

Review

# Is Ecotourism an Opportunity for Large Wild Animals to Thrive?

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**Abstract:** The development of ecotourism involving wild animals in Russia is overlooked despite the fact that the country's territory is significant not only in terms of area but also in terms of the diversity of its flora and fauna. A significant part of Russia's territory has a low population density, especially beyond the Ural ridge. It retains its natural primeval nature, which can contribute to the development of ecotourism. Initial attempts have been made to develop this, mainly in the European part (Tatarstan, Murmansk Region, the Baltic Sea, Baikal, Altai), but the commercial use of wild animals within ecotourism programs, including the ones in Siberia and the Far East, has not been discussed. This work focuses on the basics of launching ecotourism in the industrial region of Siberia (Kuzbass, Russia) as part of the *Alces alces* conservation program.

**Keywords:** ecotourism; nature protection; large wild animals; moose (*Alces alces*); Kuzbass



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## 1. Introduction

Everywhere in the world, people begin to feel an increasing desire to escape to nature from urbanized industrial megacities, even the acute life danger dictated by the global pandemic situation has just slightly reduced this need and the possibilities of its implementation. Territories with wild nature offer the possibility of spiritual and physical recovery, thus attracting tourists to those areas. Nature-based tourism programs, particularly ecotourism, promote a sense of oneness with nature [1,2].

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) notes that ecotourism is traveling through natural territories to get positive emotions and impressions from the untouched nature as well as the cultural and ethnographic peculiarities of these territories [3]. From the viewpoint of demand, travelers who identify themselves as “ecotourists” usually seek to get a sense of unity and closeness with the natural environment [4]. From the viewpoint of supply, being a set of activities for the conservation of biodiversity, ecotourism provides consumers and the public with an opportunity to get acquainted with nature [5,6] and generates income to finance environmental initiatives [7,8]. When implementing ecotourism programs, it is considered necessary to present natural features that are preserved within the protected landscape and evidence that tourism does not harm natural systems (waterways, wetlands, wildlife habitats, etc.) and to support the development of local businesses and offer accessible public facilities for both tourists and the local population [4,9].

The practice of Ecotourism is to a greater extent manifested in developing countries, but economically developed territories are also showing an increased interest in it [10–13]. The popularity of visiting territories with untouched nature, including those inhabited by indigenous people in order to witness and study their lifestyle, continues to develop as

an outdoor recreation activity in countries such as the United States, New Zealand, and African, Latin American, and Scandinavian countries.

Protected natural areas can be classified as territories with untouched nature, the key areas of wildlife conservation (including large animals), and a platform for tourist destinations [14]. However, for the most part, people negatively affect the surrounding territories, destroying important habitats, transmitting diseases, and hunting legally and illegally [15–19].

Large mammals are particularly vulnerable to insufficient protection outside and on the border of protected areas, because their habitats are usually not limited to those territories. The mortality of large animals, both carnivores and herbivores, that inhabit protected areas is strongly influenced by poaching and trophy hunting on the borders of nature reserves [20,21]. This problem can also affect migratory animals that seasonally change habitats in search of food and water. These animals include blue wildebeests (*Connochaetes taurinus*), plains zebras (*Equus quagga*), Thomson's gazelles (*Eudorcas thomsonii*), and common elands (*Taurotragus oryx*) in the Great Serengeti and in the neighboring areas of Tanzania [22–28], pronghorns (*Antilocapra americana*) in Yellowstone National Park [29,30], Savannah elephants (*Loxodonta africana*) in the national parks of Africa [31–33], reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*) and moose (*Alces alces*) in Europe and Canada [34–37], American bison (*Bison bison*) [38,39] etc.

Hunting in protected areas or their buffer zones can significantly change the behavior of animals in terms of their vital activity and can also lead to a decrease in the population, which will negatively affect both the natural balance and the tourist attractiveness of the territories as a whole [40].

Russian regions, especially in Siberia and the Far East, have sufficient potential for this business development. The Kemerovo region—Kuzbass is a coal-mining area in Western Siberia. The region has a unique combination of underground and natural resources. Rivers, forests, flora, and fauna are its natural treasure. The most common large species that inhabit taiga in this part of Siberia are bears (*Ursus arctos*), moose (*Alces alces*), and marals (*Cervus elaphus sibiricus-siberian deer*). The signature species include Siberian musk deers (*Moschus moschiferus*), lynxes (*Lynx lynx*), wolverines (*Gulo gulo*), wild boars (*Sus scrofa*), foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*), badgers (*Meles meles*), and Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*). Many animals and plants are listed in the Red List of Kuzbass and are protected by the state. The Red List of Threatened Species includes 124 species (12 species of mammals, 61 species of birds, 2 species of reptiles, etc.). About 29 species are candidates for the Red List [41,42]. However, the state policy does not pay sufficient attention to ecotourism, including measures to replace hunting expeditions with programs for wildlife observation and conservation.

