siberia. Just as a bridge of land once joined our two continents, so let a bridge of hope now reach across the water to join our two peoples in this spirit of peaceful cooperation.

Subsequently, President Gorbachev said of the joint efforts,

The result of our work together represents an event of momentous importance not only for our two countries but for the world. . . . What is very important, I think, is that we do not just declare our commitment to moving toward a healthier international environment, toward better international relations, toward a nonviolent world; we are taking practical steps in that direction.

Cooperation between the countries would include exchanges between native cultures and the reestablishment of family ties, friendships, and ceremonies. The park proposal has concentrated attention on the need for a broad program of multilateral, circumpolar research.

Since the release of the *Reconnaissance Study* in January 1990 and the U.S./U.S.S.R. summit in June 1990, meetings to focus on specific park proposals have taken place among government representatives at the local, state, and national levels, as well as with other interested groups on both sides of the Bering Strait. Joint meetings have been held during 1991 in Moscow, Leningrad, Denver, and Alaska to discuss more specific program details and the planning steps required to formally establish the international park.

The Beringian project has caught the attention of the world. International newspaper articles, television programs, and academic journals have acknowledged and supported the shared commitment to protect a legacy that transcends geographic and political boundaries. The *Reconnaissance Study* was given a national award in October 1990 by the American Society of Landscape Architects.

THE GOALS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL PARK

The Beringia International Park would be an important addition to the network of international preserves that support environmental protection in neighboring countries. As stated in the *Reconnaissance Study*, establishing a park would promote and protect

- the culture of the indigenous people
- information about the history of the earth and the evolution of flora and fauna
- the kind and distribution of plants and animals, with particular interest in preserving species and gene pools
- areas of scenic appeal

The park would further provide opportunities for the coordinated administration of resources and for the people of both countries to learn more about their common Beringian heritage and the importance of environmental protection.

The main goal of the park would be to conserve a diverse, harmonious, and unique part of the biosphere that is a fundamental resource base for the traditional lifestyles of the people of Beringia. This would include conserving the local environmental balance, monitoring air and water quality, maintaining the diversity of plants and animals, managing wildlife populations, and protecting unique natural features, as well as preserving and studying the people's cultural heritage. This heritage encompasses

archeological sites, the evolution of hunting and fishing methods, traditional ceremonies, art, and language, as well as the spiritual life of the native people.

Park research should be based on continuing geological, biological, archeological, historical, ethnographic, and sociological research by both countries. This research should identify typical ecosystems of eastern Chukotka and northwestern Alaska, as well as areas that need to be preserved for their unique natural, historical, and cultural values. With increased research and emphasis, environmental education programs could be expanded in both countries.

