To fishermen or who sail down Russia’s Pacific coast, the forests of wild oak that line the mountains of the Lazovsky Nature Reserve must look like a landscape painted on an ancient Chinese porcelain plate. The leaves meet in an unbroken canopy over the slopes, and along the ground grow mushrooms of unearthly size, shape, and color. Hiking through the reserve is not easy because there are no paths and only carved marks on tree trunks from previous travelers show the way. Lianas, or vines, twine around the tall trees, and among the leaves on the forest floor, wild boar and spotted deer still run, and black bear perch up in the branches, munching acorns. Through the underbrush of this forest, the Siberian tiger roams, the largest tiger in the world. But in recent years, this region has opened up to the outside world and the tiger of Russia’s Pacific may not survive to see the end of this century. Poachers have decimated it, eager to meet market demands in China and throughout the Far East for tiger skin and bones believed to have magic medicinal powers. Only a handful of tigers still hunt deer and goral here, often trapping their prey in the Pacific waters with the high cliffs of the mountains to their back.

Out along the shoreline, a naval vessel is sailing down to Vladivostok, and there are ball-like floats washed ashore from Japanese fishing nets and other tell-tale plastic signs of civilization encroaching from the Pacific Rim. But today the sun is warm, the waves gently lap the shore, and along the sand the prints of the tiger lead into the sea.
OUTPOST IN THE FAR EAST

The image of a precarious strategic outpost pervades the Russian perception of the Pacific Edge, a region which opened up with a vengeance after the break-up of the USSR. Once isolated by location and the strong presence of the Russian military, the Far East of Russia now attracts foreign investors, as well as get-rich-quick hopefuls and a sinister criminal element that has flourished in the post-Soviet period. Clinging to the edge of the continent and facing the Pacific more than Moscow, the region has exploded into the chaos, riskiness, and excitement of a real frontier. In the once-sealed military port of Vladivostok, Nissans and Toyotas now drive the potholed streets alongside Russian-made Zhigulis; sailors walk the boardwalk next to visiting businessmen from Taiwan; and local “entrepreneurs” talk joint ventures with foreigners eager to cash in on the warehouse sale of Russia’s resources.

Such scenes stand in real contrast to more distant times, when the expansion of Russia ran into unusually tough resistance in this youngest of frontier regions as well as competition from other powers, suffering serious setbacks as a consequence. The initial Russian conquest was slowed even by the landscape of the Far East. The rivers that conveniently bore Russian explorers across Siberia stop short of the Pacific, which is separated from the interior by an uninterrupted chain of rugged mountains running all the way from Chukotka to China. It was only along the inhospitable coast of the Okhotsk Sea that Russians easily dispersed weak native tribes and established their original Pacific foothold in 1649.

Farther north, the extreme remoteness of the Chukotka and Kamchatka peninsulas long hampered Russian control by their extreme remoteness. The Chukchis of Chukotka were eventually left to their own devices and enjoyed the distinction of being the Empire’s only officially “not fully pacified” people down to the 20th century. Fierce resistance of native Koryaks and Itelmens delayed Russian control of Kamchatka until

UTOPIA IN THE NORTHWEST

The Pacific Northwest is the place of the great getaway, a region described by Alan Furst as “a mystical zone of indifference, a place so remote, so utterly far away from everything that even your private demons will get lost trying to find you. All the refugees out here have at least one thing in common: in their secret hearts they’re people who don’t want to be found.” But getting away from it all is becoming more difficult in western Washington and Oregon, northern California, and even Alaska as more people discover the natural beauty and amenities of the region. What has sometimes been termed the most livable part of America is experiencing rapid population and economic growth, to the point where arguments over development have become a major political issue.

