

Worst drought in recent Polish history likely: hydrologist

The lack of precipitation last winter and this spring, has left Poland in danger of experiencing the worst drought in recent history, warns Vice President of the Polish Academy of Sciences and hydrologist, professor Paweł Rowiński.

According to the Institute of Meteorology and Water Management (IMGW-PIB), March 2020 was a very dry month. Most stations reported the total precipitation significantly lower than the annual norm recorded over the past several years.

Poland has already experienced a dry summer last year. Furthermore, last winter was exceptionally warm and there was very little snow in the higher parts of the Tatra mountains and none at all in some parts of Poland, which has been followed by an extremely dry spring so far.

Hydrological drought

As a result, Poland is already experiencing signs of the worst kind of drought, the so-called hydrological drought. The signs include very low levels of water in rivers and low groundwater. In many places in Poland, soil moisture is as low as 30 percent, which is indicative of the lack of water at the plant root level.

To make matters worse, Poland is particularly lacking in surface waters compared to other countries in the EU, which is due to the country's natural geological makeup and unfavorable climate conditions.

Inadequate water management

Unfortunately, the existing model of water management is not conducive to water retention. "We retain far too little rainwater - merely 6.5 percent, while water retention is crucial in drought prevention," explains prof. Rowiński.

There are various ways of retaining water, for example, the creation of wetlands, marshes, and ponds. Establishing multiple smaller reservoirs of water is preferable to having just a few large ones.

Moreover, intensive amelioration negatively impacts water management.

“Cities can also retain water. I mean “cities-sponges”, where there is very little concrete in favor of many green spaces and trees, which retain water for longer periods of time,” emphasizes prof. Rowiński.

Unfortunately, there is no quick and easy fix for reversing droughts warns prof. Rowiński: “We can minimize droughts only by implementing long-term initiatives. Although droughts are a natural phenomenon, their frequency in Poland since 2018 stems from global climate changes, also caused by humans”.

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