There is evidence [1,43,44] that, despite the demand, only about 7% of all international trips are organized as ecotourism. In Russia, this percentage is even lower. So, what is holding back the development of this industry? Perhaps it is hampered by bureaucracy, lack of funding, political will, the education of potential tourists, or infrastructure development. There are quite a few issues related to the organization and development of ecotourism in general and the use of wild animals for commercial purposes. The given study aims to collect information about various aspects of this industry and the use of environmental programs for wildlife watching, primarily in the areas of traditional hunting tourism. This study focuses on the basics of the concept of organization and analysis of the possibility of launching ecotourism in the industrial region of Siberia (Kuzbass, Russia) within the conservation of moose population.

## 2. Definition of Ecotourism

The concept of ecotourism (“ECO” as ecological) originated in research and publications on eco-development and sustainability in the 70–80s of the last century and aroused considerable public interest and controversy. Presenting a tempting alternative to the paradigm of mass tourism, ecotourism had to justify its prospects and the launch possibility as an ethical form of travel. The problems that limit the development of ecotourism include

ties with traditional forms of tourism (fishing and hunting) as part of a large mass tourism industry, the inability of the local population to control the scale of development of their own territories, the motivation for profit, and politicized and institutionalized barriers that have not been solved so far [45].

The existing confusion in the definition and the problems of developing a tourism policy do not limit the growing interest of scientists, developers, and consumers in this niche. Many experts and practitioners present ecotourism as a viable alternative to mass tourism, largely because it is a smaller-scale, local, and more sustainable type of tourism [46]. This constant lack of a clear definition makes it somewhat difficult to develop a policy and the direction of its implementation. From the moment the term was proposed, ecotourism, together with its basic concept of the sustainability of territories, still remains an abstract and ephemeral concept that is hard to interpret in most parts of the world [47,48]. The revealed gap between the theory and practice of ecotourism in many areas has yet to be eliminated [49,50].

### 3. Ecotourism Development Trends

Many developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America are heavily dependent on natural tourism products, which, in some cases, account for up to 70% of the country's gross domestic product [1]. The increasing spread of ecotourism in these countries is due to the perception of this tourism type as a variant of sustainable development, improving the well-being of people living near protected areas [51–53]. At the same time, ecotourism is considered as a sustainable form of tourism that can bring economic benefits to the local population and indigenous communities for many generations while preserving their natural resources [43,54–56]. Finally, the development of civilized ecotourism, which forms the interest of the local population in monitoring and preventing fires at the initial stages on curated territories, can partially solve the problem of fires, the spread and frequency of which have recently become threatening [57].

Preliminary results show a negative correlation between the benefits of ecotourism and the overall increase in the number of wildlife watching experiences with violations and the lack of hunting catch growth in the target territories [58]. In Poland, since 2001, there has been a ban on hunting moose throughout the country. The ban was introduced in response to excessive hunting in the previous decades, which led to a significant reduction in the range of the species and the collapse of the population at the turn of the centuries [59]. By the beginning of the 21st century, the population had decreased by more than 70% and did not exceed 1500 species [60]. Over the past decade, moose [26] have become a cult species and the main attraction of local national parks, bringing significant income to local communities.

In the United States, wild horse tourism is gaining popularity in South Dakota, Nevada, Wyoming, Montana, and New Mexico [61]. In the Arctic, more tourist activities with polar bears are launched [62,63]. In Scandinavia, moose watching programs in specially designated "moose farms" and in the wild are gaining popularity. Moose farm visitors can take pictures with animals, feed them, and even taste moose milk (from May to September, it is successfully used in the treatment of many gastrointestinal diseases) [64]. In Russia, similar activities are being implemented in the territories of wildlife sanctuaries and reserves in the Kostroma [65], Tyumen [66], Leningrad [67], and Moscow [68] regions, the Komi Republic [69], etc. The tourist season at such moose farms is usually open all year round [70,71]. In winter, moose are kept on a winter plot in the forest. From April, all animals are transferred to a fly camp (the calving period begins). Tourists visiting the farm are invited not only to take pictures with moose but also to feed them, buy souvenirs, and taste moose milk that have unique healing properties (from May to September). During the excursion at some of the stations, guests may encounter not only moose but also sika deer, fallow deer, wild boars, and marals (equipped observation towers, special enclosures, and paths between them act as a guarantee of mutual safety).

