

Wildfires spread, fish die off amid severe drought in Europe

August 11 2022, by SYLVIE CORBET and VANESSA GERA



A dead chub and other dead fish are swimming in the Oder River near Brieskow-Finkenheerd, eastern Germany, Thursday, Aug. 11, 2022. Huge numbers of dead fish have washed up along the banks of the Oder River between Germany and Poland. Credit: Frank Hammerschmidt/dpa via AP

Firefighters from across Europe struggled Thursday to contain a huge

wildfire in France that has swept through a large swath of pine forest, while Germans and Poles faced a mass fish die-off in a river flowing between their countries.

Europe is suffering under a severe heat wave and drought that has produced tragic consequences for farmers and ecosystems already under threat from climate change and pollution.

The drought is causing a loss of agricultural products and other food at a time when supply shortages and Russia's war against Ukraine have caused inflation to spike.

In France, which is enduring its worst drought on record, flames raged through pine forests overnight, illuminating the sky with an intense orange light in the Gironde region, which was already ravaged by flames last month, and in neighboring Landes. More than 68 square kilometers (26 square miles) have burned since Tuesday.

The French wildfires have already forced the evacuation of about 10,000 people and destroyed at least 16 houses.

Along the Oder River, which flows from Czechia north into the Baltic Sea, volunteers have been collecting dead fish that have washed ashore in Poland and Germany.

Piotr Nieznanski, the conservation policy director at WWF Poland, said it appears that a toxic chemical was released into the water by an industry and the low water levels caused by the drought has made conditions far more dangerous for the fish.



This photo provided by the fire brigade of the Gironde region SDIS 33, (Departmental fire and rescue service 33) shows firefighters tackling a blaze near Hostens, south of Bordeaux, southwestern France, Wednesday, Aug. 10, 2022. Credit: SDIS 33 via AP

"A tragic event is happening along the Oder River, an international river, and there is no transparent information about what is going on," he said, calling on government authorities to investigate.

People living along the river have been warned not to swim in the water or even touch it.

Poland's state water management body said the drought and high temperatures can cause even small amounts of pollution to lead to an

ecological disaster but it has not identified the source of the pollution.

In northern Serbia, the dry bed of the Conopljankso reservoir is now littered with dead fish that were unable to survive the drought.

The water level along Germany's Rhine River was at risk of falling so low that it could become difficult to transport goods—including critical energy items like coal and gasoline.



Dead fishes lie on the banks of the Oder River near Brieskow-Finkenheerd, eastern Germany, Thursday, Aug. 11, 2022. Huge numbers of dead fish have washed up along the banks of the Oder River between Germany and Poland. Credit: Frank Hammerschmidt/dpa via AP

In Italy, which is experiencing its worst drought in seven decades, the parched Po River has already caused billions of euros in losses to farmers who normally rely on Italy's longest river to irrigate their fields and rice paddies.

"I am young and I do not remember anything like this, but even the elderly in my village or the other villages around here have never seen anything like this, never ever," said Antonio Cestari, a 35-year-old farmer in Ficarolo who says he expects to produce only half his usual crops of corn, wheat and soy because his river-fed wells have such low water levels.

The Po runs 652 kilometers (405 miles) from the northwestern city of Turin to Venice. It has dozens of tributary rivers but northern Italy hasn't seen rainfall for months and this year's snowfall was down by 70%. The drying up of the Po is also jeopardizing drinking water in Italy's densely populated and highly industrialized districts.



Horses graze next to a tree that fell years ago on the dried out meadow of a stud farm in Wehrheim near Frankfurt, Germany, Thursday, Aug. 11, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Michael Probst

Over in Portugal, the Serra da Estrela national park was also being ravaged by a wildfire. Some 1,500 firefighters, 476 vehicles and 12 aircraft were deployed to fight it but the wind-driven blaze 250 kilometers (150 miles) northeast of Lisbon was very hard to reach, with inaccessible peaks almost 2,000 meters (6,560 feet) high and deep ravines. The fire has charred 10,000 hectares (25,000 acres) of woodland.

In Britain, where temperatures hit a record 40.3 degrees Celsius (104.5

degrees Fahrenheit) in July, the weather office has issued a new warning for "extreme heat" from Thursday through Sunday, with temperatures forecast to reach 36 C (96.8 F).

It has been one of the driest summers on record in southern Britain, and the Met Office weather service said there is an "exceptional risk" of wildfires over the next few days.



This photo provided by the fire brigade of the Gironde region SDIS 33, (Departmental fire and rescue service 33) shows firefighters tackling a blaze near Saint-Magne, south of Bordeaux, southwestern France, Wednesday, Aug. 10, 2022. Credit: SDIS 33 via AP

London Fire Brigade said its control room had dealt with 340 grass, garbage and open-land fires during the first week of August, eight times the number from last year. Assistant Commissioner Jonathan Smith said "the grass in London is tinderbox dry and the smallest of sparks can start a blaze which could cause devastation."

