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Russian Natural Resources Ministry Official Arrested on Bribery Charges

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Alexei Yakovlev. **Russian Natural Resources Ministry press service**

An official from Russia's Natural Resources Ministry has been arrested on bribery charges, local media reported Tuesday.

Alexei Yakovlev, 48, is accused of receiving a large-scale bribe from Elvina Novoselova, the director of Taganay National Park in the Chelyabinsk region, which he headed from 2010 until he became an official in Moscow in January 2021.

Yakovlev, who is now the deputy director of the ministry's protected areas division, was ordered to stay in pre-trial detention until Jan. 10 by the Chelyabinsk Central District Court.

State investigators allege that Yakovlev, while holding his position in the federal ministry, "collected tribute" from Taganay's employees totaling no less than 1 million rubles ($11,300), the local 74.ru news website said, citing sources in law enforcement agencies.

"When I was interrogated as a suspect, I couldn't provide precise details due to fatigue,"

Yakovlev said in a Chelyabinsk courtroom on Tuesday. “I am willing to cooperate, confess, and repent. But I need to clarify some points with the investigator because the picture looks one-sided so far."

Yakovlev’s detention raised eyebrows as some described him as “arguably the only decent person” among his fellow department heads in the Natural Resources Ministry.

“Yakovlev had good ideas: for example, to develop special fire safety standards for protected natural areas,” an anonymous employee in the nature preserve system told the Kedr environmental news outlet.

“He secured funds from the ministry to train employees of federally protected natural territories in firefighting and organized volunteer firefighters."

In his previous position as director of the Taganay National Park, Yakovlev improved the park’s protection against wildfires and other hazards, bringing it “back from ruins,” Kedr’s source added.

Novoselova meanwhile faces accusations of giving a bribe to her former chief. She remains in custody despite her lawyer's request for release on bail, for which 4.4 million rubles ($50,000) were raised.

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