

Colombia lost forest area the size of Sao Paulo in 2019: report

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A handout picture from Colombia's Defence Ministry shows smoke billowing from the Sierra de La Macarena National Natural Park, Colombia, in 2019. The Latin America country has lost hundreds of thousands of hectares of forest in recent years

Colombia lost 159,000 hectares of forest—an area the size of Brazilian

megacity Sao Paulo—to deforestation in 2019, according to an official report presented on Thursday.

Although considerable, it represents a 19 percent reduction in deforestation compared to the 197,000 hectares destroyed in 2018. In 2017, that figure was 219,000.

"We've managed to control a growing trend of deforestation," said Maria Claudia Garcia, the deputy minister for the environment and [sustainable development](#).

"The results are promising but this isn't a triumphalist message."

Yolanda Gonzalez, director of the state Institute of Hydrology, Meteorology and Environmental Studies (IDEAM), said it was "good news."

Some 62 percent of the deforestation was in the Amazon, the world's largest rainforest that spans across Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela.

The loss of forest was worst in departments blighted by armed criminal groups.

However, IDEAM's forests system coordinator Edersson Cabrera pointed to the "significant slowdown" in the Amazon region, which accounted for 70 percent of the country's deforestation in 2018.

The main causes of loss of forests are an increase in farmland, [illegal logging](#) and mining, and drug plantations, which according to the United Nations accounted for 154,000 hectares in 2019.

Colombia, one of the most biodiverse countries in the world, has

committed to reducing deforestation in the Amazon to zero in 2020, although experts doubt it can realistically achieve that target.

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