The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Wildfires in Siberia's Zabaikalsky Region Cause Nearly $6M in Damage

May 26, 2025



A wildfire in the Zabaikalsky region. **Alexei Zaretsky / TASS**

Wildfires raging across Siberia's Zabaikalsky region have caused at least 459 million rubles ($5.8 million) in damages so far this year, authorities said Monday.

Roughly half of that estimate accounts for damage to forested lands under the control of the federal government, while the rest covers the cost of fighting the blazes, according to the regional Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment.

As of early Monday, wildfires were burning across more than 750,000 hectares (1.8 million acres) of land in Zabaikalsky, accounting for over 97% of all active wildfires in Russia.

In Chita, the regional capital, high school seniors celebrated their final day of classes Saturday under smoke-choked skies. Authorities warned of "extreme" fire danger on Monday and Tuesday due to strong winds.

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A region-wide state of emergency has been in effect in the Zabaikalsky region since early April. A federal emergency was declared on April 23 to free up additional firefighting resources.

Experts have blamed most of this year's wildfires on human activity, particularly the burning of dry grass near villages.

Authorities said they have identified 95 alleged culprits and are seeking to recover firefighting costs and forest damage from them. The cases have been forwarded to regional prosecutors.

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