The Cascade Mountains serve as very effective borders of the region to the east. Blocking the Pacific rains from entering the estranged eastern portion of the states, they set off a chain reaction of differentiation that begins with climate and vegetation, runs into separate economies and population densities, and ends in deepest cultural divergences. Eastern Washington and Oregon are absolute parts of the vast Land Ocean – in terms of how they make a living, in the appearance of the landscape, and by their very political spirit. The Cascades not only are a barrier to moisture, but they also inhibit east-west transportation and trade. While the ports of the Pacific Gateway provide a linkage to Asia, the back door connection to the rest of the United States is via highways that must clug up mountain passes or railroads that tunnel through some of the longest stretches in America. Easier connections are north and south to Alaska and California. Los Angeles is only 1000 miles from Seattle and Portland, but Chicago is 2000 miles away; New York City, 3000. By air transportation, Anchorage is about half the distance from Seattle as is the U.S. East coast. On the other hand, the ports of the Pacific Edge are favorably suited for trade with the “tigers” of Asia. Japan, South
the reign of Peter the Great, when it became the base for exploring and claiming the American coast, most notably Alaska. The cruel climate of Alaska and the Far East prohibited cultivation and large-scale Russian settlement, though, increasing the lure of the far warmer and inviting lands along the Amur river. But in the attempt to expand south from the sea of Okhotsk Russians clashed with a matched rival - the Manchu Chinese Empire. In 1689, Russia retreated from the Amur, fixing the boundary with China along the Stanovoy range. Only in 1858 was then-weakened China forced to cede the almost unpopulated lands along the Amur and Ussurii rivers, which serve as the Russo-Chinese boundary to our day. Since the Government was anxious to consolidate the hold over the new provinces, thousands of settlers were encouraged to come and farm the fertile land. Still, in the Far East the Empire clearly overextended itself. Colonists could arrive overland, but commodities had to reach the Far East by traversing half the globe in the ocean journey from Petersburg to Vladivostok. The region had to import a major share of its food supplies. Alaska was provisioned by and therefore firmly tied to the United States, while the mainland Far East was largely supplied with food (and manual labor) from neighboring Chinese Manchuria. Alaska was sold to the United States in 1867. The logical Russian attempt to expand into Manchuria clashed with similar designs by Japan, and this territory was lost as well in the Russo-Japanese war (1904-05).

Russia's bastion on the Pacific was hard won and is therefore gingly guarded. Large portions of the region continue to be claimed by China or Japan (which attacked Russia in 1918-22 and in 1937) and the Far East long remained a fortress rather than a gateway to its neighbors. Vladivostok literally means “The Ruler of the East.” Military Russia in 1918-22 and in 1937) and the Far East long remained a fortress rather than a gateway to its neighbors. Vladivostok literally means “The Ruler of the East.” Military Russia in 1918-22 and in 1937) and the Far East long remained a fortress rather than a gateway to its neighbors. Vladivostok literally means “The Ruler of the East.” Military Russia in 1918-22 and in 1937) and the Far East long remained a fortress rather than a gateway to its neighbors. Vladivostok literally means “The Ruler of the East.” Military Russia in 1918-22 and in 1937) and the Far East long remained a fortress rather than a gateway to its neighbors. Vladivostok literally means “The Ruler of the East.”
10 percent of the population of Vladivostok and 40 percent in Nakhodka and Petropavlovsk. Separated from Russia by the huge expanse of the Land Ocean, the Pacific Edge is still something of a militarized “overseas” dependency.

