

China reports shrinking deserts

China's deserts are shrinking annually at a rate of about 3,000 square miles.

A senior forestry official said that the new finding sharply contrasts with the 4,000 square mile annual expansion at the end of the 20th century, the official news agency Xinhua reported.

Zhu Lieke, deputy director of the State Forestry Administration said data showed the desertification that started in China in the late 1990s has been "primarily brought under control." Addressing the Beijing International Conference on Women and Desertification, Zhu said that although China is much more aware of the problem than in the past, "the work in this regard remains tough."

Chinese officials say desertification affects the lives of 400 million people and causes annual economic losses of 54 billion yuan (\$6.75 billion).

The Chinese government spends about 2 billion yuan (\$250 million) a year fighting desertification.

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