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John Maler Jr.

The destruction of the Amazon rain forest by fires and logging has increased in recent years. A fire burned in the western Amazon in August 1995.

## Burning of Amazon Picks Up Pace, With Vast Areas Lost

By DIANA JEAN SCHEMO

RIO DE JANEIRO, Sept. 11 — After years of Brazilian Government claims that stricter environmental laws had slowed destruction of the Amazon rain forest, newly issued figures show that deforestation has actually increased sharply since the 1992 Earth Summit was held here, with fires and logging consuming rain forest the size of Denmark in just a few years.

The Government data, which covered the period 1991 to 1994, appeared to support assertions by environmental groups that the drop-off in deforestation by 1991 was caused more by an economic downturn than by any significant Government action to reduce the destruction.

It also put an end to Government claims that deforestation had continued to decline in the years since the Earth Summit, when 118 nations gathered for the largest environmental conference ever held, and Brazil enjoyed the public relations windfall of seemingly having gained control over deforestation.

"I think in the mind of many people, the burning of the Amazon rain forest had a beginning, a middle and an end," said Stephan Schwartzman, a senior scientist at the Environmental Defense Fund. The new data, he said, contradicted that impression. "The burning of the Amazon is not over. It's getting worse."

The data show that deforestation rose 34 percent, from 4,296 square miles in the 1990-91 burning season to 5,750 square miles a year by 1994.

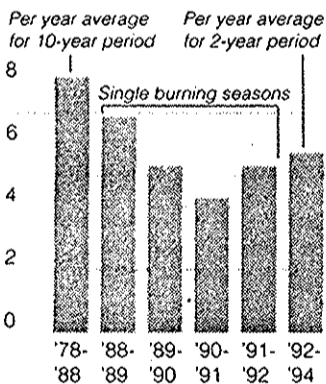
Analysis of the data for 1995, which have not yet been released, is expected to show an even greater increase in deforestation, since the number and location of fires detected last year showed many raging in virgin rain forest, said Philip M. Fearnside, an ecology professor at the National Institute for Research in the Amazon, in Manaus.

As it issued the updated figures on deforestation, the Brazilian Govern-

### A CLOSER LOOK

#### Losing a Forest

Amazon deforestation rates, in thousands of square miles.



Source: Brazilian Ministry of Environment, Water Resources and the Amazon

The New York Times

ment announced a series of measures to crack down on illegal logging of mahogany and virola, and increased to 80 percent from 50 percent the share of property that landowners in the Amazon must preserve as tropical forest.

The measures came shortly before a meeting this week in Bonn, where representatives from the Group of Seven industrialized nations are gathering to evaluate a \$280 million fund for pilot projects to save the Amazon. So far, only \$10 million of

### Dismaying new figures contradict Brazil's claims.

the total has been spent, Bruce Beehler, from the State Department's ecology office, said by telephone from Bonn.

By next year, industrialized nations will have to decide whether to extend the authorization and perhaps increase the fund, for which Brazil had originally sought \$1.5 billion.

By the eve of the Bonn meeting, the Government environmental agency responsible for overseeing the extraction of timber from the Amazon had found irregularities leading to the cancellation or suspension of 62 percent of the 1,200 authorizations for cutting mahogany and virola, said Paulo Benincá, director of natural and renewable resources at the federal environmental agency. The next step, he added, will be enforcement in the field.

As for enforcing the newly increased rain forest preserves, Mr. Benincá said the agency would rely on more sophisticated equipment and draw on information available through other Government agencies rather than hire more inspectors. The numbers of inspectors available to monitor illegal burning in the rain forest remains low, with about 80 inspectors covering two million square miles.

The measures won praise from environmentalists, though many said they could gauge their importance only after seeing how seriously they would be enforced over time.

"Our worry is that this emergency action will die down as soon as the attention wanes," said João Paulo Capobianco, executive secretary of the Socio-Environmental Institute, a private group. "Government action in the Amazon has to be permanent."

Thomas Lovejoy, the Smithsonian Institution's counselor for biodiversity and environmental affairs, said he was convinced that President Fernando Henrique Cardoso of Brazil was "very serious" about tackling destruction of the tropical rain forest.

"These two are pretty forceful measures," Mr. Lovejoy said. "There's a depth of commitment that's greater than any we've seen before."

Others appeared concerned by the timing of the measures and the release of the data. In addition to this week's meeting in Bonn, the Government will also take part in a week-long commemoration of the Amazon in New York at the end of the month, when its record in the Amazon and the demarcation of Indian lands is likely to come under scrutiny.

"What's unfortunate is that President Cardoso once again appears to be playing to the international gallery," said Mr. Schwartzman, who works in Washington and Brasilia. "He took these steps when he did in order to avoid any problems in Bonn, and to put a good face on the Government participation in the Amazon."

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