

Gorbachev Pushes Plan to Turn Iron Curtain Into Parkland

By OTTO POHL

BERLIN — Mikhail S. Gorbachev, who as Soviet leader presided over the troops and tanks that guarded the Iron Curtain, now wants a nature reserve along the full length of the former cold war border, from Finland to the Adriatic.

German and other European environmental groups have devised a plan to create nature parks out of the no man's land that separated the Soviet bloc from the West.

Kept forcibly free of people during more than 40 years of the cold war, the border between Eastern and Western Europe became a refuge for plants and animals. Construction in the region now threatens these unintentional but important nature reserves, environmentalists fear.

"Ecology isn't something we can only leave to politicians," Mr. Gorbachev, who is president of the environmental organization Green Cross International, said when lending his support to the project at a recent conference in Bonn.

Although the idea of making parks along former cold war borders has been around since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the conference was the first time that representatives of all the border countries had met to discuss the feasibility of having parkland run the length of the Iron Curtain.

Plans for the park are furthest along in Germany, where the border between East and West Germany once stretched for 870 miles. A recent study found that 85 percent of



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A park in a former no man's land would run from Finland to Greece.

the land is still undeveloped enough to be included in a national park.

Plans were delayed while courts determined the status of the land, but most claims are now settled, and the German Finance Ministry recently announced that it might be able to donate the 65 percent of former border land still in government posses-

sion.

Environmentalists stress that the reserve would not simply be the area it covered or the number of endangered species it contained but also that it would link many different groups of organisms, known as biotopes, in the longest continuous stretch of undeveloped land left in central Europe.

In the other former border countries, plans for a park are in only their early phases. The most likely route would be around the eastern half of Austria to the Adriatic, while a second area would encompass Albania, whose border with Yugoslavia was always heavily guarded, and would then pass along the northern border of Greece.

Several speakers at the conference observed that Mr. Gorbachev — who could have rolled back eastern Europe's anti-Communist revolutions by force as his predecessors did — was on hand and had, in effect, made the border park possible.

Steffen Flath, the environment minister of what is now the German state of Saxony, once part of Communist East Germany, turned to Mr. Gorbachev and said, "I remember July 1989 when things were starting to bubble, and our government said, 'Send us tanks,' and you, Mr. Gorbachev, you didn't send those tanks."

With the congratulatory words about vanishing borders in central Europe, however, some of those who follow events in this part of the world feared that events farther east were being ignored. Tamas Marghescu,

European director of the World Conservation Union, said nervous states about to join the European Union were creating new divides. He cited what he said was a new impenetrable fence along the border between Poland and Belarus, which he said split an important park that straddles the border.

"It's the new Iron Curtain," he said.

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