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Siberian Wildfires Burn 3 Mln Hectares of Forest Since January – State Watchdog

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Smoke rises from wildfires near the village of Arylakh, republic of Sakha (Yakutia). **Yakutia Prosecutor-General's Office / TASS**

Wildfires have burned across at least 3.2 million hectares of forest in Russia's Siberian and Far East regions since the start of the year, according to statistics published by Russia's Aerial Forest Protection Service on Monday.

Nearly one-half of all the blazes were concentrated in the Far East Khabarovsk region, with 2.14% of the entire region affected. The second most-affected region is the west Siberian Khanty-Mansiisk autonomous district, which has seen about 1% of its entire territory covered in fires.

Russian authorities have declared states of emergency in seven regions, including across the entire territory of the Far East republic of Sakha, where residential areas have been affected by fire-induced toxic smog.

Related article: Toxic Wildfire Smog Blankets Russia's Far Northeastern City Yakutsk

Greenpeace Russia last week published aerial footage of a forest fire in the Irkutsk region covering more than 40,000 hectares. The fire, according to the environmental watchdog, has not been mentioned in any records maintained by the Aerial Forest Protection Service.

"This is a vivid example of how official reports on existing fires and their extinguishing do not fully reflect the real situation," Greenpeace wrote in the accompanying commentary.

Last year, wildfires in Russia's northeastern regions covered an area of at least 18.8 million hectares and were deemed "record-breaking" by Greenpeace. The watchdog has repeatedly called on the Russian government to step up measures on combating the fires to avoid a repeat of last year's "catastrophic" scenario.

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