

# Entry Fees Planned for National Parks

By [The Moscow Times](#)

August 29, 2013

**The  Moscow Times**

Tourists will have to pay to visit nature reserves and national parks, according to a statement that the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry issued at a meeting of park directors from around the country that runs through Friday.

The Environment and Finance Ministries have already agreed to make the necessary changes to existing federal law, said Vsevolod Stepanitsky, deputy director of the political department at the environment ministry, RIA Novosti reported. The proposed changes will set fees for visits to parks and reserves, excluding the territories that border residential areas. Currently most sites can be visited free of charge.

Local authorities would determine prices. However, Stepanitsky cautioned park directors not to take any independent initiatives to charge tourists before the law is changed and said they would have to deal with law enforcement agencies if they do not follow his instructions.

Russia currently has 248 specially protected nature zones, including 102 reserves and 42 national parks. The Natural Resources and Environment Ministry plans to create 28 new

zones and expand the areas of 12 existing reserves by 2020, Minister Sergei Donskoi said.

Interest in ecological tourism is on the rise in Russia. About 7 million people visited the reserves and national parks last year, according to the ministry's statistics. However, while the numbers of visitors are growing, Russia still lags behind other countries in terms of the overall eco-tourism popularity.

"Only a few of the protected areas account for more than 90 percent of all visits," Stepanitsky said. "Meanwhile, tourism to 75 percent of the national parks of Russia — and the vast majority of the reserves — is small-scale and these areas' huge tourism potential is not exploited effectively."

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