Opportunities and Threats of Artificial Reforestation in Steppe Zone of Eurasia

Oxana A. Klimanova
Lomonosov Moscow State University,
Department of World Geography and Geoecology
oxk1@yandex.ru
Eurasian Steppes and Grasslands
Causes and Degree of Anthropogenic Impact

Yellow-orange colors - ploughing, pink color – grazing

The four countries with largest steppe area are situated in Eurasia (more than 1 million sq.km):
the Russian Federation, China, Kazakhstan, Mongolia (PAGE, 2000)
The countries with highest percentage of steppe in land cover are situated there:
Mongolia (83%), Kazakhstan (61%)
The main factors of land cover change in Eurasia Steppe Zone:
ploughing, urbanization, desertification, fires, grazing, landscape fragmentation
Russian Part of Eurasian Steppe Zone

Source: Ogureeva et. al., 1997
Land Use Change Models in Russian Steppe Zone

*Forest-steppe zone and northern part of genuine steppes*
the most transformed part of the Zone with highest population density in Russia and the most affected by infrastructural, industrial and urban development

Steppe has been turned into arable land as early as at the end of 19\textsuperscript{th} century.
Now the percentage of arable land is more than 60%.
In European part, to the west from the Volga River, old-field is less than 1\% of former arable land. Protected areas is very small.
This steppe type is strongly affected by afforestation, but also by settlements and suburb expansion.

*Genuine bunchgrass steppes*
 rangelands for centuries and massively reclaimed into croplands at the beginning of 1950s (so called “celina period”)

After 1991, significant part of arable land were abandoned and transformed to old-field.
Afforestation and urbanization are less important factors. Some parts of the area are affected by mining, oil and gas production. Old-fields occupy more than 5\% of former arable lands.

*Desertified steppe*
 croplands only through irrigation, rangelands for seasonal grazing are widespread

*High mountain cryophytic steppes*
 only seasonal grazing. Mining became one of the main threats Siberian mountain steppes
Three stages of afforestation in Russia since the end of 19th century till now (1)

1898 – paper “Our steppes earlier and now” by V.Dokuchaev, ‘Road map’ to increase crop productivity in steppe zone and food security
Afforestation and optimal environmental friendly land use model in Russia (forest plantation, cropland and water reservoirs)

‘Kamenaya Step’ Federal Zakaznik (Voronezh Region) has been afforested since 1898.
Three stages of afforestation in Russia since the end of 19th century till now (2)

‘Soviet period’ (1930s-1990s) – Stalin’s *plan preobrazovaniya prirody* – transformation of genuine and dry steppe zone to agricultural landscape and protection from wind erosion

Proposed area under forest plantation – 1,179 sq. km.
Proposed width of belts is 3-100 m with length of 170-1080 km.
The total length of forest belt was planned as 5,320 km.
Three stages of afforestation in Russia since the end of 19th century till now (3)

- Post-Soviet Period – degradation of forest plantation, even the half of them are completely degraded

Afforested areas in genuine steppe and dry steppe zone

Saratov Region

Volgograd Region
Opportunities and Threats of Afforestation in Steppe zone

**Ecological**

*Opportunities*
- Accumulation of snow
- Decrease of wind speed
- Wind erosion protection
- ECONET
- Increase of biodiversity

*Threats*
- Fire danger
- Invasive species
- Degradation of margin parts of cropland
- Artificial ecosystems

**Legal**

*Opportunities*
- Legalization of optimal land-use model in steppe zone
- Assessment of ecosystem services of virgin steppe zone and forest plantation

*Threats*
- Status of programs of afforestation
- Absence of regulations for steppe protection on agricultural lands

**Socio-Economic**

*Opportunities*
- Increase of crop productivity
- New workplaces and decrease of unemployment
- New areas for recreation

*Threats*
- Future expenditures on exploitation
- No effective expenditures for afforestation in dry steppe and deserted steppe zone
Case One: Belgorod Region (Central Part of Russia)

Agricultural land is 18,290 sq. km or 80% of total area.

By ‘Green Capital’ special programme it is proposed to increase the share of forest to 10%.

The main threat is ploughing of chalk slopes.
Case Two: Orenburg Region (South part of the Urals)

Agricultural land is 104,750 sq. km or 80% of total area.

The main driver for afforestation in the regions is Plan for *Kyoto Forests* (100 sq. km).

Main tendency of land-use change is of the returning old-fields to arable farming.
Case Three: Zabaikalsky Kray (Eastern Siberia)

Agricultural land is 6,663 sq. km or 8% of total area.
Main Tendency in Modern Russian Agriculture
Increasing Role of European Steppe Regions and
Decreasing of Siberian Regions

Fig. 2.7 Share of the Steppe Region in the total national grain production of Russia (35 provinces), (as% of the total) during the period 1990–2008

Source: Smelyansky, Tishkov, 2012
Conclusions

• Afforestation should became a significant driver of land-use change in forest-steppe zone in context of global change in some regions of Russia, especially in the European part of steppe zone.

• There are only economic (financial) limits for application of afforestation policy in Russian steppe zone.

• The planning of forest plantation in steppe zone is very important part of landscape planning with controversial consequences.
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