

Brazil reports more Amazon fires so far this year than all of 2021

September 19 2022, by Eugenia LOGIURATTO



View of a burnt area in the Amazon rainforest in the region of Candeias do Jamari, Rondonia state, northern Brazil, on September 2, 2022.

The number of forest fires in the Brazilian Amazon so far this year has already surpassed that for all of 2021, according to official figures

released Monday that triggered new alarm for the world's biggest rainforest.

Satellite monitoring has detected 75,592 fires from January 1 to September 18, already higher than the 75,090 detected for all of last year, according to the Brazilian space agency, INPE.

The latest grim news from the rainforest will likely add to pressure on President Jair Bolsonaro, who is fighting to win reelection next month and faces international criticism over a surge in destruction in the Amazon on his watch.

Since the far-right agribusiness ally took office in January 2019, average annual deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon has increased by 75 percent compared to the previous decade, destroying the forest cover of an area nearly the size of Puerto Rico last year.

Experts say Amazon fires are caused mainly by illegal farmers, ranchers and speculators clearing land and torching the trees.

Despite the advancing destruction, the Bolsonaro administration has slashed budgets for environmental enforcement operations and pushed to open protected Amazon lands to mining.

Greenpeace Brazil spokesman Andre Freitas called the latest figures a "tragedy foretold."

"After four years of a clear and objective anti-environmental policy by the federal government, we are seeing that as we approach the end of this government's term—one of the darkest periods ever for the Brazilian environment—land-grabbers and other illegal actors see it as the perfect opportunity to advance on the forest," he said in a statement.

Election-year row

This has been a worrying year for the Amazon, a key buffer against global warming.

Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon last month was nearly double the figure from August 2021, at 1,661 square kilometers (641 square miles).

And since the burning season began in earnest in August with the arrival of drier weather, the number of fires has soared.

According to INPE figures, there have been multiple days that surpassed the so-called "Day of Fire" on August 10, 2019, when farmers launched a coordinated plan to burn huge amounts of felled rainforest in the northern state of Para.

Then, fires sent thick gray smoke all the way to Sao Paulo, some 2,500 kilometers (1,500 miles) away, and triggered a global outcry over images of one of Earth's most vital resources burning.

Bolsonaro vehemently rejects that criticism, insisting Brazil "protects its forests much better than Europe" and batting away international alarm with the line: "The Amazon belongs to Brazilians, and always will."

The front-runner vying to unseat him in next month's presidential elections, leftist ex-president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, has vowed to do a better job protecting the Amazon.

Deforestation in Brazil's 60-percent share of the Amazon basin fell sharply under Lula, from nearly 28,000 square kilometers in 2004 to 7,000 in 2010.

Still, he has faced criticism from environmentalists for his own track

record, which notably included the controversial decision to build the massive Belo Monte hydroelectric dam in the Amazon.

And the highest number of fires ever recorded in the Brazilian Amazon by INPE, whose records go back to 1998, was on his watch: 218,637, in 2004.

© 2022 AFP

Citation: Brazil reports more Amazon fires so far this year than all of 2021 (2022, September 19) retrieved 21 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-09-brazil-amazon-year.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.