Throughout the Soviet period the Pacific Edge was persistently the fastest-growing region of the country, with a population expanding more than fivefold. Since the 1960s, migration has been driven not so much by the earlier romantic appeal of the last frontier as by the magnetic pull of high wages. Among the increasingly non-idealist generations of young Soviets, the region acquired the reputation of a “Promised Land,” where special wage incentives sometimes double what is paid for equivalent work in European Russia. The region drew those who were ready to tolerate temporary deprivations for the sake of a good future life. Forfeiting their previous skills and prestigious professions, these people came to clean fish, to work as cooks on fishing trawlers, and to serve as cargo handlers in harbors or as general manual labor in expeditions. Their sole goal was to save enough money to start a decent life back home. But this image of a “Promised Land” proved to be misleading. Nowhere else in Russia was there so acute a housing crisis. In the smaller settlements in particular, many still live in makeshift shanties popularly known as “Shanghais.” The high proportion of well-paid young people in the population makes especially intolerable the shortage of kindergarten facilities, movie theaters, or good consumer goods in stores. High wages also prove rather ephemeral due to a correspondingly high cost of living. For many, the savings are just enough for an extended vacation and spending spree “back west,” and then they are forced back to try again. The influx of new waves of youths is counterbalanced by the out-migration of older people, mostly disillusioned former enthusiasts no longer able to tolerate the unsettled and raw life in the region. Due to this turnover of people, in recent decades the population grew only at the average national rate. Numerous temporary residents, mostly women, are recruited to work in fish processing plants during the season, from June to October, and leave afterwards.

sold the United States its claims in Alaska for eight million dollars in 1867, Russian cultural presence was firmly on the landscape in places like Sitka and as far south as San Francisco. “Oregon Country” was claimed by Russia, Spain, France, England, and the United States, but by 1818 England and the United States were left to be the real game players in the region, spurred on by the fur trade. Astoria, named for John Jacob Astor of the American Fur Company, was established near the mouth of the Columbia River. By the latter half of the 1800s, there was an uneasy joint occupancy of the region by the British and Americans, as well as a strong migration of pioneer agricultural settlers into the Willamette Valley. The Oregon Trail and Oregon Country became a major focal point of the great American westward flow of white people. Portland, Seattle, and Tacoma were established settlements by the 1850s. Compromise in 1846 had determined that the U.S.-Canadian border should extend along the 49th parallel, thus cutting off British Columbia from inclusion in our region, although by climate, economy, and recent influx of Asians it may logically be considered part of the “Pacific Edge.” The international boundary also isolated a small piece of Washington State, Point Roberts, which can be entered by land only through Canada, and left undetermined the boundary around the San Juan islands, which became part of the United States much later when the German Emperor arbitrated the land dispute between British and American islanders in 1872. With the advent of railroad connections to tie the young region with the rest of the country, the friction of distance began to erode. From the 1880s to 1910 for example, Washington Territory witnessed a 1400 percent growth in its population, a forewarning of philosophical battles over growth that would be repeated later in the century. The feeling of separatism from the rest of the United States has been strong in the Pacific Edge, and when Ernest Callenbach published a novel in 1975 hypothesizing the secession of Oregon, Washington, and Northern California, it rang true to many people who wanted to keep their environmentalist values and utopian imagery of the
The threads of migrational moves continue to tie the young and immature Pacific frontier to European Russia. The residents are likely to have more friends and relatives in Moscow than within ten miles from home, and experience the region only as a remote and isolated outlier of European Russia.

The “island” sense of psychological isolation is strengthened by the lack of cohesiveness within the region. The more firmly settled Amur Lands are reliably linked to European Russia by the TransSiberian railway and have developed as Pacific outcrop of Russia’s main settlement zone and diversified economy, lying beyond the emptiness of the Land Ocean. The populations of both Vladivostok and Khabarovsk have reached the one-million mark. In contrast, the northern part of the region is dominated by small, scattered, and isolated settlements linked only by air. All basic necessities for Chukotka, Kamchatka, Sakhalin, Kurile islands, and Magadan, as well as all regional exports, pass through the seaports of Vladivostok, Nakhodka, Vostochnyi, and Soviet Harbor/Vanino, where the TransSiberian terminates. The whole of the region clings closely to the Pacific, which binds together its parts and also accounts for the region’s importance to Russia.

