Andrews are under no illusions, however, and speak very cagily about the possibility of the voice of moderation coming to dominate the gun control debate. Indeed, the fear would seem to be that the words of Robert Sherrill, in 1973, may remain true, at least in the foreseeable future: "Logic and evidence have absolutely nothing to do with the gun debate in or out of Congress; only instinct and emotion and gut reactions count for anything"

James W. Murrell
University of Southampton

Douglas R. Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom: Russian Nature Protection from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, it has become possible to gain access to the archives of the various institutions of the Stalinist and subsequent periods. While the general impression of strict thought control and censorship has been confirmed, there have been a number of revelations that indicate that the degree of totalitarian repression was something less than absolute. Among these revelations of the survival of civil society and honesty in the Soviet Union, often under excruciatingly difficult circumstances, one of the most persistent and revealing cases is that of the Nature Protection movement, broadly defined. In retrospect the Chernobyl disaster of 1986 detonated a series of explosions across the vast country, reflecting pent-up outrage against the way in which the communist system was perceived to have desecrated precious and often fragile environments and homelands. This feeling of betrayal at the most basic level – communities and homeland – not only among the non-Russian nationalities but also Russians themselves, hastened the eventual collapse of the system.

This book traces in detail the long struggle – ingenious and courageous – of biologists, geographers and natural historians, to maintain their integrity and somehow seek to preserve the cause of nature protection in the face of Stalin's juggernaut of industrialization and social engineering. The tradition of engaged bio-geographical sciences had been strong in Russia in the nineteenth century and *Zapovedniki* or nature preserves had been established as inviolate, almost sacred areas strictly off limits to economic activity.

Weiner tells a stirring tale, buttressed by meticulous research in the archives and interviews with surviving scientists, of the stratagems employed to circumvent government commands and regulations. The "little corner of freedom" he identifies seems to have been enabled by the perception on the part of the powers that nature protection was somehow apolitical and patriotic and that the scientists involved were not generally seen as subversive. This rings true to me, since I was able to send many students to study in the Soviet Union in the 1960's, to pursue themes under the rubric of Geography, which nevertheless had

a political slant, whereas their peers in economics or political science were not allowed in. The perception of "marginality thus became a guarantor of the survival of scientific public opinion as a social identity," in Weiner's words (9). However, even though environmental or ecological advocacy could be characterized as comparatively "low risk," it was by no means risk-free. There were serious issues to confront, such as the pollution of Lake Baykal, massive river diversion schemes or ill-advised projects like the Virgin Lands plough-up campaign, and some scientists, such as N. I. Vavilov, who fell afoul of Stalin and Lysenko, were put to death.

The chapters are organized by periods, from early Stalin to Gorbachev, recording all the winds (or whims) of change against which the protectors of nature had to trim their sails. The *dramatis personae* are exhaustively identified and well portrayed – the result of very wide-ranging research, interviews and judgments. The major crises, such as when Stalin decided to "liquidate" the *Zapovedniki* (later re-instated) or when the All-Russian Society for the Protection of Nature was in danger of being liquidated itself and had to be rescued by others such as the Moscow Branch of the Geographical Society, are vividly described. The emergence of student movements and of various Russian cultural-patriotic groups, and the roller-coaster impact of the Khrushchev "thaw" make exciting reading. The chief conclusion, that environmental protest and activism served as a surrogate for political speech continuously throughout the Soviet period, is well sustained and significant as a reflection of deeply rooted values in Russian culture. When *glasnost* finally came, it was indeed environmental protest that came to the foremost naturally, often connected with anti-Moscow sentiments from ethnic and regional identities. Whether this was in fact the crucial straw which broke the back of the whole ramshackle Soviet system is, to say the least, not ruled out. The unutterably sad present situation is that, in spite of the valiant efforts and machinations of the nature protection lobby over a lifetime, the natural environment of the former Soviet Union has been left in a disastrously damaged state. Even if large amounts of money were available, restitution would be a very long-drawn out and daunting task.

This is a magnificent work of scholarship, providing a picture, on a large canvas, of hundreds of dedicated and ingenious people who tried hard to save the natural environment of one-sixth of the earth's surface. Moreover through this extensive narrative, we get an accurate and perceptive insight into the trials and tribulations of Soviet citizens. Documented are the triumphs, as well as failures, of the human spirit and the sacred trust to protect the human habitat against the arbitrary effects of state tyranny and ignorance. As such this story has resonance far beyond the countries of the former Soviet Union. It is a harrowing cautionary tale, infused with nobility, that no part of our world can afford to ignore.

David Hooson
University of California, Berkeley