Muskoxen have become an important tourist attraction both for the Dovrefjell district and for Norway as a whole [72]. It is currently the main marketing trend of the Dovrefjell area. The local tourist firm Visit even has a slogan calling it the muskox kingdom [73].

In North America, ecotourism sites abound throughout the United States and include coastal beaches and urban and rural areas. Ecotourism, such as sightseeing, outdoor walks (hiking, wildlife watching), and water activities, is combined with a large number of trips (about 900,000 visits annually) to national forests, national parks, monuments, and recreation areas [74,75]. Canada also offers a variety of ecotourism opportunities, including wildlife watching (polar bear, caribou, moose, grizzly bear), hiking, cycling tours, historical tours, dog sledding/canoe tours on rough water, sea kayaking, guest ranches, and eco-lodges [61]. Many Americans actively use wildlife watching as a form of outdoor recreation, and this group is steadily surpassing such traditional forms of interaction with wildlife as hunting and fishing [76].

#### 4. Economic Benefits

As a segment of tourism and one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy, ecotourism can be an important factor of sustainability in order to satisfy the refined tastes of many tourists and expand and enrich the offer by providing an opportunity to try new tourist destinations with ecological transport, eco-hotels and ethno-villages, volunteering on organic farms in exchange for accommodation and food, and the use of numerous other services. To a certain extent, this can be considered as an innovation in the tourist proposals. Taking into account the small number of participants and the frequent remoteness of the territories, this is a relevant proposal in the pandemic conditions [77,78]. Travel companies have long been aware of this trend and are increasingly offering measures that are sustainable, eco-friendly, energy-saving, natural, safe, etc. [79,80].

Costa Rica was one of the first countries to launch ecotourism (wild nature travel) and has preserved more than 25% of its territory for the sake of future generations. Local national parks and private nature reserves have saved vast areas of forest from logging and use in agriculture [81]. Owners of private nature reserves earn income by preserving wildlife, mainly through small-scale ecotourism in the field of natural history. People are eager to pay for the privilege of seeing exotic, colorful, and often endangered species, staying in small houses located in forests or in other habitats. In the Osa Wildlife Sanctuary (southwest of the Piedras Blancas National Park) with tropical forests, many species of spiders, squirrels, capuchin monkeys and howler monkeys, toucans, sloths, kinkajous, peccaries, etc. are preserved thanks to tourists' donations and volunteering [82].

In Madagascar, it was ecotourism that had protected the remaining forests of the island (about 15% of the original forest cover has been preserved). When the island got its political stability back a few years ago, it became possible to preserve lemurs and other unusual, endemic animal species in parks and reserves. They depend on the preserved tropical, deciduous, and thorny forests supported with the funds received from tourists. Moreover, with the same funds and private investments, there is a constant increase in the area of protected territories [83]. The forest could not have been saved unless popular tourist routes were created [84]. Such activities create jobs and improve the quality of life of locals who become guides, rangers, and hotel staff. Investors and governments invest tourism revenues in local infrastructure [85]. In Madagascar, the income from the tourist program supports a clinic and a school of a local fishing village. The participation of the local population should be encouraged from the very beginning through involving locals in the decision-making process [86]. Ecotourism can be profitable for rural residents living in or near the wild, as they have first-hand knowledge of the local landscapes as well as flora and fauna. Working as guides or providing transport and housing, they receive payment for environmental services instead of the previous unsustainable hunting methods [87].

In South Africa [88], the income from tourists going on safari is the main incentive to create and maintain both huge and small nature reserves, which attract thousands of commercial visitors, whose contribution helps to pay for the constant expensive management

and maintenance of parks. In Rwanda, a permit for a hike (for 1 h) to mountain gorillas costs up to \$1500 per person. There are not many willing visitors, but the locals' concern for animals is minimized and the income received ensures the salvation of this unique and vulnerable species from extinction [88]. In Colombia (downstream and across the river from Puerto Alegria), some of the population learned how to thrive by helping animals, not harming them [89]. In these territories, it was decided to stop hunting for endangered species (monkeys). Over time, former hunters became guides, using their experience to educate visitors. The tourism industry helps a country such as Malaysia flourish [90]. According to the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture of Malaysia, 26.1 million tourists visited Malaysia in 2019. Most tourists chose rural areas with valuable natural resources (lakes, waterfalls, and mountains). Significantly expanded ecotourism activities in this environmental sphere can contribute to poverty reduction [91]. Therefore, the ecosystem should be maintained regardless of the degree of capitalist development [92]. In 2017, Rwanda received 1.5 million international travelers. Famous for their mountain ranges, volcanoes, and numerous wildlife species including great apes, the country's parks alone received 94,000 visitors, which brought in \$18.7 million in revenue. Local communities benefit from employment, business opportunities, and social projects. Ecotourism also contributes significantly to the national economy [93].

