

Shoigu Blames Regions for Wildfire Crisis

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Emergency Situations Minister Sergei Shoigu said Tuesday that the damage from this summer's wildfires would have been less severe if authorities had engaged firefighting aircraft more quickly.

Shoigu, speaking at the first day of the State Duma's fall session, said officials in the regions affected by the fires should have asked the federal government to send planes to help fight blazes before they swept out of control.

Shoigu also said regional authorities should have banned local residents from visiting drought-dried forests to help prevent blazes.

The hottest summer since records began 130 years ago and an accompanying drought sparked tens of thousands of fires. More than 50 people have died directly in the fires, and about 2,500 residences were destroyed.

During Tuesday's debates, some deputies criticized the government and the ruling United

Russia party for pushing through 2006 legislation that dismantled a sprawling Soviet-era network of forest protection.

"The wildfires highlighted the incompetent reform that has destroyed the nation's centuries-old culture of forestry," said Anatoly Greshnevikov of the Just Russia faction.

The Duma passed a resolution calling for a review of the forest legislation but steering clear of any criticism of the federal government.

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