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Amazon deforestation 'at record low'



Clearing land for agriculture is one of the reasons for deforestation in the Amazon

The destruction of Amazon rainforest has reached its lowest level since monitoring began 24 years ago, the Brazilian government says.

Environment minister Izabella Teixeira said it was thanks to government action against offenders.

Figures show the rate of deforestation fell 27% in the year to July compared with the previous 12 months.

Even so, more than 4,600 sq km (1,780 sq miles) of rainforest have been lost in a year.

"It is the lowest deforestation rate since Brazil began its monitoring," Ms Teixeira told a press conference.

"I believe that it is the only good piece of environmental news."

Deforestation rates in the Amazon have been declining since 2004 but critics say recent changes to Brazil's forest protection code could reverse that trend.



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Environment minister Izabella Teixeira

The latest data from the National Institute of Space Research relates to a period before a change in the code which environmentalists say eases the protection designed to prevent deforestation - a claim the government disputes.

Ms Teixeira says the latest figures leave the government closer to its target of reducing deforestation to 3,925 sq km by 2020.

Despite the reduction, in some Brazilian states there was a rise in deforestation.

In Acre there was a rise of 10%; in Amazonas 29% and in Tocantins 33%.

"Regrettably we have noticed that in states that didn't have an aggressive level of deforestation there has been a rise," Ms Teixeira said.

However, she welcomed a reduction in deforestation in two states which have in the past seen much forest destroyed.

In Mato Grosso the reduction was 31% and in Para 44%.

Destruction of the world's forests releases large quantities of CO₂, which form part of the greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming.

Large-scale deforestation has helped make Brazil one of the world's top greenhouse gas emitters.

Key causes of Amazon deforestation are illegal trafficking in timber and minerals, fires and the spread of agriculture and stockbreeding.