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Federal Emergency Declared Over Wildfires in Far East's Zabaikalsky Region

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Russian authorities on Wednesday declared a federal-level state of emergency in the Far Eastern Zabaikalsky region as wildfires continue to rage across vast swathes of forest.

"About 92% of all forest fire areas in the country are currently in the Zabaikalsky region," said Ivan Sovetnikov, head of Russia's Federal Forestry Agency (Rosleskhoz).

The federal emergency designation transfers responsibility for firefighting operations from Rosleskhoz and Russia's Forest Fund to the Emergency Situations Ministry, allowing for additional resources to be deployed. A regional state of emergency has been in place since April 7.

According to Russia's Aerial Forest Protection Service, 44 wildfires were active in the region as of Wednesday, spanning approximately 194,300 hectares (480,100 acres).

Roughly 1,500 personnel, including 739 firefighting parachutists and paratroopers from neighboring regions, are involved in the efforts to contain the fires.

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Emergency Situations Minister Alexander Kurenkov, who visited the region on Monday, said that Russia has recorded at least 680 wildfires so far this year, burning over 178,000 hectares (439,847 acres).

On Wednesday, Kurenkov dispatched an additional 100 specialists and two Il-76 waterbombing aircraft to the Zabaikalsky region.

Experts attribute most of Russia's wildfires to human activity, such as the burning of dry grass intended to mitigate fire risks near settlements. Other contributing factors include a lack of snow cover and an unusually early spring.

Authorities have declared the start of wildfire season across 64 Russian regions, as well as in the occupied Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, and the annexed Crimean city of Sevastopol.

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