

Deforestation in Brazil Amazon falls, more Indigenous reserves approved

September 6 2023



A forest fire burns in Mato Grosso state, Brazil in September 2021.

Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon fell by 66 percent in August versus the same month last year, the government said Tuesday, while also announcing the demarcation of two new Indigenous reserves.

"In August, we had a reduction of 66.11 percent in [deforestation](#)" in Brazil's share of the world's biggest rainforest, Environment Minister Marina Silva told a ceremony marking Amazon Day.

That followed a similar year-on-year drop of 66 percent in July—both crucial months in the Amazon, where deforestation typically surges this time of year with the onset of drier weather.

According to satellite monitoring by Brazil's space research institute, INPE, deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon wiped out 1,661 square kilometers (641 square miles) in August 2022, the last year of far-right Jair Bolsonaro's term.

Bolsonaro (2019-2022), an ally of the powerful agribusiness industry blamed for driving the destruction, presided over a sharp increase in deforestation in the Amazon.

"These results show the determination of the Lula administration to break the cycle of abandonment and regression seen under the previous government," Silva said.

"If we don't protect the forest and its people, we'll condemn the world to a brutal increase of CO₂ emissions and, as a result, accelerating climate change."

New Indigenous reserves

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who previously led Brazil from 2003 to 2010, returned to office in January vowing to protect the threatened Amazon, whose carbon-absorbing trees are a vital buffer against global warming.

Key to that pledge, researchers say, are Indigenous reserves, considered

bulwarks against deforestation.

"If there is no future for the Amazon and its people, there will be no future for the planet either," Lula said in his announcement of the two new reserves.

His government in April already issued decrees recognizing six new Indigenous territories, authorizing Indigenous peoples to occupy the land and have exclusive use of its resources.

Another six could be demarcated by the end of the year, the [government](#) said Tuesday.

The country has some 800 reserves, but around a third of them have not been officially demarcated, according to Brazil's Indigenous affairs agency.

No new reserves had been demarcated under Bolsonaro.

The demarcations—of the 187,000-hectare (462,000-acre) Rio Gregorio reserve and the 18,000-hectare (44,000-acre) Acapuri de Cima reserve—come as the country awaits a key Supreme Court decision that could derail or enshrine Indigenous gains.

The law currently only recognizes ancestral territories that were occupied by Indigenous communities at the time Brazil's constitution was promulgated in 1988.

But Indigenous leaders say certain territories were no longer occupied at that point because communities had been expelled from them, particularly during the military dictatorship from the 1960s to the 1980s.

The case will either validate or invalidate the 1988 cut-off. So far, six of

11 judges have voted—four against the cut-off, two in favor. Voting is set to resume September 20.

Indigenous reserves occupy 13.75 percent of Brazil's territory, with most—like the two approved Tuesday—in the Amazon.

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Citation: Deforestation in Brazil Amazon falls, more Indigenous reserves approved (2023, September 6) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-09-deforestation-brazil-amazon-falls-indigenous.html>

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