

Mexico tries to bring drought-stricken lake back to life

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Juvenile fish are seen in a bucket before their release in Mexico's Lake Patzcuaro.

Mexican authorities are releasing thousands of juvenile fish and cleaning up freshwater springs as part of efforts to rejuvenate one of the country's

lakes stricken by drought and heat waves.

State workers this week freed 10,000 silverside fish native to Lake Patzcuaro, whose waters attract fishermen and tourists in the western state of Michoacan.

The aim is to release a total of 50,000 fish by the end of the year.

"Let's hope they reproduce," said fisherman Miguel Alba, 46.

"People who live here by the lake live from farming and fishing. But as there aren't any fish anymore, people are having to leave," he added.

Drought, [heat waves](#) and water theft have depleted Lake Patzcuaro's water levels.

Rainfall in Mexico in 2023 was 21 percent below average, making it the driest year since record-keeping began in 1941, according to the National Meteorological Service.

The situation has only worsened this year, with heat records broken in the capital and several other cities.

Another problem stems from avocado producers illegally extracting water from Lake Patzcuaro to irrigate their fields, according to local authorities and residents.

Michoacan is Mexico's main avocado-producing region, and the lucrative trade has attracted the attention of organized crime groups who extort farmers.



A man fishes on Mexico's Lake Patzcuaro, where authorities have released thousands of fish to rebuild stocks hit by drought.



Workers shovel earth on an island in Mexico's Lake Patzcuaro.



Dead fish are seen next to Mexico's polluted Santiago River.

The Michoacan state government estimates that Lake Patzcuaro's surface area is barely half what it was 30 years ago.

Authorities are removing mud, plants and waste to rehabilitate local springs that supply water to the lake.

"We've exceeded our goals," said Julio Cesar Bernal, a biologist working for [local authorities](#).

"Fifteen new springs have been discovered that are producing a new quantity of absolutely crystalline, [clean water](#), which flows directly into the [lake](#)," he said.

Drought and pollution have led to the mass deaths of fish in a number of lakes and waterways in Mexico this year, most recently in the Santiago River in neighboring Jalisco state.

The release of wastewater by companies located upstream was the suspected culprit in that case, according to municipal official Victor Lucio Alvarez.

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