



Written by [James Murphy](#) on November 4, 2019

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Amazon Fires The Hype vs. the Truth

Back in the late 1980s, deforestation in the Amazon rainforest was one of the causes that the day's environmentalists were most vociferous about, along with the so-called destruction of the ozone layer. Today, it seems that the environmental movement has batted around the order, and the Amazon rainforest is front and center in today's climate-change hysteria.



Some of the headlines in the media were truly disturbing.

From CNN on August 26: "Flying above the Amazon fires, 'all you can see is death.'"

From *The Guardian* on August 27: "Amazon rainforest fires: an environmental catastrophe — in pictures."

From the BBC on August 21: "Amazon fires: Record number burning in Brazil rainforest — space agency."

From CNN on August 23: "Blame humans for starting the Amazon fires, environmentalists say."

As news spread of an increase of fires in the Amazon rainforest this year, prominent climate hysterics went predictably ballistic. Twitter was — forgive the turn of phrase — ablaze with celebrities and politicians sharing a lot of incorrect information about the fires.

"The lungs of the Earth are in flames," noted Hollywood actor and climate-change warrior Leonardo DiCaprio.

"The Amazon rain forest — the lungs which produce 20% of our planet's oxygen — is on fire," said French President Emmanuel Macron in a tweet.

The fact that the photo that both DiCaprio and Macron showed was actually 20 years old, not one of the current fires in the Amazon, does not matter. All that matters — to them, at least — is that they "care" about the planet, and they're spreading the word about what some are calling the greatest ecological disaster in Earth's history.

Many other celebrities, big-name athletes, politicians, and even so-called news sources echoed the alarmism — and the errors. Some celebrities showed pictures of wildfires in the Amazon that were decades old. Others showed pictures of wildfires from such un-Amazonian places as Montana and Sweden. None of this mattered to the climate-change cult. The Amazon rainforest was, literally, engulfed in flames.

And, worse, it was all humanity's fault.

Meteorologist Eric Holthaus, who works for the environmental magazine *Grist*, put it this way on Twitter: "The current fires are without precedent in the past 20,000 years. These fires are not natural, they are being driven by greed, colonialism, and are a crime against humanity. We are in a climate



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emergency.”

Enter reality. The fact of the matter is, the Amazon rainforest is not a magical place that contains all of the biodiversity humanity will ever need. It is a forest, and forests burn from time to time. It’s as natural as the blue hue of the sky or the dampness of a rainy day.

The 2019 Amazon fire season has been bad in relation to the last few years, above average in the amount of total fires and acreage burned, according to available historical records. But as of October 10, it’s not a record bad season. It’s not even the worst fire season in this young century. It’s not even the worst fire season this decade.

What Is Actually Happening

There is no question that portions of the Amazon rainforest are burning. There is also no question that some of those fires were started by man — specifically by farmers who are burning fields in order to prepare the land for the next season’s planting, which is a common agricultural practice in the region. There is also no doubt that the 2019 fire season in the Amazon is above average in terms of the amount of fires and acreage destroyed.

But is it the environmental catastrophe that is being portrayed by the media?

The dry season — and therefore the fire season — in the Amazon typically runs from June until December, with peak burning usually occurring in September. The simple fact that the Amazon has something called a *fire season* should tell you something. As with any forested region in the world, fires, man-made and not, are expected and are actually a part of the natural ecosystem.

Climate hysterics are correct in their claim that the 2019 fire season shows an 80-percent increase in fires over the 2018 fire season, but they fail to mention that 2018 was a relatively tame fire season by Amazon standards. The “80-percent increase” is an excellent example of cherry-picked data. The 2019 fires are not “unprecedented,” and they are definitely not all-time records.

It’s not hard to prove this assertion. A quick check of the Global Fire Emissions Database, which uses NASA MODIS data, shows that several years in the dec-ade of the 2000s — notably every year from 2002 until 2007 — were far higher in total fires than the current year’s fires. The years 2010 and 2012 were also higher in total number of fires. The total acreage burned in 2019 — approximately 2.25 million acres — is above the annual average but far less than the 2002-2007 period or 2010.