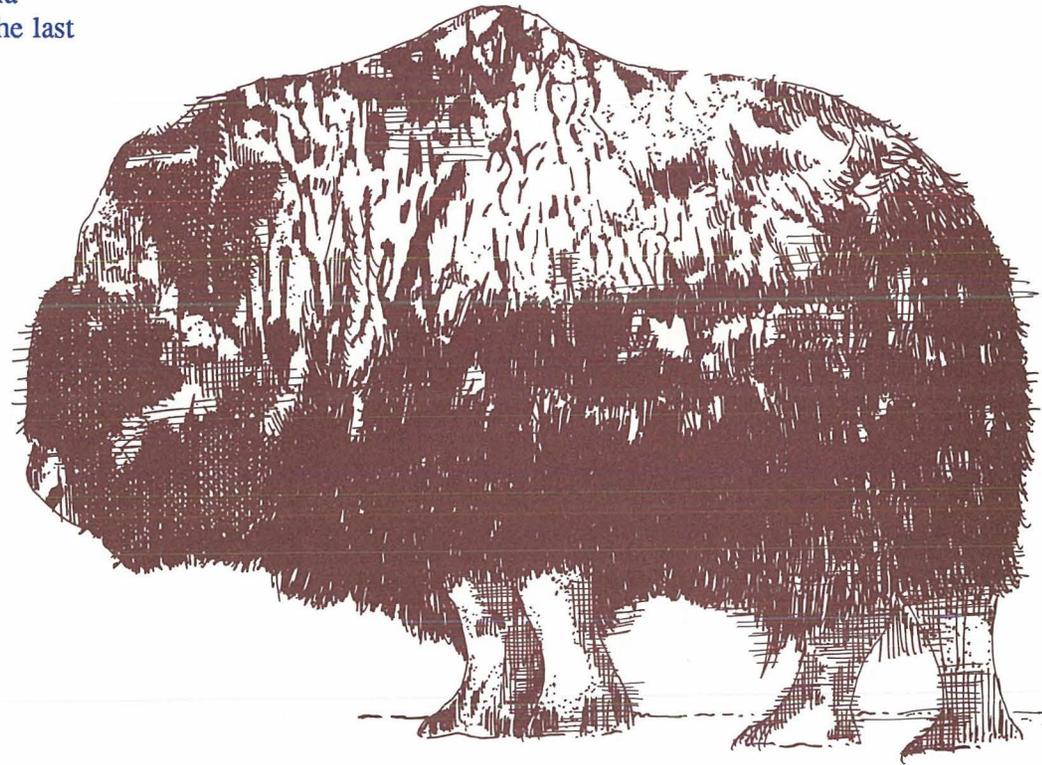
Joint scientific research and events should be carried out under an agreed upon, unified program in both countries. The primary goals include inventories of natural and cultural resources, development of a system for monitoring the ecosystem, and study of the species common to both nations' parks. Additional important studies include caribou and their relation with reindeer herding, and the influence of fire on tundra and the northern treeline ecosystems.

To establish broad scientific programs, cooperative agreements with Russian and American government agencies, universities, and private entities would be used. The agreements would allow studies beyond park boundaries. In the United States such studies would be focused on the resources of Bering Land Bridge National Preserve. No expansion of federal ownership would take place.

To identify further opportunities for cooperation, an international park advisory commission, consisting of an equal number of U.S. and Russian members, would be established. The commission would be jointly chaired by one representative from each country.

To accomplish these goals, each country must set aside areas for the principal purpose of protecting their common Beringian heritage, in accordance with the regulations and laws of each country.

The legislative requirements for the international park are of particular importance. The legislative base of each country is built on its unique tradition of laws and each country's concern for the preservation of its natural and cultural heritage. The United States has such a tradition established in laws relating to the National Park Service. A careful legislative approach must be taken in Russia because of the great internal political changes of the last several years.



A PROGRESS REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL PARK

AMERICAN ACTIVITIES

The U.S. portion of the international park will be formed initially from an existing area — Bering Land Bridge National Preserve. Other National Park Service areas in northwestern Alaska might be added later if they would complement units established on the Russian side.

Legislation for Congress has been drafted that incorporates the recommendations of the January 1990 *Reconnaissance Study*. The legislative proposal authorizes the president of the United States to issue a proclamation designating Bering Land Bridge National Preserve as the U.S. portion of the international park when a similar protected area has been established on the Chukotskiy Peninsula.

The proposal also provides opportunities for expanded cooperative activities that would foster the reestablishment of traditional relationships, promote international research into cultural and natural resources, and encourage the sharing of environmental information. Centers for research and public information are also authorized.