Shut off from the rest of the country by the Land Ocean, the region has long enjoyed a semi-autonomous island existence. Between 1920 and 1922 it was the nominally independent Far Eastern republic, created as a Russian buffer to thwart Japanese expansion. Afterwards, the nearly autonomous Far Eastern Territory preserved its own economic planning system as late as 1937. Even today, local residents acutely feel that they are islanders, usually referring to the European regions of Russia as the mainland, or the continent. Whether for Russia or Pacific investors, the region seems to still function as an island dependency in an economic sense.

region intact. The name "Ecotopia" became popular, fed by the anti-growth sentiment that was perhaps most strong in Oregon. But the battle seems to be lost. “There are just too darned many people here now” is a complaint one hears frequently in Portland and Seattle. Traffic jams regularly choke interstates that were once “overbuilt,” formerly pristine hiking trails fill like crowded streets on summer weekends; huge new urban corridors are springing up around Portland and on the eastern side of Lake Washington; and in the heart of Ecotopia, pollution is an ongoing problem. The final blow to the hideout region came with change in its geographic situation. The Pacific Northwest has become a victim both of its own quality-of-life mythology and the post-industrial economic shift that has freed up the American population to locate in areas once considered too remote. And when the variable of Pacific Rim boom economies in Asia are added in to the equation, it is clear that events outside the Northwest are still determining the fate of this utopia.
THEME 1: CHASING A RIM OF GROWTH

As befits a dependency, the economy of the Far East focuses on the extraction of resources for outside markets, and, as befits an island, it is strongly linked to the sea. The principal treasure of the Far East has been fish. The region accounts for 40 percent of the national catch, and the fishing industry is its leading economic sector - in Kamchatka and Sakhalin fishing accounts for a staggering 55 to 75 percent of the value of industrial output. Yet most of the catch is limited to coastal waters, rather than the nearby open ocean, and the fish reserves are severely overtaxed, not least by Japanese poaching.

Another prime resource for exploitation has been timber, but many of the best species and easily accessible stands are tapped out. What remains is either larch (not a prime commercial species) or forests on mountain slopes. A wood products industry commensurate with the resource size has not been established, thus limiting the economic value of the wood cut. Trade with Japan, which originally purchased much of the raw log exports from the Far East, has become more limited as the most desirable species are exhausted. Much wood is harvested in a reckless manner, and foreign investors from South Korea and the United States have met opposition to logging from Native Siberian groups and environmental organizations.

The gift of ancient volcanoes (non-ferrous metals, especially tin) is another source of wealth, but the extent of mining is not at all comparable to the huge operations in the Land Ocean. Although the region has long been known to possess coal and oil, local production accounts for only one fifth of regional needs. Both coal and oil are mostly found in the north of Sakhalin island, with major new oil and natural gas fields located offshore in the Sea of Okhotsk, clad in ice for most of the year and frequently stormy. Thus far Russia has failed to develop these offshore fields without western technology. Overall, the share of the region in Russia's industrial output and exports is well lower

THEME 1: CHASING A RIM OF GROWTH

The story of jobs in the Pacific Edge of America is a journey from lumber mills to Nintendo games, and along the way, people could always find work building airplanes or missiles. Trees, soil, fish, and minerals formed the first base for employment in western Washington and Oregon, and raw materials still very much dominate the Alaskan economy.

About 25 percent of the nation's lumber comes from the Pacific region. While hemlock, spruce, and cedar are important species, perhaps the one tree that symbolizes the timber industry in the Northwest more than any other is the Douglas fir, a coniferous species that is not really a fir at all but can grow to 325 feet tall, with diameters up to seventeen feet. Douglas fir provides about fifty percent of the annual harvest in the Northwest, thriving in the climate to become a favored species for regrowth in the tree plantations that supply much of the mill and export logs for the region.

