

2020 another grim year for Brazilian Amazon

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2020 was a devastating year for the Brazilian Amazon

Deforestation destroyed the equivalent of more than two football pitches each minute in the Brazilian Amazon in 2020, another devastating year for a resource seen as vital to curbing climate change, according to government data released Friday.

Brazilian space agency INPE identified 8,426 square kilometers (3,253 square miles) of Amazon rainforest lost to [deforestation](#) in 2020, using its DETER monitoring program, which analyzes [satellite images](#) to track the destruction monthly.

That was the second-most devastating year for Brazil's share of the world's biggest rainforest since the program was launched in 2015.

The amount of forest destroyed was only larger in 2019, when the figure came in at 9,178 square kilometers.

Environmentalists underlined that those were also the first two years in office for far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, who has cut funding for environmental programs and pushed to open protected Amazon lands to agribusiness and mining.

"The two years of the Bolsonaro administration have been the worst two years (of deforestation) recorded in the DETER program," said Marcio Astrini of the Brazilian Climate Observatory, a coalition of environmental groups.

"That's no coincidence. It's the result of the current government's policies of environmental destruction," he said in a statement.

The Brazilian space agency also operates another satellite-based monitoring program known as PRODES that analyzes deforestation once a year in greater detail.

That analysis, released in November, was even more alarming: it found deforestation surged 9.5 percent annually in the 12 months to August 2020, destroying 11,088 square kilometers of the Brazilian Amazon—an area larger than Jamaica.

The destruction in Brazil, the world's biggest exporter of beef and soybeans, is being driven largely by farmers, ranchers and land speculators bulldozing trees and burning them to make way for crops and pasture.

That has also fueled a surge in destructive wildfires.

The number of fires in the Brazilian Amazon increased 16 percent last year, to a total of more than 103,000.

Fires also devastated the Pantanal wetlands to the south, a paradise of biodiversity that saw an estimated one-quarter of its surface area go up in flames last year.

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