

# Brazilian Amazon deforestation hits new record in May

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Deforestation continued to surge in the Brazilian Amazon last month, according to official figures released Friday, showing it was the worst May and worst first five months of the year on record.

Environmentalists warn 2020 is on track to be the most destructive year ever for the world's biggest rainforest, with even more losses than in

devastating fires that triggered global outcry last year.

"We are facing a scenario of total catastrophe for the Amazon," Mariana Napolitano, scientific director at the World Wildlife Fund's Brazil office, said in a statement.

A total of 829 square kilometers (320 square miles) in the Brazilian Amazon, 14 times the area of Manhattan, was lost to [deforestation](#) in May, according to satellite data from Brazil's National Space Research Institute (INPE).

That was a 12-percent increase from last year, and the worst May since record keeping began in August 2015.

Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon is now at more than 2,000 square kilometers so far this year, up 34 percent from the same period last year.

That is all the more worrying given that the most destructive months are still ahead—the dry season, from around June to October, when [forest fires](#) accelerate the deforestation caused by illegal loggers, miners and farmers.

The Amazon Environmental Research Institute (IPAM) forecast this week that 9,000 square kilometers of cleared forest would be primed to burn by August, potentially causing far worse fires than last year, when 9,169 square kilometers were lost to deforestation of all kinds for the entire year, according to INPE.

Activists accuse Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right climate change skeptic, of emboldening those responsible for deforestation with calls to legalize farming and mining on protected lands.

"The government has made clear its total disregard for the environment,

the forest and Brazilian people's lives," Greenpeace campaigner Cristiane Mazzetti said in a statement.

The deforestation crisis has converged with the coronavirus crisis in Brazil, the latest epicenter in the pandemic, with more than 40,000 deaths so far.

The health emergency has reduced environmental authorities' capacity to police the forest, experts say.

And when fire season starts, the resulting smoke risks causing a spike in respiratory emergencies in a region already overwhelmed with them because of COVID-19.

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