The timber industry may be the founding heart activity of the Pacific Edge. For over one hundred years, the forests of western Washington, Oregon, and northern California provided an apparently unending supply of huge-diameter, original growth, and second-growth trees. But in the 1990s, it looks as if the party is over, and many people in towns that depend on the trees are feeling the impending loss of their employment base. The controversy over logging the remaining original forest is representative of the changing identity of the region, in what has come to be billed as the fight between logger and environmentalist. The trees of the Northwest also point to the importance of trade with Japan and other countries of the fast-growing Pacific Rim. About forty percent of logs cut in Washington, for example, have been exported yearly to markets in Japan. While many regions of the United States complain about jobs lost to Asia, the Northwest has benefitted as Japan, Taiwan, China, and South Korea absolutely dominate the turnover in trade through Seattle, Portland, and other port cities.
than its proportion of population. Local production of consumer goods is able to meet only 30 percent of the region's needs and half of its food is imported. The geopolitical importance of the outpost region has led the Russian government to subsidize up to a third of regional spending. Since the Soviet economic system tended to underprice major imports into the area, such as fuels, foodstuffs, and especially labor, the huge expenses of creating a workplace, building housing for volatile migrants, and paying higher wages necessary to attract a workforce were mostly borne by other regions. As Russia's switch to a market economy stopped the flow of subsidies, most businesses could not afford to pay higher wages themselves, and residents who came here for big money started leaving in droves. The current crisis underscores not only that investment in this region is proving risky due to organized crime and a chaotic economy, but also that the Far East was a money-losing dependency of Russia, not a profitable resource colony.

These hard times are especially ironic since the region was viewed earlier by the Soviet government as a gateway, a hinge linking their economy to the dynamic Pacific Rim. To facilitate Russia's entry into the “Pacific Age,” projects such as BAM (Baikal Amur Mainline railroad) were undertaken in the 1970s to create a new Siberian land bridge linking the Pacific and Europe. During the world oil crisis of the same period, prospects looked bright for the development of the Far East as a resource frontier for capital-rich but resource-poor Pacific Rim economies. A number of resource projects were conceived jointly with Japan, including timber harvesting and processing as well as oil and liquified natural gas production in Sakhalin for the Japanese market. Most big hopes of the period were dashed with the onset of post-oil-crisis resource-saving technologies that dramatically devalued primary materials and reduced the attractiveness of investment in resource projects. Also, in comparison with Canada or Australia, the Soviet Far East simply is not the most attractive of resource frontiers in the Pacific Rim. The ebullient perception of the Far East as a potential Klondike,

Colored strips of imported Asian cars cover Seattle's waterfront piers; banks and trading companies that specialize in Asia bring money into the Northwest economy. Small wonder that when the Seattle baseball franchise fell under ownership by Nintendo, the main complaints about Japanese purchase of an American institution like baseball were heard largely from outside the region.

Hard feelings have evolved over the years, however, regarding fishing disputes between Asian countries and Northwest companies in the Pacific. Many of the original salmon runs are threatened or gone, and much of the focus of the fishing sector has moved on to Alaskan waters. Similar to problems in managing forest resources, arguments abound over who has the right to take salmon; from questions over guarantees made by treaty to the Native Americans (for whom the salmon is as important part of traditional culture and spirituality), to international conflicts with Japanese fishing interests. When voices are added to the fray from commercial and sports fishers, from users of hydropower produced by the Columbia, and from farmers depending on irrigation waters in the eastern portions of the states, the salmon hardly have a chance. The fish with the romantic names like sockeye and chinook, who hold so firmly to their home beacon, have proved no match for human competition.

Manufacturing has always played a smaller role in the region's economy. Distance from major market centers has tended to limit industry only to that related to resources, such as lumber mills or canneries, or to specialized production not directly tied to transportation. But in Washington State manufacturing bears the name of one company: Boeing, which has dominated local industrial employment more intensely than any other comparable example for manufacturing in U.S. cities. By 1970, as a result of a downturn in demand for airplanes, Boeing laid off 65,000 workers within two years, putting a dent in the city's economic base that was to affect urban planning in Seattle for many years ahead. The city swore it would never again be so addicted to
widespread among Russians, is but a misleading exaggeration. In this region, the potential and the actual always seem to be at odds.

