

Nearly 70 percent of Argentine forests lost in a century

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A partial view of the lenga's forest taken from the base of Perito Moreno glacier in 2008 in Patagonia, Argentina. Argentina has lost nearly 70 percent of its forests in a century, the Environmental Secretariat said at a UN conference on desertification.

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Forests that spread across 100 million hectares (247 million acres) in 1900 have dwindled to 33.19 million hectares (82 million acres), officials said.

"In 100 years, we have lost between 60 and 70 percent of our forest heritage," Environmental Undersecretary Sergio La Rocca told reporters on Friday.

Forest destruction has accelerated in the past 10 years with the boom of soy crops, a major motor of growth in Argentina, the top exporter of soy flour and oil and the third-largest exporter of soy seeds.

The northern province of Salta alone lost 26 percent of its forests in the past 30 years, according to a study by the College of Agronomics at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA).

The UBA study found that in 2007, "the highest rate was reached: 2.1 percent of forests destroyed in a single year."

Faced with the breadth of the devastation in the province, the Supreme Court ordered a halt to deforestation in natural forests, following an appeal by indigenous populations.

The move ran counter to the provincial authorities, which had authorized [forest](#) exploitation.

La Rocca spoke at the ninth session of the conference of parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCDD) in Buenos Aires.

The scourge of desertification directly affects 200 million people, according to UN figures.

Buenos Aires will host the 23rd World Forestry Congress October 18-23, a forum where governments, civil society and the private sector exchange views to formulate forestry policy.

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