

# Amazon Clearing on the Rise, Scientist Says

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SAO JOSE DOS CAMPOS, Brazil (AP) — **The destruction of the Amazon rainforest is on the rise again after falling to a six-year low in 1997**, Brazilian scientists said Wednesday.

**Preliminary figures from the National Space Research Institute showed that 6,500 square miles of forest — an area larger than Connecticut — were destroyed last year, up from 5,100 square miles in 1997.**

But the total devastation is certainly higher. The institute didn't count areas destroyed by forest fires, including a massive prairie fire in the northern state of Roraima last year that ravaged more than 4,200 square miles.

Thelma Krug, who heads the institute's earth observation department, said the data measures only the actual clearing of land by loggers, farmers and cattle ranchers.

**Since 1978, Brazil's Amazon has shrunk by 205,439 square miles — more than 10 percent of its original size. Some scientists believe the destruction of the world's largest wilderness could accelerate global warming.**

The TM Landsat satellite images from 1997 showed that **45 percent of the destroyed area was primary forest**, while the rest was mostly savanna or fringe area that already had been cleared, Krug said.

The data from last year are still being analyzed, and no breakdown was available, she said.

The latest numbers are an improvement from 1995, when forest destruction hit a

single-year record of 11,220 square miles. The low was 4,300 square miles in 1991, when a recession slowed the economy.

Still, environmentalists said the upswing last year indicates repression isn't working. "This shows that the government has failed in combating deforestation," said Ulisses Lacava, spokesman for the World Wildlife Fund office in Brasilia, the capital. "What we need is a comprehensive plan for forest management."

The data on deforestation now goes to the government's environmental protection agency, known as Ibama, which is in charge of enforcing the law.

The new environment minister, Jose Sarney Filho, said his office was trying to discover the reason for last year's figures and implied that the numbers were misleading.

"I'm not questioning the data, but we don't know if deforestation actually rose or if our monitoring improved," Sarney Filho said in Brasilia.

Another question is how budget cuts will affect the environment. Brazil has promised the International Monetary Fund it will cut spending sharply this year to reduce its deficit and qualify for a \$41.5 billion aid package.

"We hope we can continue with our work, despite the current economic difficulties," said the institute's director, Marcio Nogueira Barbosa.

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