

Forest-mapping satellite to join Earth study mission, ESA said

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A view of the forest in French Guyana near Dorlin, on December 1, 2012. A satellite that will map the world's forests has been chosen for the seventh mission in Europe's Earth Explorer project, the European Space Agency (ESA) said Tuesday.

A satellite that will map the world's forests has been chosen for the seventh mission in Europe's Earth Explorer project, the European Space Agency (ESA) said Tuesday.

Dubbed "Biomass", the satellite will use sophisticated [radar technology](#) to map and monitor living matter—plants and animals—as well as inorganic carbon contained in forests, one of the world's most precious resources.

"This information, which is poorly known in the tropics, is essential to our understanding of the role of forests in Earth's carbon cycle and in climate change," ESA said in a statement.

It will also allow scientists to map the elevation of inaccessible parts of the planet covered by dense vegetation, and provide data on sub-surface geology and ice-sheet cover.

ESA said its Earth Observation programme board selected "Biomass" on Tuesday from among three proposed missions.

It is due to be launched in 2020.

Earth Explorer missions already in orbit are providing data on the cryosphere—those parts of Earth's surface where water is frozen—as well as on gravity, soil moisture and [ocean salinity](#).

Future missions that have already been approved will study the Earth's magnetic field, wind and radiation.

Earth Explorer seeks a better understanding of the changes our planet is undergoing, including the [effects of global warming](#) and population growth.

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