

Increase in rate of Brazilian Amazon deforestation raises alarm



A view of deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon. (Vincent Bevins / For The Times) **By CLAIRE RIGBY**

Figures released this week point to an apparent rise in deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon over the last year, an ominous development that one researcher attributed to an increase in cattle ranching aimed at the U.S. market. The newly lost forest, nearly 2,000 square miles, amounts to an area about the size of Delaware.



Brazil's special forces wage uphill fight against Amazon destroyers

The report was published by Brazil's National Institute for Space Research and is based on satellite data used to monitor day-to-day changes in Amazon forest cover. The figures represent the largest loss of forest recorded by the system in six years. Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon peaked in 2003-04, when the loss of a devastating 10,700 square miles was recorded, but the losses fell to less than 2,000 square miles annually following strategies put in place in 2008

by then-President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. Official figures have shown a steady decline since then, hitting a low in 2012 of 1,764 square miles. This week's figures, however, indicate an increase to 1,977 square miles over the last 12 months.

The increase, if confirmed when Brazil's official deforestation rate is published in November, will mark an inauspicious start to Brazil's part in the upcoming Paris climate change talks. During a visit by German Chancellor Angela Merkel in August, Germany pledged support for environmental initiatives amounting to \$618 million, much of it earmarked for the preservation of tropical forest, and President Dilma Rousseff reiterated Brazil's commitment to eliminating illegal Amazon deforestation by 2030.



Drought drives water shortage to critical stage in Sao Paulo, Brazil
Greenpeace Brazil criticized that commitment as showing a "lack of ambition," and called for an

end to all deforestation, not only the illegal variety. Paulo Barreto, a senior researcher at Imazon, a non-profit research group, speculated in the Brazilian news magazine Epoca that a recent agreement to open the U.S. market to Brazilian fresh beef imports, in addition to processed beef already imported from Brazil, may be contributing to deforestation. Since that agreement was reached in June, he said, "farmers have been encouraged by the prospect of increased sales, and may have begun to prepare the ground for more cattle."

Experts urge caution in interpreting the latest deforestation figures, which do not represent Brazil's official rate; that is generated using more precise satellite images. The figures issued this week are based on a "rapid response" system whose accuracy is compromised by the lower range and resolution of its images, and by heavy cloud cover.

However, Gustavo Faleiros, editor of data-journalism organization InfoAmazonia, said the only doubt is about the precision of the deforestation figures.

"There's no question that it is taking place," he said.

Source: <http://www.latimes.com/world/brazil/la-fg-brazil-deforestation-20150903-story.html>