

11-30-1989

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Recommended Citation

Neagle, John. "Amazon Rain Forests May Disappear In 50 To 100 Years If Deforestation Continues At Present Rate." (1989).
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Amazon Rain Forests May Disappear In 50 To 100 Years If Deforestation Continues At Present Rate

by John Neagle

Category/Department: General

Published: Thursday, November 30, 1989

On Nov. 29, Carlos Nobre, an engineer and meteorologist with the Brazilian Space Research Institute, told reporters in San Jose dos Campos of a new study which shows that all Amazon rain forests could be destroyed in 50 to 100 years if deforestation continues at the present rate. Nobre said the findings were the result of a year-long study at the University of Maryland, using a Cyber 205 supercomputer belonging to the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The Institute is located at Sao Jose dos Campos, 200 miles southwest of Rio. Nobre said he used mathematical formulas to project the effects of deforestation, which he estimates destroys some 14,000 square miles of rain forest per year. The results indicated that the huge forested area could dry up and turn into a vast, scrub-covered savanna. He added, "The advance of pasture land would profoundly change the landscape and the way of life in the region." Next, the scientist emphasized that the destruction of trees to clear land for planting and grazing reduces the forest's capacity to retain water. Consequently, temperatures will rise, rainfall will diminish and the soil will deteriorate. According to Nobre, even the water level in rivers will fall, reducing hydroelectric potential in the region. When that occurs, he said, the rain forests would succumb to a long dry season and be transformed into a savanna, covered with scrub trees and grass. The Brazilian Amazon (encompassing about 2 million sq.mi.) is the world's largest wilderness. Independent studies show that about 12% of the Amazon has been destroyed. The Brazilian government claims that only 5% has been destroyed. (Basic data from AP, 11/29/89)

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