



U216 Environment - Lake Baikal

Increasing threats

V/O

In a country in transition like Russia, how can the conservation of the environment be reconciled with the demands for economic development?

In Soviet times, the exploitation of natural resources was seen as the key to industrial growth.

Vast, empty and covering three-quarters of the country, Siberia had an abundance of coal, forests, minerals and other resources. Huge factories were constructed to generate the wealth and employment that was also crucial to the success of the state. But the rush for economic development ignored its environmental consequences.

Dima

In the early years of the Soviet Union no-one cared about protecting the environment. Everything was directed at exploiting the country's natural resources for the development of industry and the new young state.

Masha

At the Soviet time everything was governed by the Communist and this was this huge project and the main slogan was at this time 'we shouldn't wait for the nature to give us the resources. Our major task is to take everything from nature we can.

V/O

Lake Baikal's unspoiled environment soon became subject to the new industrial policies that were emerging from the Soviet government. One of the earliest environmental threats was from the demand for electricity for industries and for the growing Siberian cities. In Irkutsk, the regional capital, a hydroelectric power station was built on the Angara, the only river to flow out of Lake Baikal. The dam caused the water level of the lake to rise by more than a metre. The rising waters contributed to erosion along the shoreline. They also caused water-logging and flooding of agricultural lands. New coal-fired power stations created air pollution that fell on the lake and on the surrounding taiga.