

Amazon Rainforest and Brazil's Pantanal May Disappear Due to Illegal Deforestation and Arson

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In Brazil, a serious environmental crisis is approaching. The Amazon Forest and the Brazilian Pantanal are suffering the direct consequences of deforestation and irregular exploitation of their natural resources, which are already beginning to threaten the very existence of these biomes.

At the beginning of October, around 50 civil society organizations joined together to demand from the National Development Bank (BNDS) – Brazilian federal bank whose objective is to finance large national economic projects – the release of financial resources for the Amazon Fund – a project that aims to undertake a series of initiatives for the preservation of natural resources and combating deforestation in the Amazon Forest. The reason why the Amazon Fund needed to resort to BNDS is simple: its external partners are ending alliances due to the misuse of money.

Last year, Germany and Norway suspended transfers after Environment Minister Ricardo Salles announced changes to the fund's management. Such changes significantly reduced the participation of the civil society and entities in defense of the forest, which began to be questioned by environmentalists as a possible scheme to prevent the implementation of environmental defense projects, facilitating deforestation. Still, recently, the campaign "DefundBolsonaro" was created, with a strong presence of indigenous community leaders and environmental activists, whose objective is to pressure companies and investors that support President Bolsonaro to cease financing his government due to the serious environmental impact of his policies.

Another factor that is currently on the rise and strongly contributes to the destruction of the Amazon is the spread of fires. Since the beginning of July, the number of fires in the Amazon has increased by almost 30% over the same period last year.

The Amazon rainforest had 6,803 fires in July. The previous month had already been the worst June in the last 13 years, according to official data from the National Institute for Space Research (INPE). In August, 29,307 fire outbreaks were reported, 12.4% above the historical average.

Faced with the catastrophic scenario in the Amazon rainforest, Bolsonaro acts through silence and denialism, completely ignoring the existence of such fires and further encouraging deforestation and the destruction of the native forest for the expansion of agribusiness – most of these fires are caused by farmers interested in expanding pasture for cattle or destroying native vegetation for the cultivation of agricultural products.

A recent episode that caused particular collective indignation, mainly on social networks,

was the release of a [video](#) of Bolsonaro's participation in a meeting of the Davos Economic Forum, in 2019, in which the president and foreign minister, Ernesto Araújo, talked privately with former US Vice President Al Gore. In this private and informal conversation, Al Gore mentions that he is deeply concerned about the situation in the Amazon and Bolsonaro replies that there are many resources in the Amazon and that he "would like to explore them with the United States". The tone of absolute disdain with which the Brazilian president refers to the largest biome in his country has caused revolt not only in Brazil, but among environmentalists worldwide.



Brazil's Amazon, Forest Fires, August 2020

Despite the serious situation in the Amazon, the case of the Brazilian Pantanal is similarly terrible and even more worrying.

The Pantanal had in August the worst month in its history regarding fires, with 5,935 ones reported. In the previous month, July, the Pantanal also recorded the highest number of fires in a month of July in its history. Although the numbers appear to be lower than those in the Amazon, the situation in the Pantanal is more worrying since this biome is much smaller than the Amazon rainforest.

According to several experts, the Brazilian Pantanal may disappear completely in less than three decades if public policies for environmental purposes are not promptly implemented in order to stop deforestation and fires. The disappearance of the Pantanal would bring with it the extinction of several animal and plant species that only exist in this biome or that have its largest population there. In addition, the impact on the Brazilian economy would be gigantic, due to the economic potential of the region, where tourism and the rational and sustainable exploitation of natural resources earn millions of dollars every year.

The path Bolsonaro is taking is a true political suicide. The neglecting on the environmental issue will cost Brazil to stay completely out of the new global dynamic, where sustainability and investments in environmental projects are assuming a central role in the world economy – which will be even more evident in the post-pandemic world. Still, Bolsonaro can

reawaken the debate around the internationalization of the Amazon – a topic previously suggested by Emmanuel Macron and which has gained great popularity among politicians worldwide. Still, something like a defense of the internationalization of the Pantanal may also come up, which would be a serious blow against Brazilian sovereignty and national unity.

The question that remains is: having the debate about the internationalization of Brazilian biomes already arisen and Bolsonaro affirmed that he wanted to “explore the Amazon with the US”, would the Brazilian president really be innocent or interested in bringing these biomes to the foreign domain?

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