The historical data show that fire seasons in the Amazon — like much of climate and weather phenomenon — have a cyclical nature. One or two bad fire seasons are typically followed by one or two seasons with lower fire counts. Why would this be? Do farmers only torch their fields in certain years?

Actually, fires in the region are greatly influenced by climate and weather anomalies such as El Niño in the Pacific Ocean and the multi-decadal oscillation in the Atlantic Ocean, both of which can influence drought conditions in the region. A weak El Niño in 2018/2019, which meteorologists are now saying is over, may have contributed to dry conditions in the Amazon this year.

So at least a portion of 2019’s above-average fire season is due to natural weather conditions — definitely not climate change. El Niño and the multi-decadal oscillation in the Atlantic are understood weather/climate events that occur regularly — not that you’ll hear about any of that in the climate-alarmist media, which has taken its marching orders from climate NGOs, who encourage them to refer



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to anything climate-related as a “crisis.”

Also lacking in media descriptions of the fires in the Amazon is that many of this year’s fires — *most* of them if you believe the *New York Times* — are occurring on dry scrubland, areas that have already been cleared of rainforest.

“Most of this is land use that have replaced rainforest,” Matthew Hanson, the co-leader of the Global Land Analysis and Discovery laboratory at the University of Maryland, told the *Times*.

“Brazil has turned certain states like Mato Grosso into Iowa,” Hanson said. “You’ve got rainforest and then there’s just an ocean of soybean.”

So Brazilian farmers are not simply burning up trees for the joy of it; they are burning fields in preparation for the next season’s planting — an agricultural practice in the region that farmers call the *queimada*, a Portuguese word for burn. And the Brazilian government is not allowing these burned lands to be developed into shopping malls and parking lots. They are being re-planted with soybean, a food crop that, besides feeding people, sequesters carbon dioxide and produces oxygen, just as the rainforest does.

One more thing that the climate-alarmist media hasn’t trumpeted is a piece of good news in global vegetation. While the Amazon and other subtropical regions have experienced some tree loss over the past several decades due to agricultural practices and fires, a report in the scientific journal *Nature* shows that, globally, tree coverage has *increased* by a whopping 2.24 million square kilometers or approximately 865,000 square miles over the past four decades. This is an increase in global tree coverage roughly the size of Texas and Alaska combined.

As for Those Celebrity Claims

The claim that the Amazon produces 20 percent of the world’s oxygen is nothing but a blatant lie, or, at least, the unknowing restatement of that lie. Neither should the Amazon rainforest be considered the “lungs of the world.”

Among those in the media who have repeated the misinformation are ABC News, CNN, *Newsweek*, *Business Insider*, and millions of uninformed climate alarmists on social media. U.S. presidential candidate Kamala Harris repeated the number in a tweet, in which she held Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro personally responsible for the fires.

“Brazil’s President Bolsonaro must answer for this devastation. The Amazon creates over 20% of the world’s oxygen and is home to one million indigenous people. Any destruction affects us all.” That the Amazon is also home to some 29 million more everyday Brazilians is, apparently, of no concern to Senator Harris.

But, perhaps the most egregious use of the 20-percent claim belongs to France’s Macron. Not only is he, a sitting president of a developed nation, giving his constituents completely incorrect information, he may be doing it only to strong-arm Bolsonaro in trade negotiations.

France’s climate-alarmist president Macron has threatened Brazil’s trade with the European Union over the fire situation in the Amazon. Macron led a bloc of EU nations, which included Ireland and Germany, that threatened economic sanctions against Brazil unless it meets certain criteria to protect the Amazon.



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During a meeting of the G-7 in France in August, Macron bluntly went after Brazil and Bolsonaro in a statement. “In light of Brazil’s attitude these recent weeks,” the statement read, Macron “can only conclude that President Bolsonaro lied to him during the Osaka Summit.” At that G-20 summit, governments agreed that there was an “urgent need” to address climate change, pollution, and environmental destruction.

“The decisions and statements from Brazil these recent weeks show clearly that President Bolsonaro has decided not to respect his commitments on the climate, nor to involve himself on the issue of biodiversity.”

So, now the EU, led by Macron, is attempting to strong-arm the Mercosur nations, which include Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay, into economic submission over the fires in the Amazon. It’s a despicable tactic that affects not only Brazil but other nations as well.

