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Shamans Summon Rains to Put Out Siberian Wildfires

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Siberian shamans have banded together to summon rain clouds to extinguish the vast wildfires that environmentalists have dubbed an ecological catastrophe, but which officials have said would be "pointless" to put out.

Wildfires are currently blazing across almost 3 million hectares of forest, an area almost the size of Belgium, according to the Federal Forestry Agency. Firefighters are battling fires covering almost 100,000 hectares in Siberia's Irkutsk and other regions, but other wildfires raging on 2.8 million hectares are only being monitored, the agency said.

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Dozens of shamans will this Sunday gather in the ancient religion’s spiritual center on an island in Lake Baikal to pray for rain, the state-run TASS news agency reported Wednesday.

“About 40 shamans from the republic of Buryatia, Zabaikalsky region and Irkutsk region will gather on Olkhon Island on Aug. 4. They will perform rituals to make it rain on the forest fires,” the head of an interregional shaman community said.

Russia’s Buddhist monks have also pledged to summon rains if their Instagram followers provide “the exact coordinates and place names” of where the fires are raging.

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Authorities have said they do not plan to expend resources on fighting the monitored fires because they are mainly in remote, uninhabited areas — known as "control zones" — and therefore not a direct threat to people.

Greenpeace, however, said the authorities were wrong to say the fires, which have been burning for several weeks, affected only uninhabited parts of the country. "There are people there! The lines of the control zones fall in such a way that settlements fall within them," it said.

"The situation with the forest fires in Siberia has long ceased to be a local problem and has turned into an ecological catastrophe on the scale of the entire country," Greenpeace wrote on social media on Monday.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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