

Deforestation in Brazil's Amazon falls 66% in August

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A view of a deforested area in the middle of the Amazon forest, near the BR-230 highway, known as Transamazonica, in the municipality of Uruara, Para, Brazil, July 14, 2021.

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Sept 5 (Reuters) - Deforestation in Brazil's Amazon fell 66.11% in August to its lowest level for the month since 2018, Environment

Minister Marina Silva said on Tuesday, in a significant mark for its environmental policy as destruction often spikes this time of year.

Satellite data from Brazilian space research agency INPE indicated that 563 square km (217.38 square miles) of rainforest were cleared in the month, a 66.1% drop from the same period a year ago.

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In the first eight months of the year, INPE's figures showed, deforestation has fallen a cumulative 48% from the same period of 2022.

The data give President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva reasons to cheer as he has promised to end deforestation in the region by 2030 after destruction surged under his predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro, who slashed environmental protection efforts.

Earlier, Lula celebrated the decline, saying on social media that it is a "result of the great work of the Environment Ministry and the federal government."

Some experts feared the significant drop of more than 40% in deforestation seen in the first seven months of Lula's administration could have been put at risk by higher destruction in August and September, when the weather turns drier.

Initial signs, however, are that those concerns did not materialize.

Deforestation in the Amazon causes the loss of many species and their habitats, negatively impacts indigenous people and their health, causes fire, an increase in CO2 emission, soil erosion, flooding,

desertification, pollution of rivers and lands, and negatively alters water cycle around the world.

Brazil last month hosted a major rainforest summit, where eight Amazon nations agreed to a list of unified environmental policies and measures to bolster regional cooperation but failed to agree on a common goal for ending deforestation.

Lula has staked his international reputation on improving Brazil's environmental standing.

On Tuesday, he signed the demarcation of two new Indigenous lands - part of his efforts to reverse some policies put in place by Bolsonaro, who halted land recognition while in office.

The recognition of the two Indigenous reservations grants them legal protection against invasions by illegal loggers, gold miners and cattle ranchers.

"We are experiencing a new moment, with more assertive policies and greater political will in favor of the Amazon," WWF-Brazil's director, Mariana Napolitano, said.

But more is still needed, including traceability and transparency in the trade of livestock, gold and other commodities, she added.

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