

Putin Vows Funds Boost to Protect Russian Forests From Fires

By [AFP](#)

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Putin, a former prominent climate-change skeptic, said the nation must learn from the "unprecedented" wildfires. kremlin.ru

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday pledged hundreds of millions of dollars to protect the country's forests, saying the nation must learn from the "unprecedented" wildfires that engulfed swathes of Siberia.

Experts blame the huge fires that have ripped across Russia's vast territory in recent years on climate change, negligence, and underfunded forestry management services.

"We need to learn lessons and radically strengthen the forest protection system," Putin told a televised meeting of officials of the ruling United Russia party.

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Putin, a former prominent climate-change skeptic, was speaking ahead of parliamentary elections next month that could see the unpopular United Russia party struggle.

He also pledged a significant surge in funding for the efforts.

"To improve the regions' capabilities in protecting forests, we will additionally allocate another 24 billion rubles (\$325 million)," he said, in brief remarks on the fires in which he didn't mention climate change.

Russia's forestry agency says fires this year have ravaged over 173,000 square kilometers, making it the second-worst season since the turn of the century.

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In Russia's largest and coldest region of Yakutia, which sits atop permafrost, fires have burned through an area larger than Portugal.

Officials in areas hard-hit have called for resources and economic support from Moscow to deal with the damage.

Putin described the scale of the fires this month as "absolutely unprecedented."

The Russian leader this year participated in a summit hosted by U.S. President Joe Biden and said Moscow is interested in "stepping up international cooperation" on climate change.

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