

Surge in forest loss seen if Brazil indigenous reserves opened to mining

by [Mauricio Angelo](#) | Thomson Reuters Foundation

Friday, 18 September 2020 15:00 GMT

ABOUT OUR CLIMATE COVERAGE

We focus on the human and development impacts of climate change

Share:

Newsletter sign up:

Trending

- [OPINION: Bisexual people exist – stop erasing us](#)
- [Beyonce reference cut from Bollywood song after racist lyrics storm](#)
- [South Africa's battle between coal and climate](#)
- [Fears surge in demand for hand sanitiser could fuel child labour](#)
- [Singapore, Helsinki and Zurich top index of world's smartest cities](#)

Allowing mining in Brazil's indigenous Amazon reserves could lead to a loss of forest area the size of England, researchers say

By Mauricio Angelo

BRASILIA, Sept 18 (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - A Brazilian government proposal to open indigenous land in Brazil to mining concessions could lead to the loss of forests over an area larger than England, researchers said Friday.

Such a loss would reduce by \$5 billion a year the global benefits the forest provides in terms of things such as forest products, rainfall generation and storage of climate-changing emissions, they estimated.

"The impact would be direct for indigenous communities, but mainly for society in general. The entire planet would be affected," said Juliana Siqueira-Gay, a University of São Paulo environmental engineer and lead author of the [study published Friday](#) in the science journal One Earth.

A bill introduced in Brazil's Congress in February proposes [opening indigenous land in the Amazon](#) and elsewhere to mining, hydroelectric plants, oil and gas projects and livestock farming.

Such development could be carried out over the objections of indigenous communities living on the land, according to the bill, supported by large numbers of members of Congress aligned with agribusiness and extractive industries.

Brazil's largest indigenous organizations have condemned the bill, saying it shows a "total disregard for national and international legislation that ensures indigenous fundamental rights".

In the new study, researchers looked at what would happen if all known mineral deposits in Brazil's Amazon were mined.

The study examined not just likely direct losses of forest but damage from the creation of processing plants, roads and other transport infrastructure for minerals.

Such changes could affect 160,000 square kilometres (62,000 square miles) of forest, an area bigger than the U.S. state of Georgia.

Legalising mining concessions on indigenous land would affect every indigenous group in the Amazon, researchers said, with mining claims or applications currently in place on 115 indigenous territories.

Despite the existing mining ban, large national and international mining companies have since the 1990s filed with the National Mining Agency hundreds of requests for "analysis" of deposits on indigenous land.

Illegal mining is already underway in 148 indigenous territories, the study said.

Researchers said the proposed opening of indigenous land to mining comes despite the existence of about 4,600 mostly untapped deposits of gold, copper, iron ore and other minerals outside indigenous territories in the Amazon, according to the Geological Survey of Brazil.

"It is not necessary to explore inside indigenous lands considering the mineral reserves available in Brazil outside protected areas," Siqueira-Gay said.

Given the resulting economic damage of such expansion inside indigenous reserves, "it's not worth it", she said.

Bolsonaro has vowed to integrate Brazil's roughly 900,000 indigenous people into the broader economy and society, while tapping the mineral riches and commercial farming potential of their 462 reservations.

Environmentalists say such a move will speed up clearing of the Amazon jungle, the world's largest tropical rainforest, which is considered [vital for slowing global climate change](#).

The Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (Apib) has said the new bill mainly signals a "willingness to serve the economic interests that support" Bolsonaro's government.

The measure lacks guarantees that indigenous communities would have "free, prior and informed consent" over any development on their land, as established by the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, researchers said.

The Bolsonaro government did not respond to repeated requests for comment on the study and the potential impact of the bill.

Read more:

['Nobody has done anything': Amazon indigenous group decries illegal mining](#)

[Brazil court decision sparks fears indigenous land could be handed to farmers](#)

[Amazon roads could harm economies, not just forests](#)

(Reporting by Mauricio Angelo ; editing by Laurie Goering : (Please credit the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the charitable arm of Thomson Reuters.

Visit <http://news.trust.org/climate>)

Our Standards: [The Thomson Reuters Trust Principles.](#)

THEMES

- [FORESTS](#)
- [\\$THEME_LOOKUP.GET\("\\${O}"\)](#)
- [HUMAN RIGHTS](#)