## 5. Tourism in Kuzbass

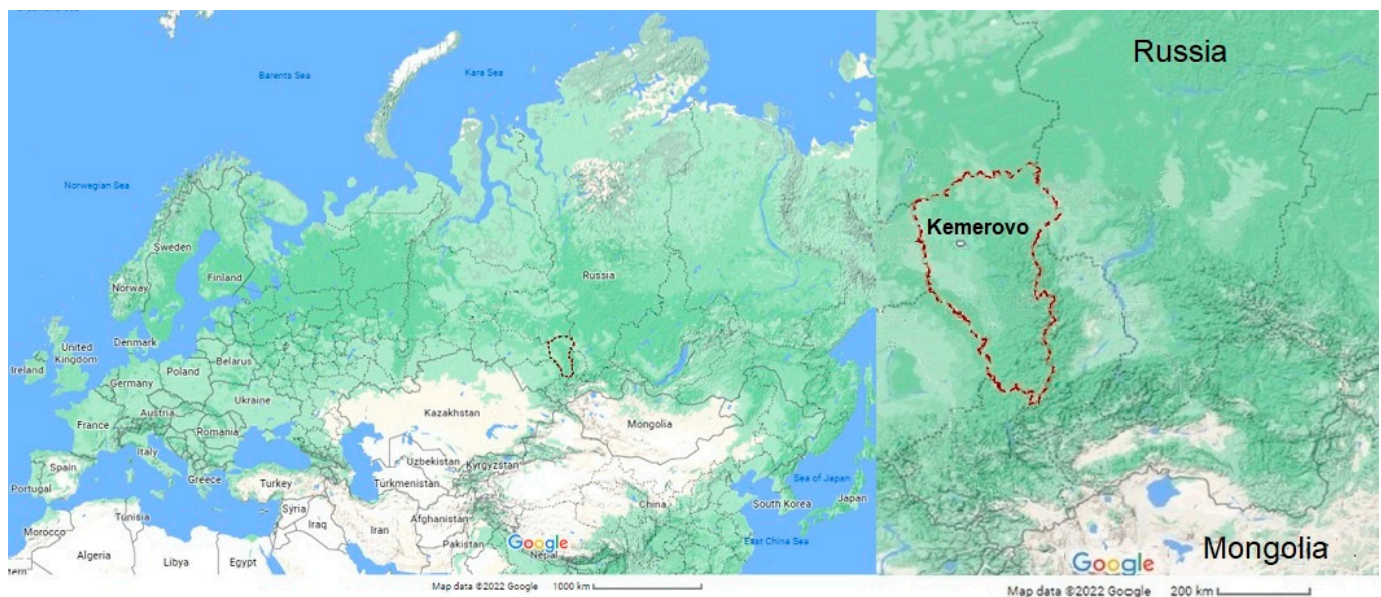
Nature-based tourism and, to a greater extent, ecotourism, are based on the premise that visitors appreciate the opportunity to explore nature, to understand the diverse habitats and local species, and to provide financial and political support for their permanent protection. Therefore, ecotourism, as an ideal form of nature-based tourism, works integrally with environmental measures and really brings a number of important benefits, including income generation, conservation support, and educational opportunities both for visitors and local communities [94].


The Kemerovo region is located in the south-east of Western Siberia, almost in the center of the Asian continent (Figure 1). The region's area is more than 95 thousand km<sup>2</sup>. The almost deserted mountain-taiga forests of the Kuznetsk Alatau, Gornaya Shoria, and Salair Ridge account for about 30% of the region's territory. The region's terrain is divided into flat (northern part), piedmont, and mountainous regions (east, west, and south), and intermountain Kuznetsk hollow. The variety of natural conditions of the territories is determined by the diverse relief, with forests occupying more than half of the region's area. The main forest-forming species are coniferous (~47%), birch (~28%), and aspen (~23%). Pine forests can be found as islets, and a relict Siberian linden grove can be found in the Kondoma River basin and Gornaya Shoria. Plants of tundra and alpine meadows (on mountain peaks), fir-aspen forests with tall grasses and relict plants (middle and low mountains), and steppe and forest-steppe plants (foothills and intermountain hollows) all contribute to the diversity of vegetation. The fauna of the Kemerovo region includes approximately 450 animal species (68 species of mammals, 325 species of birds, 6 species of reptiles, 42 species of fish, etc.). The fauna of Kuzbass is quite diverse. Animals living both on the plains and in the mountains can be found on the territory of the Kemerovo region.