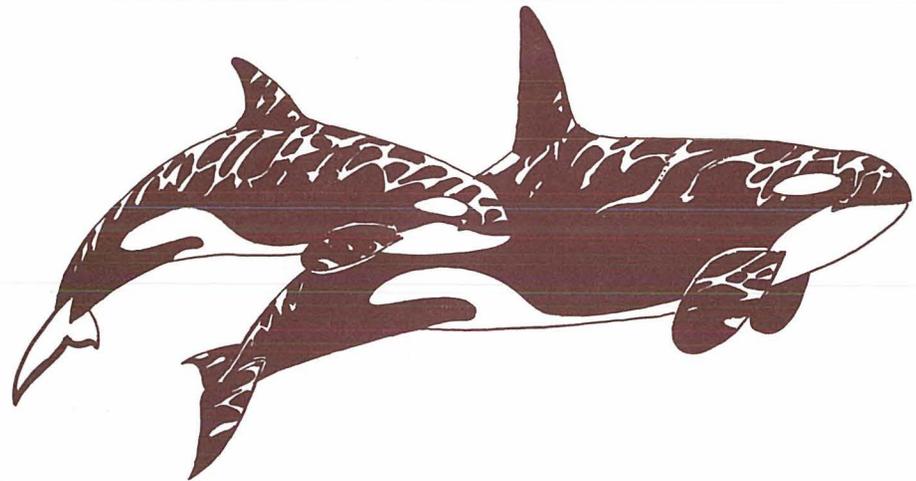
It is hoped that Congress will pass legislation for the U.S. component of the international park in 1992.

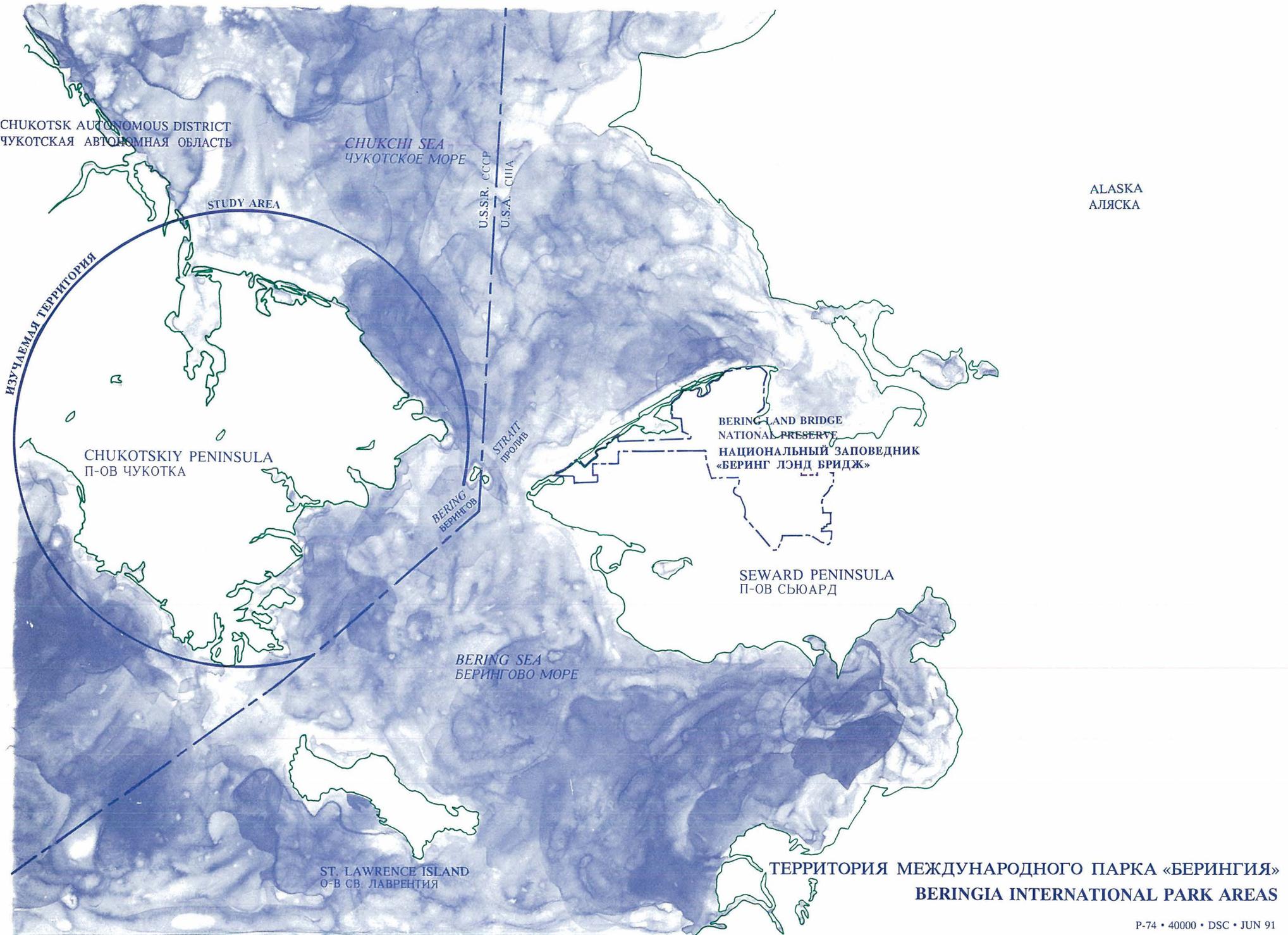
Cooperative fieldwork in the United States will begin before legislation is enacted. One research project will focus on the cultural heritage of a native man whose life spans the gap between ancient and modern lifeways. Uses of two historic reindeer herding villages and changes in traditional lifeways and ethnoarcheology will also be

