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Forest Destruction From Wildfires in Russia's North Tripled Since 2002 – Study

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A wildfire in Yakutia. **The Aerial Forest Protection Service**

The rate of forest destruction caused by wildfires in Russia's northern latitudes more than tripled between 2012 and 2021 compared to the previous decade, according to a new study by the Space Research Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS).

Using satellite data, researchers calculated the extent of woodland devastation due to wildfires in areas above 60 degrees latitude between 2002 and 2021, splitting the period into two separate decades for comparison.

According to the study's findings, an average of more than 1.2 million hectares of Russia's northern forests were ravaged by wildfires each year between 2012 and 2021. In the decade before, that figure stood at just 359,000 hectares.

Researchers attributed the sharp uptick to unusually destructive wildfire seasons in 2020 and

2021.

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The rate of destruction was especially dramatic in Russia's Arctic region, with researchers noting a more than eightfold increase in forest loss there between 2012 and 2021 when compared to the previous decade.

On average, 100,000 hectares of Arctic forests were ravaged by wildfires each year over that same period, or about 0.2% of the total forest coverage in the northernmost region.

“Northern forests are one of the most crucial carbon sinks and, at the same time, sources of carbon dioxide that plants accumulate during their lifetime and release after death,” the researchers said.

They stressed the importance of improving wildfire management, as well as how scientists estimate and model carbon emissions that are released into the atmosphere.

Last year, researchers at RAS found that Siberia’s boreal forests may soon go from serving as a carbon “sink” to becoming a net source of emissions, as wildfires have grown in both scale and intensity in recent years.

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