The primary sectors of the Kemerovo region economy are coal, chemical industries, and metallurgy. The socio-economic development strategy of Kuzbass for the period up to 2035 considers the diversification of the economy and presents the platform "Clean coal—green Kuzbass" [95]. The strategy includes not only the development and implementation of green technologies at various stages (from training to the production of a finished product) but also the development of industries with less harm to the ecology of the region, which includes tourism.

At the moment, tourism in Kuzbass is one of the priority economic sectors. Ski, cultural, historical, and sports tourism have the greatest potential for development in terms of the tourist flow and the number of jobs created. Business, rural, environmental, and

adventure tourism sub-types complement the development of key tourism types, although they have less potential.



**Figure 1.** Kemerovo region—Kuzbass—on the map of Russia: -region border. Available online: <https://google.com/maps/@47.2488534,88.9156307,3z/data=!5m1!1e4?hl=en> (accessed on 9 February 2022).

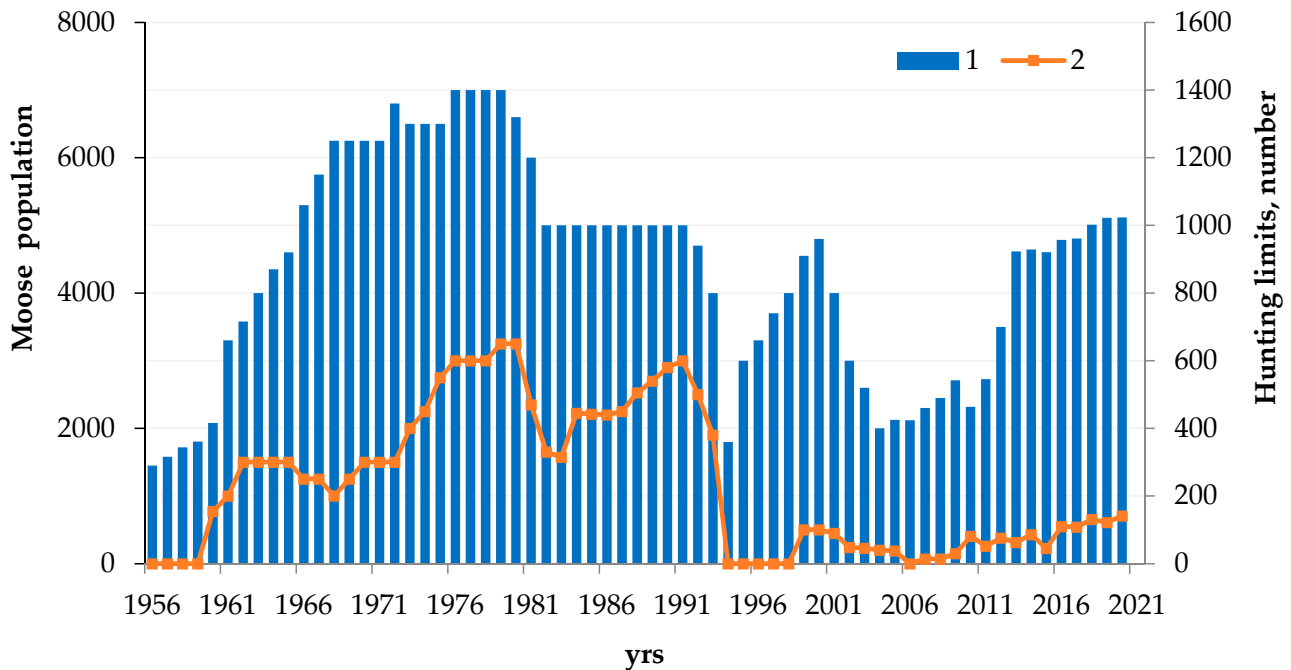
Nature-based tourism has been actively developing in recent years. Among the key objects for mass tourism, we can single out the Sheregesh ski center that is located in the Gornaya Shoria and attracts lots of those who love active recreation [96]. According to the results of 2020/2021, more than 2 million people visited the resort. In the summer, trips to the mountains (Kuznetsk Alatau, Gornaya Shoria), rafting on rivers, and visits to natural landmarks are offered. Ski tourism accounts for about 70% of the total tourist flow in the Kemerovo region.

A network of reserve museums is actively developing in the Kemerovo region as the most promising activity to preserve and popularize the region's cultural heritage. Among them are the following: "Tomskaya Pisanitsa" open-air reserve museum (about 175 thousand people per year); Kuznetsk Alatau Nature Reserve; Shorsky National Park with the "Tazgol" open-air museum of ethnography; "Kuzedeevo Linden Island" reserve with a unique relict grove of Siberian Linden; the museum and environmental complex in the village of Shestakovo (the right bank of the river Kiya) with the excavation site where the bones of a unique Siberian dinosaur *Psittacosaurus* were found; and the "Tryokhrechie" ("Three Rivers") reserve museum.

