

Russia's 2020 Wildfires Cover Greece-Sized Area – Greenpeace

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Experts warn that this year's blazes could become the most destructive in history. **Valery Sharifulin / TASS**

Wildfires in Russia have burned across a combined area the size of Greece so far in 2020, surpassing official estimates threefold, Greenpeace Russia said as it braces for blazes to erupt this week and peak next month.

Russia's Federal Forestry Agency has [identified](#) 12.3 million acres of wildfires raging across the country's forests so far this year, four-fifths of which are in Siberia and the Russian Far East. Experts warn that this year's blazes, some of which may have [survived](#) from last summer through a historically warm and dry winter, could become the most destructive in history.

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Using satellite data, Greenpeace Russia estimated that 33.3 million acres — more than the

area of Greece and nearly three times more than official data indicates — burned across forests, steppes and fields from January to mid-May.

“If the steppe is on fire, the blaze can pass over a huge area in a matter of hours,” Greenpeace Russia’s forestry expert Alexei Yaroshenko [told](#) the Kommersant business daily Tuesday.

One-third of the fires fell on abandoned fields that have turned into forests, killing an estimated 4.7 billion trees, or seven times the number planted in 2019, Greenpeace Russia said.

The environmental NGO said it believes non-forest fires should be counted in official data — which only tallies forest reserve fires that threaten populated areas — because they also pose a danger to forests.

Last year’s wildfires in Siberia burned across an area the size of [Belgium](#) at their peak and emitted the equivalent of Sweden’s total annual carbon dioxide emissions in one month alone.

Climate change is heating Russia at a rate more than twice the global average. Russia, the world’s fourth-largest greenhouse gas emitter with an economy heavily dependent on oil and gas, has been slow to take steps to curb its carbon emissions.

Greenpeace Russia expects wildfires to pick up in pace and peak in July.

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