

Blaze Wipes Out Small Altai Village

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An Altai region village of 433 houses was completely destroyed by wildfires Wednesday, Interfax reported, citing the Emergency Situations Ministry.

All 1,166 inhabitants of the village of Nikolayevka were successfully evacuated, a ministry spokeswoman told Interfax, adding that the blaze had broken out in a forest surrounding the village.

Firefighters were fighting hard to protect another village, Kornilovo, that was also threatened by the blaze, the report said.

President Dmitry Medvedev, meanwhile, said this summer's catastrophic wildfires have demonstrated the need to reform the Forest Code and the Federal Forestry Agency.

Medvedev indicated that Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's recent move to take direct control of the Federal Forestry Agency could be insufficient to properly protect the nation's forests in the future.

"If it's more convenient to work that way, you are welcome," Medvedev told a government

meeting focused on forests. “But if it proves insufficient, I reserve the right to radically change those structures.”

He said the blazes had shown that the Forest Code, signed into law by Putin in 2006, and the existing official structures cannot properly protect the forests.

(MT, AP)

Editor's note: The village of Nikolayevka is located in the Altai region. An earlier version of this article said it was in the Altai republic. The region and republic are separate areas.

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