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Headline: Peru glaciers decimated by climate change – report

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FILE PHOTO: A view of the lake formed by meltwater from the Pastoruri glacier, as seen from atop the glacier in Huaraz, September 19, 2013. Picture taken September 19, 2013. REUTERS/Mariana Bazo/File Photo

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LIMA — Peru has lost 56% of its tropical glaciers in the last six decades due to climate change, according to a new government inventory released Wednesday.

Peru holds 68% of the world's tropical glaciers, and warming temperatures have led to melting and creating new mountain lagoons that risk overflowing and flooding, the National Institute of Research of Mountain Glaciers and Ecosystems said.

The report uses satellite imagery until 2020 and shows that 2,084 glaciers cover 1,050 square kilometers (405 square miles) in Peru, compared to the 2,399 square kilometers of ice and snow in 1962.

"In four years, from 2016 to 2020, we have lost almost 6% of these high mountain glaciers," Beatriz Fuentealba, the institute's director, said from the Ancash region, where many glaciers have disappeared.

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According to the inventory, 164 lagoons have been formed or are forming in the last four years, bringing the number of glacial lagoons up to 8,466, covering about 1,081 square kilometers.

"The new lagoons could be, in the future, water reserves, but being at high altitudes, they cause a danger of overflowing and flooding," said Jesus Gomez, director of research on glaciers at the Ministry of the Environment.

Nearly all of Peru's tropical glaciers are above 6,000 meters (19,685 feet) above sea level, while the new lagoons are at an altitude of between 4,000 and 5,000 meters, the report said.

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Almost 20 million Peruvians benefit directly or indirectly from the water that comes down from the glaciers, according to the report.

"This means that we have lost more than half of our water reserves," said Environment Minister Albina Ruiz, noting that glacial retreat is impacting the natural mountain ecosystem.

“Although we cannot prevent glaciers from disappearing over the years, we can reduce the speed at which they are being lost,” she said, calling for less pollution, more green areas, and “above all, recognizing that the mountain provides us with life.”

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