The Pacific Edge of Russia is still a young frontier in the early rude stage of development. Its population of 5.5 million, clinging to the international line is completely overshadowed by its neighbors: about 120 million in Japan, 60 million in Korea and 90 million in the Manchurian provinces of China. Nowadays, with always remote Russia in disarray and the economy liberalizing, these realities of geography prompt the Pacific Edge to trade the old idea of a hinge between Russia and Pacific Rim for one-way integration into the latter. Following the example of the economically-aggressive “Tigers of Asia” (such as Hong Kong and South Korea) the Far East became home to Russia’s first free economic zone in Nakhodka, and the whole of Sakhalin Island enjoys a special status of “economic homerule.” The region is Russia leader in the development of transborder barter trade, especially along the Chinese boundary. Special economic zones are being created on the Chinese side of the international line to take advantage of commerce with Russia, the largest of them being across the Amur River from Blagoveshchensk. The two banks of the city are now linked for the first time by power and telephone lines and a railway crossing. The United Nations is financing a project that plans to bring together the comparative advantages of Russian natural resources, Chinese labor, and technology from Japan and South Korea to undertake manufacturing for export. China and North Korea are regarded as potential sources of labor for the chronically underpeopled region, especially for achieving food self-sufficiency, and the first groups of Asian farmers are already tilling land in the Maritime territory.

Yet even as the region’s hopes to join the Pacific club are revived, it can be admitted only as a semi-colonial resource appendage. Choosing new masters will hardly bring rapid prosperity. Thus far, Pacific integration is most visible in the terms of one company, and began a program to diversify its work force. Today, Boeing is still the main game in town in terms of the manufacturing work force in the region. Compared to Seattle, Portland has always been more diverse in its manufacturing employment, relying on wood products, transportation equipment, and machinery companies.

Geographers and economists studying the urban economies of the Pacific Edge had subscribed to traditional theories that held to the notion that manufacturing would provide a major export base for a region's economy. Despite the downturn in timber, fishing, and some manufacturing, the region gained jobs in services and there was a boom in downtown office construction. Where were the jobs coming from? Reports suggest that transportation and trade, communications, finance, and business services are bringing money into the region. What has come to be known as the “Post Industrial Economy” nationally is already apparent in the Pacific Northwest, with markets in other western states, in Europe, and particularly in Asia. By the end of the 1980s, Asia was providing 43 percent of imports into the United States and buying 31 percent of American exports, and the ports and businesses of America’s Pacific Edge were big beneficiaries of this growth spurt. Added to these connections was the location of “high tech” activities in the Seattle and Portland metropolitan areas, particularly computer software firms such as Microsoft, recreational firms like Nintendo, and biotechnology and genetic engineering companies.
automobiles and videocassette recorders for sale in Far Eastern cities. In most cases the worthless cars are traded for precious natural resources in shady deals by mushrooming local businesses that operate in the gray zone between law and crime. The region is gripped by the “grab and go” spirit of unbridled speculation. As a result, crime has skyrocketed, particularly street robberies and burglaries, and it is not uncommon for foreign business investors to hire armed guards to protect equipment deliveries. Some regard the system of pay-offs as a necessary expense, and perhaps a more serious damper on investment is the uncertainty of the business climate along the Pacific Edge.

THEME 2: LIVING ON A RING OF FIRE

In its attempt to become a prosperous gateway, the region may well lose its most valuable asset, that of being the remote refuge of nearly pristine nature. Foreign wood products companies have already invaded the forests of the region, with North Korean operations in Amur Oblast already accused by Russian environmentalists of severe overcutting, and U.S. companies interested in tapping into the remaining tracts of trees. Wild animal populations are experiencing increased pressures as well: having discovered the high value of bear bile on the Japanese market, poachers killed 2000 bears in Kamchatka just in the summer of 1992, frequently not even bothering to take the animals’ hides. Considering that the entire bear population of Kamchatka barely exceeds 10,000, the consequences can be dramatic. This case is typical: the rootless population that has gathered in the region in search of fast money is ruthless in pursuit of a new Klondike, and is quite willing to sell to the highest bidder not just their labor but also the region’s unique natural wealth. For all its immense area, the region has little room to reconcile its Gateway and Getaway functions. Hortensia, a typical domestic plant in European Russia, circles tree trunks up to the tops. In the wild forests of Sikhote-Alin, you can still hear the growling of the Ussuri tiger under the larches. Kamchatka boasts fur seal breeding grounds on Kommodore Islands and bird rookeries along the coast.

