Preface

I have a personal connection to Russian society and culture. Both my parents are of Russian descent, and my father was born in Moldavia when it was a part of the Tsarist Empire. He and his family moved to the USA in 1919, refugees from the civil war that followed the Bolshevik Revolution. The specific reasons my father's family took flight remain vague. However, more than one relative has told me that being Jewish peasants in a village that lay within a contested region where differences of faith, social status and political affiliation could endanger life and limb was a powerful motive for emigrating.

After embarking at Ellis Island, my father's parents and his three siblings found their way to a Russian émigré community in Ambridge, Pennsylvania – and, after a time, to Cleveland, Ohio, where I was born several decades later. Despite this personal connection, I was not motivated to undertake research on environmental politics and policy in Russia – nor, certainly, to write a book on the subject – until ten years ago. The events that led to that decision were the result of a fortuitous convergence of factors.

In 2001, Ivan Blokov of Greenpeace Russia and I met while he was visiting various universities in the USA through the support of an Eisenhower Fellowship. Ivan and I became acquainted midway through his US journey, when he visited my former institution – the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. We had the opportunity to discuss many issues, including water policy, global environmental change and public involvement in environmental decisions. While all three issues were interests of mine, the last of these was an especially passionate interest for Ivan, and a particular area of focus for his organization and its work.

We discovered that our intellectual interests were so much in synch that I eagerly accepted Ivan's invitation to visit Moscow and St Petersburg during the summer of the following year. Two more visits, in 2005 and 2006, followed, as well as a visit by Ivan to my new home in Southern California in 2008. These exchanges were but the most visible part of a profitable, intellectually rich and deeply satisfying collaboration that led to this book. Our professional and personal bonds gelled around one critical issue: the relationship between the growth and maturation of

democratic institutions on the one hand, and the achievement of effective environmental policy reform on the other.

Throughout our collaboration Ivan was the ‘insider’ and environmental activist – dauntless in his dedication to policy change, politically astute regarding the activities and leadership of environmental and other NGOs, and knowledgeable about key personnel in Russia’s federal and regional governments. Ivan conceived of the survey of decision makers – and, with the help of his network, identified suitable NGO and governmental contacts. He also undertook most of the data analysis of the survey results. As an ‘outsider’ to Russia, and a virtual novice in Russian politics, I brought knowledge of environmental issues generally – particularly in the realm of natural resource disputes and the management of environmental risk – and a background in democratic political theory. I undertook much of the literature review of non-Russian sources that provided background, and that were helpful in interpreting our findings. Meanwhile, Ivan was able to steer me toward many data sources and Russian case study accounts through his direct familiarity with the cases themselves, and their related issues.

The idea for an entire book came about quite undramatically. During my 2002 visit, we discussed the relationship between Russia’s democratic challenges, particularly its quest to develop a robust civil society, and rising environmental consciousness among various opinion leaders (who were more than happy to share their views with us). At the end of this visit, we outlined the core ideas for what became this book. The subsequent visit to Russia in 2005, involving formal interviews with officials and NGO leaders in Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod and Dzerzhinsk, led to refinement of a survey instrument that was pre-tested in 2006 and administered in 2007–08. In late 2008 some of the survey results became the basis for a paper we presented at the American Political Science Association meeting in Boston that year and, later, in revised form, as an article in *The Review of Policy Research*.

In a project such as this, there are literally dozens of people to thank – not only those who early consented to be interviewed for the project, when we pre-tested our survey, but countless others who gave of their time, hospitality and generosity, especially to a stranger who spoke little Russian, but who was eager to learn much about the culture and politics of a great nation and its people. Particular thanks go to the staff of Greenpeace Russia’s office in Moscow, which arranged for my travels, coordinated local and distant interviews with many officials and NGO leaders, and who were generous with their time and talent to a fault. I also thank Ivan for his friendship these many years, and own close friends and loved ones who supported all our efforts patiently, and with understanding and grace.

I regret that I have yet to take Jill with me to Russia. Although I have poured out wonderful stories about my travels, which she has very much enjoyed, and given her the opportunity to meet Ivan in 2008, when he visited California, she has yet to directly experience the courage and perseverance of the people whom I had the pleasure to meet and interview during my three visits to Russia. I promise to rectify that shortcoming soon enough.

Finally, to Edward Elgar for their confidence in this project – and especially to Alex Pettifer for his dauntless efforts in bringing the project to publication, and to Elizabeth Teague for her dedicated editorial work – I owe many thanks. I am also grateful to the three anonymous peer reviewers whose comments and suggestions immeasurably improved the project. All errors of fact and interpretation remain mine alone.

In closing, I dedicate this book to the hopes and aspirations of Russia's still-fledgling democracy and to the leaders of NGOs, as well as individual citizens, who are helping bring about representative and engaged institutions, practices and behaviors. While my family fled from Moldavia and found freedom in America, I am reminded that millions who lived in the societies that eventually comprised the former Soviet Union – and the Russian Republic – were not nearly so fortunate. After decades of civil war, Stalinist repression, the carnage of World War II, a cold war with the West, and a 'thaw' in overt repression, entire generations grew up with little experience in, or direct knowledge of, alternative forms of governance based on openness, transparency and electoral accountability. The fact that, since the early 1990s, such alternatives are flourishing is a hopeful sign to those who have experienced environmental and other injustices. These alternatives, we should be reminded, were all but unimaginable merely a generation ago.

David Feldman
Irvine, California
June 2012