

Study says deforested areas in the Amazon vulnerable to loss of legal protections

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Uncontacted indigenous tribe in the Brazilian state of Acre. Credit: Gleilson Miranda / Governo do Acre / Wikipedia

A study published today in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)* finds that protected areas that are deforested are more

likely to subsequently lose legal protections.

The study examined 62 [protected areas](#) in Rondônia, Brazil, home to immense stretches of the Amazon, and found that when protected lands are deforested, the government often later reduced or wholly eliminated an area's legal protections.

"It's a [vicious cycle](#)," says Mike Mascia, Senior Director, Social Sciences at Conservation International and co-author of the study. "If a protected area has suffered from deforestation, then it becomes vulnerable to loss of legal protections. And if a government scales back some or all legal protections, then the remaining forest may be even more vulnerable to the forces that led to deforestation in the first place."

Scientists refer to these legal changes as PADDD, which stands for protected area downgrading, downsizing or degazettement, says Mascia. "A very fresh and well-known example is what happening to Bear's Ears National Monument, in Utah. President Trump reduced the size of Bear's Ears—that's PADDD. Now that area is open for mining."

"The government's support for economic development in Rondônia – and the subsequent deforestation in Rondonian protected areas—is emblematic of the challenges facing protected areas around the world," said Rodrigo Medeiros, VP of Conservation International Brazil.

"There's a misconception that these areas aren't bringing any benefits to society. Protected areas provide clean air, carbon storage, freshwater—the benefits are innumerable. It's critical that governments factor in the ecological importance of protected areas and enforce protections for conservation outcomes."

One of the highlights of the study is that effective governance of protected areas—making sure they don't get deforested in the first place—may create a virtuous cycle, by helping to ensure legal

protections endure over the long term and, thus, sustain the very forests that merit [protection](#).

More information: Anteneh T. Tesfaw et al. Land-use and land-cover change shape the sustainability and impacts of protected areas, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2018). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1716462115](#)

Provided by Conservation International

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