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Volga River Drops to 37-Year Low in Southern Russia

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Low water levels along the Volga River in the southern Saratov region. **Saratov online / VK**

Volga River water levels have plummeted to a 37-year low in Russia's southern Saratov region, media reported Tuesday, citing data from the regional hydrometeorological agency.

The water level around the city of Saratov, which lies on the eastern bank of the 3,500-kilometer-long Volga River, fell to 13.69 meters on Oct. 20, just slightly above the minimum 13 meters required for boat navigation.

The record drying up of one of Russia's major waterways and Europe's longest river could pose a threat to nearby ecosystems, experts said.

"When water doesn't come in, chains of bodies of water dry up, the level of groundwater drops, spawning grounds are lost, and ecosystems perish," Alexander Fayzulin, a senior research fellow at the Institute of Ecology of the Volga Basin at the Russian Academy of Sciences, told the Ecosphere environmental outlet.

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In September, unusually low water levels along the Volga were also recorded in the republic of Tatarstan, where the water in the Kuybyshev Reservoir nearly reached a "critical" level, according to local media.

Among the possible reasons cited by experts for the low water conditions are habitat destruction, little rainfall during the summer, and an inability of the Volga's 12 hydroelectric plants, which regulate the river's flow, to cope with changes in water volumes.

In Saratov, low water levels have led to one-submerged objects appearing above the water, such as the sunken Saratov icebreaker — a vessel built in England in the late 19th century and reportedly the world's first river icebreaker.

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