

Medvedev Gives Forestry Agency to Putin

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Forest fires burning in the Ryazan region this month. President Medvedev has ordered that the Federal Forestry Agency be put under the direct control of the government, rather than under the Agriculture **Maria Antonova**

President Dmitry Medvedev has ordered the Federal Forestry Agency to be transferred to the direct control of the government as the authorities take steps to ensure that there will be no repeat to the wildfires that ravaged central Russia last month.

First Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Zubkov told Medvedev on Friday that the forestry agency, which formerly reported to the Agriculture Ministry, operated without sufficient authority.

"As far as protecting the forests and supervising forestry operations and fire safety, it turned out that the agency didn't have these functions — they were in different agencies," he said in comments posted on the Kremlin web site.

Medvedev ordered that the forestry functions of the Federal Veterinary and Phytosanitary Inspection Service and the Agriculture Ministry be transferred to the Federal Forestry Agency

and called for a detailed review of the 2007 Forest Code.

Critics say the Forest Code, signed into law by then-President Vladimir Putin, was the main culprit behind the fires because it dismantled a centralized system of forest oversight for a more regional system.

Environmentalists supported the bureaucratic shakeup. The World Wildlife Federation "has long called for this step, but the state recognized its necessity only after catastrophic fires, which are only an indicator of systemic problems in forest management," it said in a statement.

The WWF also called for the government to engage more actively with society over forestry policy and for further reforms to the forestry legislation.

The forestry agency's head, Alexei Savinov, was fired two weeks ago and was replaced with his deputy, Viktor Maslyakov.

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