

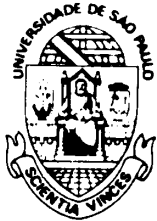
Fearnside, P.M. 1989. "Deforestation in Brazilian Amazonia: The Rates and Causes of Forest Destruction." The Ecologist 19(6): 214-218.

There has been an explosive surge in the rate of clearing in the Brazilian Amazon in recent years. Fundamental changes must be made in the structure of the legal and economic systems underlying forest clearance to avoid complete decimation of this forest. Regardless of the discrepancies in estimates (by NOAA, the World Bank and Brazil) of the actual area subject to deforestation, the deforested area of the Brazilian Amazon is still relatively small, but expanding rapidly.

Deforestation is driven by both the expansion of cleared areas and the appearance of new centers of deforestation, the latter cause being influenced largely by governmental decisions. New highways, some financed by international lenders, have allowed a wave of colonization into western Amazonia. Migration into forested areas has been encouraged for political reasons. Pasture plays a central role in accelerating deforestation, as it is the easiest way to occupy an extensive area and thus obtain property rights via a centuries-old legal practice in the Brazilian Amazon. Financial incentives continue to contribute despite the 1979 decision by the Superintendency for the Development of the Amazon (SUDAM) to stop approving incentives for new cattle projects in "dense forest." Existing projects in dense forest continue to receive incentives for deforestation; some new projects receive incentives as well, defying SUDAM's decision. Inappropriate discount rates and the distribution of costs (which are widely distributed to the many, both alive and unborn) and benefits (which are concentrated to the few) remain fundamental aspects of the problem.

The Brazilian Amazon is faced with a number of future pressures, including population pressure. Commercial logging of the Amazon is sure to increase given the rapid deforestation occurring in southeast Asia. Charcoal production, mining activities, and hydroelectric development are likely to increase causing further deforestation.

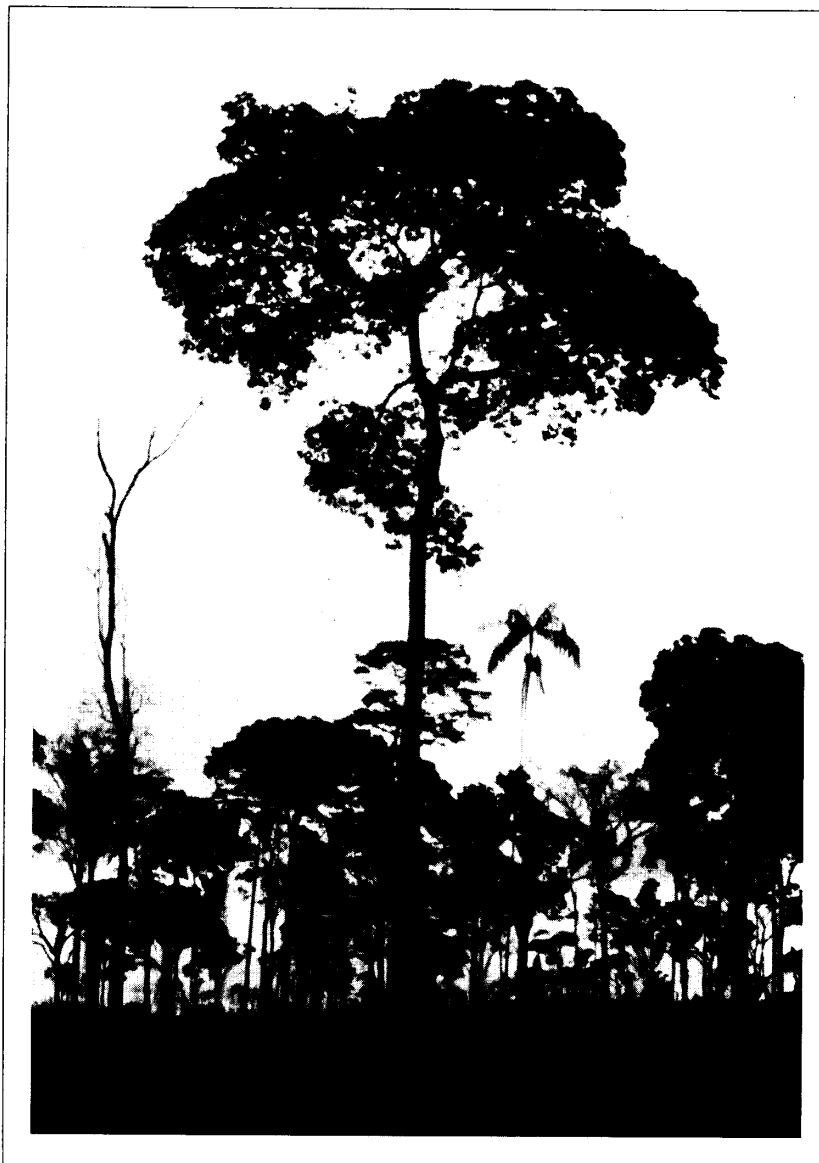
While some causes of deforestation are beyond governmental control, some key causes are not. The granting of land titles for land "improvement", the granting of special loans and tax incentives for agriculture and cattle ranching activities, and the building of highways in Amazonia must all be changed without delay.



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