At the UN’s climate summit in New York on September 24, Bolsonaro got his chance to respond to those who are vilifying him and his nation. In a speech to the General Assembly, Bolsonaro told the world that what goes on in the borders of his own country is really not the world’s business and has “aroused [Brazil’s] patriotic sentiment.”

“It is a fallacy to say that the Amazon is the heritage of humankind, and a misconception, as confirmed by scientists, to say that our Amazonian forests are the lungs of the world. Using these fallacies, certain countries instead of helping, embarked on the media lies and behaved in a disrespectful manner and with a colonialist spirit. They even called into question that which we hold as the most sacred value: our own sovereignty.”

Meanwhile, everyday Brazilians must be asking themselves, “Why are we being vilified for the normal fires in the Amazon when wildfires in California are being treated as an unavoidable symptom of climate change?” The answer: political expedience.

Adding to the falseness of the claims being made against Bolsonaro and Brazil, the claims that the Amazon produces 20 percent of the world’s oxygen have been roundly debunked, even by climate-alarmist scientists. Michael Mann, for instance, who created the infamous “hockey stick” graph that featured so prominently in Al Gore’s 2006 film *An Inconvenient Truth*, said in a tweet that the 20-percent number was far too high. “The 20% figure IS too high. True number closer to 6 %...”

And is the Amazon rainforest truly the “lungs of the planet”? No way, according to Dan Nepstad, the president and founder of Earth Innovation Institute. Nepstad is a senior scientist who has worked in the Brazilian rainforest for more than three decades. He has been debunking this claim for a while now.

Back in 2005, Nepstad told the *Los Angeles Times* flat out, “It’s not the lungs of the world. It’s probably burning up more oxygen now than it’s producing.” He added, “Left unmolested, the forest does generate enormous amounts of oxygen through photosynthesis, but it consumes most of it itself in the decomposition of organic matter.”

The “lungs of the world” claim might have grown a bit wearisome for Nepstad over time, as he flatly told *Forbes* in August of *this* year that the claim is “bull**t.” Nepstad then went on to vent his frustration at the assertion, “There’s no science behind that. The Amazon produces a lot of oxygen, but it uses the same amount of oxygen through respiration so it’s a wash.”

In reality, the “lungs of the world” — if you like that metaphor — are more likely the world’s oceans,



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which contain microscopic, floating plants known as phytoplankton. Scientists are split on exactly how much of the Earth's oxygen comes from what source, but the oceans and marine plant life are likely responsible for somewhere between 50 and 85 percent of our oxygen, depending on which source you consult.

So if a global blight on phytoplankton, kelp, and algae ever occurs, we should worry about our oxygen supply — not so with the burning Amazon rainforest.

Finally, a last note as to the claim that the 2019 fires are “without precedent”: In the 2000s, when so-called deforestation was allegedly at its peak, terrible fire seasons occurred from 2002 to 2007 and again in 2010 and 2012. Amazingly, with the socialist Worker's Party in charge of Brazil during those years, the world heard little about the devastation in Brazil's rainforest back then.

The Politics of the Amazon

Not surprisingly, much of the false information and hysteria involved in reporting on the 2019 fire season in the Amazon has to do with politics. When conservative Trump ally Jair Bolsonaro was elected as Brazil's president in 2018, suddenly whatever happened in the Amazon became his fault. Last November, prior to Bolsonaro taking office, the new government signaled its disdain for climate alarmism by canceling a scheduled United Nations global summit on climate change, which the nation was scheduled to host. Bolsonaro's incoming foreign minister, Ernesto Araujo, referred to the climate-change movement as a “Marxist” plot intended to stifle the growth of emerging capitalist economies in favor of China.

Part of Bolsonaro's appeal to everyday Brazilians was his promise to undo certain environmental policies that had strangled soybean farmers and cattle sellers in Brazil. Previously, those farmers had been, more or less, forced to follow strict government mandates on deforestation in the Amazon, where approximately 10 percent of the country's soybean acreage is located.

