

Brazil firefighters race to contain wetland blazes

5 August 2020, by Rogerio Florentino, With Jordi Miro In Brasilia



Aerial view showing large scale forest fires in Pocone, Pantanal region (the largest tropical wetlands in the world), Mato Grosso State, Brazil on August 1, 2020

A tractor cuts a firebreak through the vegetation of the Pantanal, the world's biggest tropical wetlands, as firefighters race to contain the blazes that have been devastating one of the most biodiverse regions on Earth.

The Brazilian Pantanal suffered a record 1,684 fires last month, triple the number from July 2019, according to [satellite images](#).

It was the worst month on record for fires in the [region](#), which sits on the southern edge of the Amazon rainforest and stretches from Brazil into Paraguay and Bolivia.

Firefighters have been working around the clock to contain the blazes, with the help of residents of the city of Pocone and the surrounding area.

"We've been fighting this one for about 10 days. We've already lost 50,000 hectares," or 125,000 acres, firefighter Adrison Parques de Aguilar told AFP.

Eighty percent of the Pantanal is typically covered in water in the rainy season. But the region has had a drought this year, leaving large swathes of vegetation at risk of going up in flames.

The fires are sometimes set by ranchers clearing land to graze cattle, even though President Jair Bolsonaro, under pressure to protect the Amazon and the Pantanal, decreed a four-month ban on agricultural fires in July.

Dozens of columns of smoke rise along the Transpantaneira, a highway linking the region's ranches and [tourist destinations](#).



Firefighters prepare to fight forest fires in Pocone, Pantanal region, Mato Grosso State, Brazil on July 31, 2020

"The flora and fauna are being devastated. This is causing irreparable environmental damage," said Aguilar.

The firefighters advance single file through the wetlands, putting out remnant fires and looking for others burning underground.

The last in line carries a rifle to fend off jaguars.

The region is also home to yellow anacondas, jabiru storks, giant otters, toucans, macaws and hundreds of other species.

Human inhabitants, meanwhile, are worried about the impact the smoke will have on their health.

The issue is all the more pressing amid the coronavirus pandemic, which has caused more infections and deaths in Brazil than any other country except the United States.

The smoke only increases the risk of respiratory emergencies in a region already facing an onslaught of them because of the virus.



Firefighters extinguish forest fires in Pocone, Pantanal region, Mato Grosso State, Brazil on July 31, 2020

"It's the dry weather that's causing all this. We haven't had rain in months," said rancher Antonio Santana Correia Marques.

"The Pantanal needs rain."

© 2020 AFP

APA citation: Brazil firefighters race to contain wetland blazes (2020, August 5) retrieved 31 October 2020 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-08-brazil-firefighters-wetland-blazes.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.