THEME 2: LIVING ON A RING OF FIRE

The Pacific Northwest may be at the “edge” of the continental United States, but geologically it is at the center of action. Volcanoes, mountains, and earthquakes all provide evidence of the region’s belonging to the Pacific Ring of Fire, a rim of seismically active zones around the Pacific Ocean Basin. The Pacific Edge is one of the few places in America where someone can actually see geologic processes happening. The result has been a place of both incredible natural beauty and deadly attraction. This environment of fire and ice can be traced back to the Pacific Ocean plates, riding on a crust of magma. Off the coasts of Washington and Oregon lies an oceanic trench, swallowing up seafloor crust at a rate of 2 to 3 inches per year. As the North American continent drifts westward, the Pacific Plate slips into this trench. There was a time when you could own Pacific beachfront property in Spokane - if you were around a few hundred million years ago.

The microcontinent that formed the North Cascades sailed across the Pacific fifty million years ago, bringing with it the volcanoes that were to form the classic peaks. Along a line parallel to the ocean trench a series of fire breathers grew out of the mountains - the stratovolcanoes of the Cascades, formed by alternating layers of lava and debris thrown violently out of the mouth to create giant cones on the landscape. One of the most striking of these may have been Mount Mazama in Oregon, 9,000 to 11,000 feet high. About seven thousand years ago, Mazama blew its stack in an eruption so huge it resulted in a caldera - a collapsed cone. As water seeped in, it became one of the most beautiful sights in the northwest - Crater Lake. The most recent example of the dangers of life among the volcanoes has been the May 18, 1980 eruption of Mount St Helens in southern Washington. The blowout took the lives of thousands of animals and more than 30 human beings, in an explosion that released the equivalent energy of 21,000 Hiroshima-sized atomic bombs. People in the Northwest watched the whole event on their televisions.
The desire to preserve these unique environments led to the creation in the Pacific Edge of some of Russia's largest nature reserves. The 934,000-hectare (>2 million acres) Kronotskiy reserve on Kamchatka protects native sable which had been overhunted. The reserve contains sixteen spectacular snow-covered volcanoes such as Krasheninnikov and Kronotskaya Sopka. The warmth of the underlying strata heats up the waters of some lakes in the reserve to the point where they do not freeze even in the harsh winter, and plant life as well as animals flourish around these natural hot tubs. But perhaps the most famous feature of the reserve is the Valley of the Geysers, not even “discovered” by scientists until 1941. While you compare the Pacific coast of Washington on a map with that of Oregon, you might wonder why all the development seems to have clustered along the Oregon coast. Indeed, Saturday night in Seaside, Oregon, is probably as raucous with teenagers as any city in the Northwest, and many towns along the coast have drawn a livelihood from tourism.

Any misstep can destroy the fragile environmental balance, and indeed the region provides examples of both Russian early environmental protection and thoughtless “frontiersmen” exploiting the “unlimited bounty” of nature. In Kamchatka, marshes have been drained to increase agricultural areas, which, along with lumber operations, pronounces a death sentence on the salmon nursery grounds - the main treasure of the area. The All Terrain Vehicles and caterpillars used by geologists and the military leave scars on the landscape that take five or six years to heal. The destroyed vegetation undercuts the foodbase of small rodents who are in turn the main food of the sable and fox populations. It has been reported that in Kamchatka alone there are about 12,000 of these so-called “geologists’ paths.”