However, nature-based tourism does not guarantee no harm to nature, which is what happens in reality. Hunting and fishing are widespread in Russia and belong to nature-based tourism options. There are cases where controlled hunting was used as part of nature conservation efforts. For example, to control the moose population, unrestricted growth of which in a closed area without natural predators (wolves) can cause significant damage to forest plantations [97]. However, such measures were not practiced on the territory of the Kemerovo Region in modern Russia, mainly due to the uncontrollable actions of poachers. In this regard, the region's main wildlife interests can be associated with predators, moose, roe deer, marals, wild boars, fish, and forest birds [98]. Moose are one of the most common large ungulates, second only to the Siberian roe deer. They are one of the main objects of hunting.

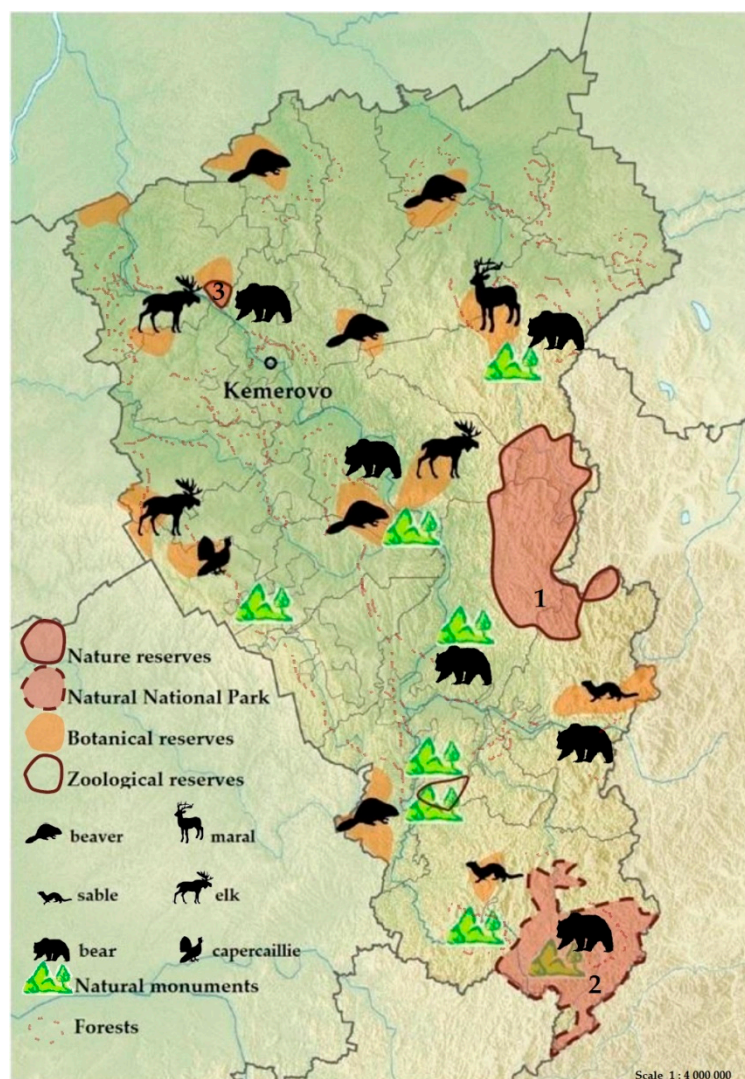
The moose of Kuzbass are a large species. They reach a height of more than 2 m, with a trunk length of up to 3 m. As a rule, these animals lead a sedentary lifestyle, remaining

in one area of habitat if there is no lack of nutrition and discomfort. In the winter, they choose areas with a lower snow height (up to 0.5 m). Winter migrations are started by females with offspring, while males lead the return from wintering. For the winter, they unite in small groups, but, since spring, they live separately as a rule. Moose belong to hunting resources. Figure 2 depicts the population size and hunting limits for moose in the Kemerovo region [98].



**Figure 2.** Moose population in the Kemerovo region—Kuzbass from 1956 to 2018 according to official reporting data (1) and the permitted hunting limits (2).

Many years of uncontrollable hunting with violations of the established rules in these areas led to a significant reduction in the number of wild animals. Large animals were especially vulnerable to poachers. The main causes of moose mortality include predators (wolves, brown bears) and poaching [99]. Recently, the situation has changed, and local authorities are paying significant attention to the conservation of the animals in designated specially protected areas, including state nature reserves, national parks, state wildlife sanctuaries, and natural monuments (Figure 3). Hunting is prohibited by law in specially protected areas.



