

# Russian ecologists say Nord Stream 2 damages precious refuge

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Russian environmentalists on Tuesday said the planned Nord Stream 2 pipeline that will funnel Russian gas to Europe threatens a coastal Baltic refuge that is home to rare animals and birds.

"The Nord Stream 2 project through the Kurgalsky reserve is unacceptable. Construction is impossible without inflicting environmental damage," Mikhail Kreindlin, an ecologist with Greenpeace Russia, told a news conference in Saint-Petersburg.

The Kurgalsky refuge is about 600 square kilometres (230 square miles) of protected land and sea including the Kurgalsky peninsula in the Gulf of Finland, located about 20 kilometres from Russia's border with Estonia.

The sanctuary was established to protect the coastal landscape as well as nesting colonies of migratory shorebirds and habitats of seals, including the Baltic ringed seal, a species declining in the Gulf due to climate change.

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The company held hearings for the proposed route, which crosses the territory of the protected territory and goes west through the Bay of Narva. "Nord Stream does not negatively impact the environment, including the Kurgalsky reserve," Nord Stream 2, the company behind the project, insists.

Vladimir Khrabry, an ornithologist with the Russian Academy of Scientists, however, disagreed. "This is an outstanding territory from the point of view of biodiversity," he said at the news conference.

Environmentalists say that the company didn't conduct the necessary studies, choosing the route for economic reasons, and played down the value of the refuge, which has 250 species of birds, according to Greenpeace.

"Nord Stream should be constructed, but they have to find an alternative route which would not go through the protected zone of Kurgalsky refuge. It's possible," said environmentalist Alexander Sutyagin, who heads the NGO Monitoring BTS, which monitors the Baltic pipeline system.

Gazprom is building Nord Stream 2 in cooperation with Anglo-Dutch Shell, Germany's Uniper and Wintershall, Austria's OMV and France's Engie.

The project bypassing conflict-torn Ukraine and also Poland would double the flow of the Nord Stream pipeline currently linking Germany and Russia.

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