

Chile Declares Emergency as Wildfires Rage in Ancient Forest



Santiago de Chile, March 25 (teleSUR-RHC) The Chilean government has declared a red alert in three national parks and reserves as massive wildfires are threatening ancient forests, officials said on Tuesday.

The National Emergency Office (ONEMI) said that firefighters have been battling the flames for more than a week in the drought-stricken southern region of Araucania.

The government agency also warned the fires would likely spread and intensify. Authorities said the fires have burnt over 6,000 hectares of reserves, among them the Conguillio national park, which is famous for its thousand-year-old pines known as monkey puzzle trees.

Local press reported that citizens in the nearby areas have complained about the slow response from authorities', however high temperatures and strong winds of more than 30 miles an hour are complicating the firefighters' efforts.

The country's Interior Ministry said that brigades from Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay are battling to extinguish the blaze, which threaten hundreds of plant species and animal life. A total of 200 firefighters are currently in the area, backed by planes and helicopters.

President Michelle Bachellet, who has previously expressed her concern for the intense drought affecting the country, has announced millions of dollars in investments to improve access to underground water and to construct desalination plants.

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