

Researchers warn of climate repercussions if Brazilian highway through the Amazon is paved

August 7 2020, by Bob Yirka



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A pair of researchers with the National Institute for Research in Amazonia has posted an open letter in the journal *Science* warning of the negative repercussions of resuming paving of a road through a part of the Amazon. In their letter, Lucas Ferrante and Philip Martin Fearnside

suggest that resumption of paving will lead to releasing large amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, further contributing to global warming.

Back in 1973, the Brazilian army built a [road](#) through part of the Amazon [rainforest](#)—called BR-319, it was subsequently abandoned in 1988. The army paved just a small portion of the highway, leaving the rest plain dirt—it runs from Porto Velho, a town in a part of the rainforest that has already been deforested, to Manaus, which lies very deep in pristine parts of the Amazon. The highway is currently used by farmers, ranchers, squatters and Indigenous people.

This past June, officials with Brazil's government announced that it had initiated plans for paving the rest of the highway. In their letter, Ferrante and Fearnside suggest that doing so without conducting an environmental impact assessment would be a mistake. They note that paving the highway would involve cutting down more trees because a highway would be much wider than a simple dirt road—they estimate that 138,000 square acres would be deforested. They further note that such deforestation would lead to the release of massive amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, making it more difficult for the world to head off global warming.

The authors also note that carving roads through the rainforest has traditionally led to human encroachment—small roads leading to the highway are built, buildings are erected to feed and provide fuel for those passing by, and some people would come to live in the area. Such encroachment, they note, would lead to even more deforestation. They further suggest that paving the highway will set a precedent for other projects in the rainforest, such as building [hydroelectric dams](#) or constructing other new highways. They conclude by claiming that paving the highway will signal to the [international community](#) that Brazil is not willing to comply with climate commitments the country has made

regarding protection of the rainforest.

More information: The Amazon's road to deforestation, *Science* 07 Aug 2020: Vol. 369, Issue 6504, pp. 634. [DOI: 10.1126/science.abd6977](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abd6977)

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