But nature here can turn the tables and be threatening as well to human inhabitants of the Far East. Just as the sea forms the identity of the Far East, its landscape is dominated by the mountains. There are about thirty active volcanoes just on Kamchatka, and the Kuriles are simply a chain of partially submerged volcanoes. The great volcanoes, such as Avachinsky, Karymskiy, Shiveluch, and Klyuchevskoi (which

The mountains of the Northwest are a prime influence on the region’s vegetation and climate. Washington State has one of the few mid-latitude rainforests in the world due to the odd juxtaposition of westerly winds off the Pacific and the Olympic Mountain range. As the rains from the Pacific slam into the mountains, precipitation may reach more than 200 inches of rain per year, creating moist conditions conducive to the growth of huge cedar and hemlock trees. The coast range of Oregon is not as high as the Olympics, and thus, Portland’s climate is slightly hotter and drier than Seattle’s. The lack of major mountains and a relatively gentle coastline have resulted in a region more welcoming to visitors. If you compare the Pacific coast of Washington with that of Oregon, you might wonder why all the development seems to have clustered along the Oregon coast. Indeed, Saturday night in Seaside, Oregon, is probably as raucous with teenagers as any city in the Northwest, and many towns along the coast have drawn a livelihood from tourism.

But the state of Alaska has no rival in North America when it comes to real mountains. From the Brooks Range in the north to the 20,000 foot high St. Elias Mountains rising straight out of the sea in the south, Alaska is a marvel of fire and ice. Volcanoes such as Mt. Iliamna are quite active, and Alaska has witnessed some of the strongest earthquakes in the United States in modern times, such as the March 27, 1964, earthquake of more than 8 on the Richter scale, centered near Valdez.

The value of nature has been recognized by the abundance of federal and state land preserves of various types in the region. In Washington and Oregon there are four national parks (Mt. Rainier, Crater Lake, Olympic, and North Cascades), while Alaska has eight, including Denali, Wrangell-St. Elias, and Gates of the Arctic, the three largest in the national park system in terms of acreage. The national Wilderness Act of 1984 reserved even more land in the Pacific Northwest, and created a distinct category because only areas “unaffected by human use” can be included. People are regarded as rare visitors in these areas. Environmentalists complain that too little land has been
rival the perfect beauty of Fujiyama’s cone), are objects of unconscious worship by the Far Easterners, who speak of them as if they are living beings. The violent explosion of volcano Bezimyannyi (“Nameless”) in 1956 blew off the volcano’s top in a manner resembling the later famous Mt. St. Helens event. Tsunami waves and tropical typhoons with their devastating effects are not infrequent visitors to the region as well. The Russian expression “Life on Volcano” is not just metaphorical along the Pacific Edge, and the allusion to the European Russia as the “firm earth” is not merely a reflection of local “islander” mentality, but also a comparison to their own ground, which indeed frequently trembles. People live here endangered by all four great elements of nature - earth, water, air, and fire - and equally insecure in their alternating roles as defenders of Russia’s outpost or inhabitants of a new colony thrown wide open. The region is as young and rudely chiseled as its ferocious volcanoes, and just as unsteady on its feet.

preserved under this policy; others feel that too much land is being locked up that could otherwise be used successfully on a multiuse basis. Also in the 1980s, the Columbia Gorge was added to the nation’s list of wild and scenic rivers. Development versus preservation is a constant battle on this beautiful section of the Columbia. The Oregon side alone already enjoyed 27 state parks, and the stretch of river from Hoodspor to the Dalles is considered one of the premiere windsurfing paradises in North America. People on the Pacific Edge seem to take full advantage of life on a ring of fire, and the beauty of the natural environment may be doomimg the area to a continued battle over growth. The region’s service as front door to the Pacific is booming, and as most of the local economy remains strong and the region’s national image so positive, new people keep drifting in - for jobs, for the excitement of living in young states, for a chance to sip espresso on the waterfront after work and climb the Cascade peaks on weekends. It is not the cobwebbed corner of America any longer. Perhaps there has never been a place which has had such mixed feelings about its own success.