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Skolkovo Graduate Plans Recycling Revolution in Primorye

By Roland Oliphant

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The Primorye region, well-known as a refuge for endangered species like Amur tigers and leopards, might become a mecca for ecofriendly business under an ambitious investment plan unveiled this month.

Vladimir Yermolayev, a 32-year-old Vladivostok native, said that at a meeting earlier this month, Governor Vladimir Miklushevsky backed a 17-year, 7 billion ruble ($232 million) plan to turn Primorye into the country's most efficient recycler.

The three-pronged road map involves construction of technology parks for recycling centers to handle local domestic and industrial waste, creation of a legislative framework to make the business profitable and promotion of a green mentality among the public.

Yermolayev said he was inspired with the idea by a visit to San Francisco, where the municipal government recycles up to 80 percent of the city's waste using "zero waste" technology.

"Vladivostok is always compared with San Francisco, of course," he said. "But it will take us some time to work out how to adapt it to Russian conditions. Obviously the difference between Primorye and California is vast."

The entire plan, which is slated to run to 2030, is expected to cost at least 7 billion rubles, he said.

The first stage of surveying in the region is expected to cost around 80 million rubles, he said.

Yermolayev said he began looking for funding after Miklushevsky approved the idea Jan. 10.

He described the project as a public-private partnership but would not reveal how much would come from the state and how much from private investment.

He said only that he is talking with potential investors. Direct investments are expected to start flowing by the end of 2013.

The exact sites for the recycling centers will be chosen only after an exhaustive study of the region, although Yermolayev said Vladivostok Mayor Igor Pushkaryov said he was prepared to donate sites left over from last year's APEC summit for the purpose.

Yermolayev, who in June became part of the first group of students to graduate from the Skolkovo Startup Academy, credited the innovation hub for helping him start the project.

"They've been a great help," he said. "For example, [they put] us in contact with the governor. It's one of the drivers that has made this possible."

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