

Loyalists Snap Up Land Close to Putin – RBC Investigation

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The  Moscow Times

Loyalists close to Russian President Vladimir Putin have bought huge plots of land next to the president's country residence, an investigation by the RBC news outlet reported Wednesday.

Papers obtained by RBC show that the private land is leased out to the Kremlin and resembles a first-class resort. Facilities are reported to include residences, living accommodation, restaurants, a bathhouse, an indoor ice-rink, other sports facilities including a driving range, and a heliport.

Billionaire businessmen Yury Kovalchuk and Arkady Rotenberg, known for their close ties to the president, were shown to own vast plots of land on Valdai Lake in northwest Russia, neighboring Putin's official residence.

Kovalchuk, chairman of the board of directors at Bank Rossiya, and his son Boris, the head of Inter RAO energy holding company, control about 100 hectares of land neighboring Putin's

residence.

Rotenberg, formerly Putin's judo sparring partner, also owns a plot of land nearby, totalling about 10.5 hectares. Both Rotenberg and Kovalchuk are included on the U.S. Treasury's list of sanctioned Russian officials and individuals.

Putin's long-time bodyguard and the head of the recently created National Guard, Viktor Zolotov and his family members – or at least their full namesakes – own vast land spots in nearby village Yascherovo.

Alexei Dyumin, also a former Putin's bodyguard, has been Zolotov's neighbor since 2012. Dyumin was appointed acting governor of Tulskey Oblast in February and he is preparing to participate in his first election this September. Kremlin business manager Alexander Kolpakov — or his full namesake, the report stresses — lives nearby, as do several current and former security service employees (FSO and FSB).

A nearby village houses former FSO director Yevgeny Murov, former Kremlin business manager Vladimir Kozhin, and a number of their associates. Various Russian businessmen connected to the security services are also named as current or former residents of the area. One of them, Dmitry Mikhalevich, was arrested earlier this year and charged with smuggling contraband in what was seen by observers as an internal conflict within Russia's high-ranked siloviki — a term used to describe members of the elite with ties to the security services or military.

Political analyst Nikolai Petrov told The Moscow Times that it was obvious that Putin spends much of his time outside of the Kremlin and Moscow. Putin's circle of contacts is also narrowing to include mostly siloviki and personal security employees, he said.

"They're not just residents – they're gods," one local landowner was quoted by RBC as saying. "They call themselves Kremlin-3."

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