**Figure 3.** Nature protection territories of the Kemerovo region: 1–The state natural reserve “Kuznetsk Alatau”; 2–Shorsky National Park; 3–The museum-reserve “Tomskaya Pisanitsa”. Adapted from a schoolchild’s atlas [100].

The state natural reserve “Kuznetsk Alatau” (Available online: <http://www.kuzalatau.ru> (accessed on 8 February 2022)) was formed in 1989, located in the east of the Kemerovo region (Figure 3). The total area is more than 400,000 ha. The reserve allowed for the preservation and restoration of disturbed ecosystems such as river sources, raised bogs, and mountain-taiga forests teeming with unique fauna and flora. The reserve is home to 65 species of mammals, 273 species of birds (including the black stork), and 13 species of fish. There are an estimated 943 species of grasses, shrubs, and trees in these areas.

Shorsky National Park (Available online: [shorskynp.ru](http://shorskynp.ru) (accessed on 8 February 2022)) was established in 1989 and is located in the southern part of the Kemerovo region (Figure 3) with a total area of over 400,000 ha. The park’s terrain is a complex mountain system crisscrossed by river valleys. The steepest slopes are found along river valleys and above the forest border. Currently (the study of the flora and fauna of the park is not completed), there are 625 species of vascular plants and more than 300 species of mosses, 56 species of mammals, 262 species of birds, and 21 species of tertiary relics on the territory of the national park. Additionally, rare mammals such as the river otter (*Lutra lutra*) and Siberian musk deer (*Moschus moschiferus*) can be found there.

The museum-reserve “Tomskaya Pisanitsa” (Available online: <https://tomskayapisanitsa.ru> accessed on 8 February 2022) was founded in 1988 on the foundation of the southern group



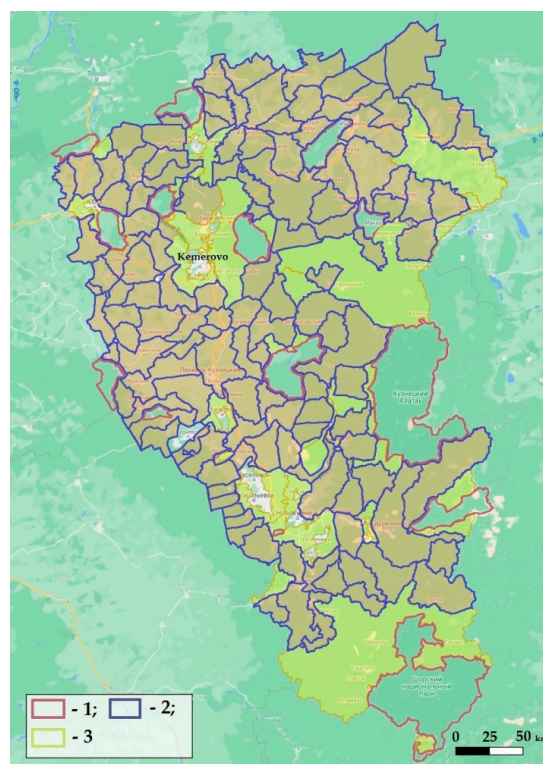
of rocks, dotted with cave paintings (280 of which have survived), in the Lower Pritomye region, located in a forested area north-west of Kemerovo. It has a total area of 140 ha (Figure 3). A snowmobile excursion “Moose trail” (the track is certified) is organized on the reserve’s territory, where guests have a unique opportunity to see the footprints of wild animals in their natural habitat in the snow and, if they are lucky, the animals themselves.

Natural monuments include Linden Island (total area ~11,000 ha), Kostenkovskie Rocks (~80 ha), Chumaysky Bukhtai (~4 ha), etc. Linden Island is a remnant of the thermophilic deciduous forests of the Tertiary period. The Siberian linden (*Tilia sibirica*) area on the territory of the natural monument is represented by the tallest plants among all Siberian communities (height 25–33 m, in diameter up to 1 m). This is the only broad-leaved forest formation in Siberia.

“Kostenkovskie Rocks” are defined by the remains of the black taiga dominated by Siberian fir, secondary aspen and birch forests (the eastern part and the northern border of the territory), small pine forests, and birch groves with a well-developed herbaceous layer (closer to the rocks). Rare species of orchids can be found here, as well as *Juniperus pseudosabina*, *Ziziphora clinopodioides*, *Dracocephalum peregrinum*, and relict *Carex humilis*; it is also home to the large butterfly *Parnassius apollo*, listed in the Red Data Books of the Russian Federation and the Kemerovo Region.

