

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JACOB KUSHNER / CONTRIBUTOR

Mystery of the rising Caribbean lakes

HISPANIOLA – On the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, home to the sovereign nations of the Dominican Republic and Haiti, two large lakes are rising dramatically.

Lake Azuéi in Haiti submerged an entire community; across the border in the Dominican Republic, Lake Enriquillo has risen nearly 33 feet in just 10 years. As their land flooded, many farmers began cutting down trees to make charcoal to earn a living, leading to deforestation.

Scientists from across the globe have tried to solve the mystery behind the rising lakes. Some think climate change is to blame, arguing that warming seas created more evaporation and clouds, which led to more rainfall. But if true, that would be strange, because in most of the world climate change is causing lakes to shrink.

The phenomenon is spurring calls for more research to help explain – and mitigate – the situation. Until scientists are able to identify the cause and work toward a solution, thousands of farmers on this Caribbean island will have to adapt.

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RICH CLABAUGH/STAFF

2 NET EFFECT Fishermen near Lake Azuéi repair their nets. When the lake rose, many Haitians began to fish, which quickly led to overfishing.



1 SHIPMENT A man loads a bag of charcoal onto a boat bound for a market near Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Haiti's Lake Azuéi grew so significantly that it breached the Dominican border, making it easier to illegally ferry Dominican charcoal to Haiti.



3 NEW BEGINNING When Lake Enriquillo swallowed the land where he grew vegetables near the Dominican town of Duvergé, Demetrio, who asked to not use his last name, says the only way to earn a living was to cut down trees to produce charcoal to sell to Haiti. He left the charcoal business only recently, after he was hired at an agricultural cooperative.

4 WATERY RUINS The rooflines of a few houses are all that remain of the Haitian village of Letant. All of the 83 families living here were displaced to higher ground when Lake Azuéi flooded their homes.



5 FERAL LAND Pigs scavenge amid the rubble of the village of Boca de Cachón, at the western edge of Lake Enriquillo. Residents were relocated by the Dominican government as the lake encroached upon the town. Dominican engineers destroyed their houses so that they wouldn't move back.