

# Indigenous peoples key to saving threatened forests

January 7 2020, by Patrick Galey

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A new assessment of how wild forests are maintained showed that indigenous people have tenure over 36 percent of Earth's remaining intact forest landscapes

More than a third of the world's vanishing pristine forests are managed by indigenous peoples under threat from development and deforestation,

scientists said Tuesday, calling for greater protection.

As deadly bushfires ravage Australia's east coast, a new assessment of how wild forests are maintained showed that [indigenous people](#) have tenure over 36 percent of Earth's remaining intact forest landscapes.

These are mosaics of forest and adjoining landscapes untouched by human development or [habitat loss](#) and form key protection against [climate change](#) and biodiversity loss.

Indigenous peoples play a vital role in maintaining ecosystems and use traditional methods to manage forests that have proven to be more effective in many cases than modern conservation techniques.

These peoples are currently under attack in several countries, led by Brazil where President Jair Bolsonaro's government is taking steps to legalise mining on [indigenous lands](#).

## 'Important climate protection'

An international team of scientists conducted a geospatial analysis of 50 countries where pristine forests remain, overlaid with maps of indigenous people's lands.

They found that while untouched forest areas had declined 8.2 percent since 2000 on indigenous land, the number was higher—10 percent this century—in areas outside their stewardship.



A military helicopter flies above a burning woodchip mill in Australia's New South Wales state

Intact [forest](#) landscapes "provide critical environmental services and important climate protection," said John Fa, from Manchester Metropolitan University's School of Science and the Environment.

Official data released last month by Brazil's National Institute for Space Research (INPE) showed that the pace of deforestation in the Amazon had more than doubled in a year since Bolsonaro took office.

Authors of the paper, published in the journal *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, called on world governments to safeguard indigenous peoples' rights and include them in the fight against climate change.



Fa said that the severity of fires currently destroying habitats across southeast Australia could be partly attributed to poor planning and resource management by successive governments.

"Some Indigenous people in Australia are pointing out that the recent fires may not have been so catastrophic had there been what we think was traditional fire management of these forests," he told AFP.



Fires have ravaged swathes of the Amazon this year

Climate change doubles the risk of the extreme heat and dryness Australia is currently experiencing, according to one peer-reviewed

study from 2016, and extends the annual wildfire period.

Fa said that the government of Australia was "reaping what is sowed not only from resisting [climate](#) action internationally or nationally for decades but also from the colonial processes that robbed indigenous people of the land, and robbed the land of indigenous management."

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