Chumaysky Bukhtai is a small cone-shaped hill of volcanic origin, distinguished by the presence of valuable, relict, rare, and endangered species of plants and animals.

However, national parks, zakazniks (game reserves), and other protected areas require significant costs for the maintenance and development of infrastructure, and the conservation of wildlife, as a rule, is carried out on a self-sustaining basis. In the region, there is still a high demand for amateur hunting, including the hunting of ungulates. Hunting is permitted on public hunting grounds with the purchase of a permit and payment of state fees or on private hunting grounds upon agreement with the owner (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Map of the hunting grounds of the Kemerovo region: 1-Specially protected natural areas; 2-Private hunting grounds; 3-Public hunting grounds.

In Kuzbass, there are more than 50,000 hunters with hunting tickets (about 2% of the region's population), and 100–150 permits (licenses) for moose hunting are issued per year. Despite the sale of hunting licenses, the proceeds fail to compensate for the negative impact on nature (agriculture, forestry, hunting, and fish farming together make up no more than 3% of the gross regional product), not to mention the development of the region's economy. It is not viable to develop hunting tourism in areas with permitted hunting to increase profits, and the limited number of animals is one of the reasons. Untapped resources include specially protected areas where organized ecotourism can complement existing hunting tourism in permitted areas. There is a possibility of beneficial administration, both for animals (moose) and local residents [101,102], taking into consideration the current world experience of tourism based on the use of wild animals, but only within the framework of ecotourism, not nature-based tourism. When hunting wild animals, the owners of private hunting estates monitor the implementation of legislation on their territory and do not exceed the allocated quotas. Hunting farms, including public hunting grounds, are not interested in reducing the population of wild animals (moose) but rather in increasing it. Despite some stability in recent years in terms of the dynamics of the moose population and the existing state management of the wild animal population (allocation of hunting quotas), it has not yet been possible to reach the size in the best years of its existence. Poachers are the primary cause of moose deaths in recent decades, according to official statistics.

Poaching is almost never a political priority. This problem cannot be solved by politics or legislation. The local population is given an important role in the protection and management of natural resources. Local and indigenous communities are often deprived of real benefits from wildlife and its conservation, and their only benefit comes from poaching. Ecotourism will stimulate the formation of the local population's motivation to protect both nature and wild animals, as well as the desire to quit poaching, as their well-being will depend on it. Wildlife conservation can be carried out on the basis of the commercial use of wildlife resources in protected natural areas. Natural resources that generate income and contribute to the development of rural areas will be better protected by people living in these areas, as they will positively affect the improvement of their situation, including their financial well-being.

## 6. Conclusions

The formation and development of ecotourism is a long-term process that requires the constant efforts of all involved parties to obtain tangible benefits, even in the long run [1]. However, the negative impact of ecotourism on wild animals has not been studied, although the tourist flow in the national parks of Africa and South America is quite high. The impact of humans (including watching expeditions) on the population size is ambivalent, determined both by animal species and by the mechanisms of organizing ecotouristic routes [103–105]. It is safe to say that ecotourism cannot be widely accessible, unlike nature-based tourism. When such activities are aimed only at obtaining financial profit, the problem of nature conservation will always be relevant. To gain a significant flow of customers, short tours are often offered to small settlements where animals are extracted from nature, kept in captivity, and provided for fun. In this case, tourists turn a blind eye to such violations, preferring not to think about the existing threats to nature. Therefore, a high cultural level is essential both for visitors seeking positive emotions and for the local population, who do not succumb to the desire to become wealthy in the here and now. Furthermore, as the territory—the habitat of animals—develops economically, the created harmonious balance will allow both nature and wild animals to be preserved.

The Kemerovo region has enough factors not only for the successful implementation of ecotourism projects but also for ecotourism with wild animals in order to diversify the regional economic development. However, the territory is still at the zero stage for launching such a project. The successful development of this tourism type can serve as an incentive for the conservation of other natural resources and the development of tourism. The conflict between the economic results of natural resource extraction, overexploitation,

and overconsumption must be resolved through ethics, cultural values, and political will. The local population, however, is given the most important role. Controlled hunting and fishing can also supplement and increase the socio-economic benefits of ecotourism and thereby support the conservation of nature by the local population. Without a doubt, it is much easier to organize and implement nature-based tourism programs, as they do not require licensing and are widespread in the territory of Kuzbass, but it is the implementation of ecotourism that will secure both the financial stability of the local population and the welfare of the wildlife, including for the benefit of future generations.

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