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Water Levels Reach Dangerous Low at Siberia's Lake Baikal

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The water levels in Lake Baikal have reached their lowest point in 60 years.

The water levels in Lake Baikal, the world's largest freshwater lake, have reached their lowest point in 60 years, threatening water supplies to the Siberian republic of Buryatia, regional authorities said Monday.

The lake's water levels are now about 40 centimeters lower than in 2013, authorities said in a statement. Local fishermen, including those ice-fishing in the Selenga River, which flows into Lake Baikal, have been complaining of a lack of fish.

Buryat authorities have accused hydroelectricity company Irkutskenergo of having contributed to the water shortages via its "excessive drainage of the lake's water in spring and summer 2014."

"Our peatlands have been drained and have begun to burn," the head of the Buryatia republic, Vyacheslav Nagovitsyn, said in a statement posted on his official website. "The Irkutsk energy industry still wants to reduce the level [of water.]"

Irkutskenergo representatives have declined to comment on the situation, telling state news agency RIA Novosti that the company has been operating in compliance with the law.

Nagovitsyn said that Buryat authorities have not excluded the possibility of declaring a state of emergency due to the shallowing of wells in residential areas near Lake Baikal, which contains 20 percent of the world's total unfrozen freshwater reserve, according to UNESCO estimates.

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