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## The Amazon Rainforest Is Close to a 'Tipping Point' and the Results Will Be Disastrous



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The Amazon rainforest could soon become a savanna, scientists warn as deforestation, drought, wildfire, and climate change continue to take a toll on the world's largest tropical rainforest.

A new study says the Amazon rainforest is nearing a tipping point in its decline that could change the region drastically.

The new research, published yesterday in the journal *Nature Climate Change*, finds that the Amazon is losing its ability to recover from episodes like drought and extreme weather.

"Deforestation and climate change are likely the main drivers of this decline," study co-author Niklas Boers, a professor at the Technical University of Munich, said in a statement. The researchers say they've found evidence of this decline across 75 percent of the Amazon.

## The tipping point

"It's worth reminding ourselves that if it gets to that tipping point and we commit to losing the Amazon rainforest, then we get a significant feedback to global climate change," said Timothy Lenton, a scientist at the University of Exeter and a co-author of the study.

The research team looked at three decades worth of satellite data, paying close attention to trees and other vegetation after extreme events. The researchers concluded that the forest, which is essential for oxygen production and carbon sequestration, has been losing its resilience for the last two decades.



*Photo by David Clode on Unsplash*

The researchers say this is nearing the forest to a tipping point, but an arrival date is unclear as a number of factors can push it closer or farther from that edge. But the scientists warn, once the threshold has been crossed, the shift could happen quickly.

“Once it starts, my sense is it could happen in decades,” said Chris Boulton, a scientist at the University of Exeter and lead author of the research. But the scientists say it’s just too challenging to pinpoint when the shift may occur.

“We can’t turn this into a definitive forecast of when the tipping would happen,” Lenton said.

## Deforestation in the Amazon

The news comes after the Amazon recorded record levels of deforestation in Brazil in January. Deforestation in totalled more than 160 square miles in January, five times higher than in the same time period in 2021, according to preliminary satellite data.



*Photo by Andrés Medina on Unsplash*

“There is a race to deforest the Amazon,” Britaldo Soares Filho, an environmental modeling researcher at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, said in a statement. “People might be surprised that it didn’t increase even more.”

Deforestation has increased under Brazilian president Jair Bonsonaro, who began relaxing regulations around forest management since taking office in 2019.

Animal agriculture is leading deforestation in the Amazon, as Brazil is now the world’s top beef exporter. Last November, the EU took steps to ban beef linked to deforestation, but traceability has become increasingly more difficult, particularly from Brazil.

“What we propose is a pioneering initiative,” Virginijus Sinkevičius, the EU environment commissioner, said. “EU action alone will not solve the problem. We also need major markets like the US and China to clean up their supply chain and we need producers to step up protection of the forests, but we stand ready to help.”

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