In Switzerland, a drought and high temperatures have endangered fish populations and authorities have begun moving fish out of some creeks that were running dry.

In Hausen, in the canton of Zurich, officials caught hundreds of fish, many of them brown trout, in the almost dried-up Heischerbach, Juchbach and Muehlebach creeks this week by anesthetizing them with electric shocks and then immediately placing them in a water tank enriched with oxygen, local media reported. Later, the fish were taken to creeks that still carry enough water.



Dead fishes drift in the Oder River near Brieskow-Finkenheerd, eastern Germany, Thursday, Aug. 11, 2022. Huge numbers of dead fish have washed up along the banks of the Oder River between Germany and Poland. Credit: Frank Hammerschmidt/dpa via AP



This photo provided by the fire brigade of the Gironde region SDIS 33, (Departmental fire and rescue service 33) shows firefighters tackling a blaze near Hostens, south of Bordeaux, southwestern France, Wednesday, Aug. 10, 2022. Credit: SDIS 33 via AP



A dead fish drifts in the Oder River near Brieskow-Finkenheerd, eastern Germany, Thursday, Aug. 11, 2022. Huge numbers of dead fish have washed up along the banks of the Oder River between Germany and Poland. Credit: Frank Hammerschmidt/dpa via AP



This photo provided by the fire brigade of the Gironde region SDIS 33, (Departmental fire and rescue service 33) shows firefighters tackling a blaze near Saint-Magne, south of Bordeaux, southwestern France, Wednesday, Aug. 10, 2022. Credit: SDIS 33 via AP



This photo provided by the fire brigade of the Gironde region SDIS 33, (Departmental fire and rescue service 33) shows firefighters tackling a blaze near Saint-Magne, south of Bordeaux, southwestern France, Wednesday, Aug. 10, 2022. Credit: SDIS 33 via AP



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This photo provided by the fire brigade of the Gironde region SDIS 33, (Departmental fire and rescue service 33) shows firefighters observing a blaze near Saint-Magne, south of Bordeaux, southwestern France, Wednesday, Aug. 10, 2022. Credit: SDIS 33 via AP



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This photo provided by the fire brigade of the Gironde region SDIS 33, (Departmental fire and rescue service 33) shows a blaze burning near Saint-Magne, south of Bordeaux, southwestern France, Wednesday, Aug. 10, 2022. Credit: SDIS 33 via AP



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A cut-off water basin with dead trees is exposed at Colliford Lake, where water levels have severely dropped exposing the unseen trees and rocks at Cornwall's largest lake and reservoir, covering more than 900 acres of Bodmin Moor, Cornwall, England, Wednesday Aug. 10, 2022. The Met Office has issued an amber warning for extreme heat covering four days from Thursday to Sunday for parts of England and Wales as a new heatwave looms. Credit: Ben Birchall/PA via AP



Large areas of grass have turned yellow due to the dry conditions in Holyrood Park, Edinburgh, Scotland Wednesday Aug. 10, 2022. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) have issued a 'very high' risk of wildfires alert across southern and eastern Scotland with long, dry sunny spells expected over the coming days. Credit: Jane Barlow/PA via AP



A group of young men cool off in the hot weather by diving into the water at Cullercoats Bay in North Tyneside, England, Wednesday Aug. 10, 2022. The Met Office has issued an amber warning for extreme heat covering four days from Thursday to Sunday for parts of England and Wales as a new heatwave looms. Credit: Owen Humphreys/PA via AP



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Groups of people watch the sun go down from a hill in Ealing, west London, Tuesday Aug. 9, 2022, as a summer of hosepipe bans and fire warnings continues, with a heat health alert coming into place across much of the country. Credit: Victoria Jones/PA via AP

Despite all the harm caused by the extreme weather, Swiss authorities see one morbid upside: they believe there's hope of finding some people who went missing in the mountains in the last few years because their bodies are being released as glaciers melt.

In the Swiss canton of Valais, melting glaciers have recently revealed parts of a crashed airplane and, at separate locations, at least two skeletons. The bodies have not yet been identified, news website 20Minuten reported Thursday.

Spanish state television showed dozens of trucks heading to France having to turn around and stay in Spain because wildfires had forced authorities to close some border crossings. TVE reported that truckers, many carrying perishable goods, were looking for ways to cross the border because the parking areas around the Irun crossing were full.

France this week is in its fourth heat wave of the year as it faces what the government describes as the country's worst drought on record. Temperatures were expected to reach 40 C (104 F) on Thursday.

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