

# Record deforestation in Brazil's Amazon rainforest shows challenge facing Lula

Satellites show record destruction for the month of February as new government tries to undo damage wreaked under Bolsonaro

**Constance Malleret** *in Rio de Janeiro*

Fri 10 Mar 2023 16.32 GMT



Deforestation in Brazil's Amazon rainforest rose in February to the highest level on record for the month, highlighting the scale of the challenge facing the administration of **Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva**, as it tries to undo the environmental destruction wreaked under the far-right former president Jair Bolsonaro.

Government satellites show that a record 322 sq km of **Amazon rainforest** were destroyed in February, a 62% increase on last year and the highest number for the month since records began.

Lula, who took office on 1 January this year, has pledged to end illegal logging after deforestation soared to a 15-year high during the Bolsonaro years.

With **the environment ministry once again led by the environmentalist Marina Silva**, who oversaw a sharp drop in deforestation in the same role during Lula's first term in office, the government has reactivated the Amazon Fund, a key tool for preservation, and recreated a civil society council on the environment – both abandoned under Bolsonaro.

Silva has also brushed off and updated a deforestation prevention and control plan that formed the backbone of her successful policies nearly two decades ago.

These are important steps, but “innovation is necessary, as the Amazon today is not the same as it was 10, 20 years ago”, said a Greenpeace **Brazil** spokesperson, Rômulo Batista.

Crime and violence exploded under the previous government, as Bolsonaro's disdain for the rainforest and the people who protect it emboldened criminals of all kinds, including the killers of the **Indigenous expert Bruno Pereira** and **British journalist Dom Phillips**. Addressing the crisis will require rebuilding the manpower of environmental agencies that were gutted by the far-right populist, a process which cannot happen overnight, said Batista.



### 'A war society doesn't see': the Brazilian force driving out mining gangs from Indigenous lands

“The land grabber, the deforester, the illegal miner, they are making the most of this time to rush to cut the forest down,” Batista said.

After preliminary data pointed towards the jump in destruction in February, Silva **told reporters** last month that loggers were working even during the Amazon's rainy season as a “sort of revenge” against the current government's crackdown.

Deforestation figures are typically lower at the start of the year, as the Amazon rainy season hinders forest clearing and cloud cover means satellites are less likely to pick up on it. For this reason, analysts had cautioned against celebrating a drop in deforestation in January.