recorded. Further, the architecture of historic Eskimo buildings will be accurately documented for the first time. Other projects will study reindeer herding practices. The research program will integrate work by scientists in natural and cultural resources and from government agencies, universities, and foundations in the United States and the Russian Republic.

The National Park Service and the National Science Foundation are jointly sponsoring a study to examine the climatic and tectonic history of the Bering Strait region over the past 3 million years. American and Russian geologists will cooperate on this study.

In addition to starting joint research and scientific investigations, discussions on other areas of cooperative activities have begun. With appropriate legislative authority, travel restrictions will be eased to allow for efficient research and cultural exchanges. Educational materials explaining resources on both sides will be prepared and public information provided. Planning assistance could occur by each side to the other.





RUSSIAN ACTIVITIES

In Russia the goals of the project can only be realized by designating newly protected territories, including both terrestrial and marine areas. Incorporating complete natural and cultural ecosystems in the park will help ensure their protection. Russian scientists believe that without protecting marine territories it is impossible to effectively preserve coastal and terrestrial ecosystems.

There is a preliminary agreement between the republic and local governments to organize an international park on the Chukotskiy Peninsula. Proposals are now being considered for areas and boundaries to be set aside as the Russian component of the international park.

This park proposal will be closely associated with native people. Traditional uses of natural resources by native people will be preserved and revived, adding to the success of environmental protection. Further, the park will provide special opportunities for native people.

The native population of the Chukotskiy Peninsula supports the concept of organizing an international park. On August 3, 1990, the Regional Association of the Eskimos of Chukotka adopted a special resolution endorsing the international park.

The proposed park has been discussed by the village, regional, and district governments. The first working meeting in July 1990 brought together park planning specialists and representatives of the Chukotka government, the public, and native organizations.

In September 1990 the Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R. issued a decree to create an international park and

delegated the responsibility of carrying out the decree to the Council of Ministers of the Russian Republic. In November 1990 the Council of Ministers of the Russian Republic issued its own decree and identified the State Committee for Environmental Protection of the Russian Republic as the lead organization for the establishment of the park.

Park planning is being done by the Leningrad State Institute of Urban Planning (LENGIPROGOR), which is one of the largest planning organizations in Russia and has much experience working in northern regions. Planning participants have included scientists of various disciplines; representatives of local governments, public organizations, and special interest groups; and native people.

