

China's large lakes face water shortages

Two of China's largest lakes along the Yangtze River, the Poyang and Dongting, face extreme water shortages, local authorities and environment observers have said.

Last year, Poyang, China's largest freshwater lake, entered its low season 54 days earlier than in previous years. By Tuesday, the water level at Xingzi station was 8.37 meters, 2 meters lower than the average in the low season.

The overall water area of the Poyang Lake is currently 351 square kilometers, about one-fourth of what it is in flood season, according to the local water resources department.

The Dongting Lake in Hunan Province is also drying out. The drinking water supply of residents and local animals is also under threat.

Hu Zhenpeng, director of the Jiangxi provincial ecological civilization association, said aquatic vegetation on the Poyang Lake had reduced by 400 square kilometers and many animals had died due to the drought.

"As the lake beds are exposed, lake species such as the Yangtze dolphin have an even smaller space to live in," Hu said.

"I did not catch much big fish for the whole of the winter," said Zhang Donggun, a 57-year-old farmer in Lushan City, Jiangxi Province.

"Usually fish lay eggs in the Yangtze, and around the beginning of April they come to the Poyang Lake to grow. But if water levels are too low, they do not have room to grow," he said.

Facing stark water shortages around the two lakes, farmers have had to switch from a double crop rice to a single crop breed.

There have been proposals to establish sluice gates to regulate water for the two lakes, but experts have warned that gates could create more problems than they could solve.

"The management of the two lakes could impact the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River and even impact the economic and social development of the whole country," said Chen Jin, an expert with the Yangtze River Research Institute.

"Waste water discharged into the lake area must be controlled, and the efficiency of water use needs to be improved," he said.