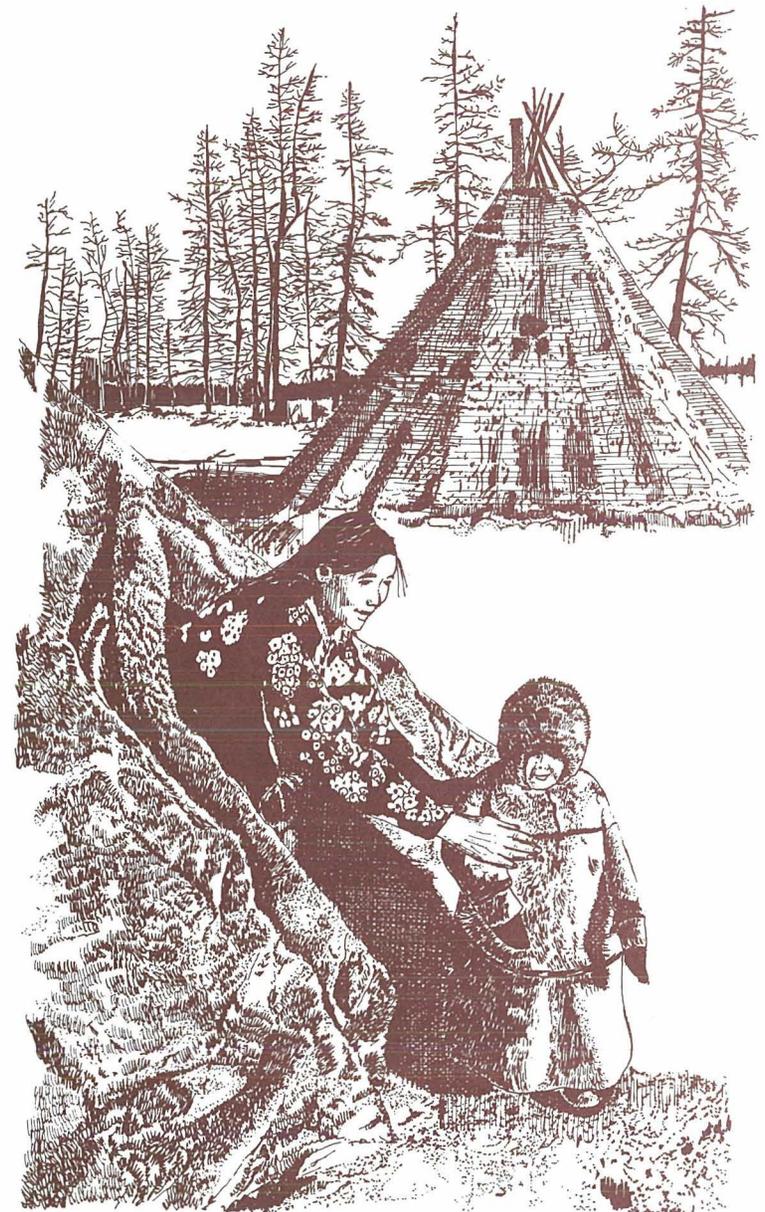
The first stage of planning, finished by August 1991, was the subject of discussion at a seminar in Provideniya. The internal management plan is expected to be completed in 1992 and presented to the Russian Republic and the Council of Ministers.

Many years of scientific study have shown the Beringian region to be a significant migratory crossroads for land and marine organisms. Highly productive marine waters attract numerous fish, birds, and marine mammals. The waters surrounding the Chukotskiy Peninsula have five species of pinnipeds and eight species of whales (including gray, blue, and bowhead whales, plus local groups of the fin and humpback whales, which are internationally protected).

Russian ornithologists have noted that bird species are exceptionally diverse for a polar region; there are over 140 species of birds, 12 of which are rare or endangered. The Chukotskiy Peninsula also has the richest plant populations in the Arctic, with about 25 species listed as rare or endangered. Some of the plants and animals of northeastern Asia are relics of the original flora and fauna of Beringia.

The shoreline of the Chukotskiy Peninsula is the site for the origin and evolution of a unique 2,000-year-old Bering Sea eskimo culture of marine mammal hunters (the Okvik and Punuk cultures). Over 100 ancient villages and sites have been found preserved, including many ritual sites built from the skeletal remains of bowhead and gray whales. Unique fields of rock cairns have also been found.

The Russian side believes any kind of activity in and around the Bering Strait needs to be balanced with concern for its environmental and cultural resources. This balance includes the life cycles of that region, the Pacific Ocean, and the Arctic seas, which combine to form the unique history of human development in this area.





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