Soybean farmers and cattle ranchers in Brazil, who are being vilified by environmentalists around the world, generally complied with the government mandates, partially because of promises that they would be compensated for not engaging in deforestation. However, not much of the money from the Amazon Fund, a globalist NGO that was established in 2008 in order to collect donations to fund efforts combating deforestation, ever got to the farmers.

When environmentalists began to make noise about “protecting” Brazil's Cerrado, a vast subtropical savannah region that accounts for some 60 percent of soybean acreage in the country and is also considered to be “under attack” by Brazilian agriculture, the farmers sensed another moratorium on land clearing coming and began to revolt with their votes. Bolsonaro's message resonated with farmers in the nation.

Nepstad put it this way in an interview with *Environmental Progress*: “I spoke to farmers in August of last year just two months prior to the election and they were all saying it, ‘You know, it's this forest agenda that will get this guy elected. We're all going to elect him, vote for him.’ And farmers voted for [Bolsonaro] in droves.”

“You know, there's really a tight correlation between the amount of support Bolsonaro won and the prominence of soybeans in that country,” Nepstad concluded.



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So it stands to reason that the first fire season of Bolsonaro's tenure has somehow become "record breaking" and an ecological genocide. Unfortunately, for the environmentalists wishing to run roughshod over Brazilian agriculture, the facts of the situation lay waste to their hysteria.

"What is happening in the Amazon is not exceptional," said Leonardo Coutinho, a leading Brazilian environmental journalist. "Take a look at Google web searches, search for 'Amazon' and 'Amazon Forest' over time. Global public opinion was not as interested in the 'Amazon tragedy' when the situation was undeniably worse. The present moment does not justify global hysteria."

More Fear-peddling

To add to the anxiety that radical environmentalists have been trying to induce via referencing the destruction of the Amazon rainforest — because a fearful populace is one that is more easily controlled — greenies have resorted to the use of a 1960s term: ecocide. Ecocide means a willful destruction of the environment by humans. Obviously meant to sound like genocide, the term first gained widespread usage in 1970 when American bioethicist Arthur Galston used it to describe the defoliant effects of Agent Orange, which the U.S. military used in Vietnam.

And now the term has resurfaced to describe the actions of Brazil in regard to the Amazon. A headline in *The Guardian* even read, "G7 can't turn a blind eye to ecocide in the Amazon." The article went on to personally blame and mock Brazil's Bolsonaro for his policies in the region and to ponder whether he is guilty of committing a crime against humanity.

Moreover, some scientists are also claiming that the loss of so much acreage to fire in Amazonia could lead to that most dreaded of climate catastrophes: the tipping point — the point in time when we have so much CO2 built up in the air that catastrophic global warming is unstoppable and imminent.

The term "tipping point" has been abused throughout the years by the likes of Al Gore, Prince Charles, and various climate alarmists. Nevertheless, the tipping point talking point is still being used as a fear device.

"We might be very, very close to the tipping point," said Brazilian climatologist Carlos Nobre. Should we cross it, "it's irreversible."

"What we're talking about here is an irreversible switch," said University of Florida scientist Emilio Bruna. "And that's really worrying people."

"It's important to keep repeating these concerns. There are a number of tipping points which are not far away," said Philip Fearnside, a professor at Brazil's National Institute of Amazonian Research. Then, tellingly, Fearnside explained, "We can't see exactly where they are, but we know they are very close."

"Irreversible" tipping points sound really scary, but the scientists studying them can't quantify them or tell us exactly what or where they are. That's not science; it's Chicken Little-ism.

What Does It All Mean?

But globalists and environmentalists dream of a world where they can tell Amazonian nations — and the world, for that matter — what to do with their own lands and will try any tactic to achieve their goal. Some have even floated the idea of making "ecocide" a crime against humanity similar to genocide and hauling Bolsonaro before the International Court of Justice at the Hague for the crime.



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Bolsonaro is completely correct when he asserts that Macron and other globalists are acting in a “colonialist” way. The portion of the Amazon rainforest that is inside of Brazil’s borders belongs to Brazil, the same way that the Mississippi River belongs to the United States, the River Seine belongs to France, and Siberia belongs to Russia.

That sovereignty needs to be respected.

For developed nations to tell an emerging nation how to use its own land is disdainful of that emerging nation’s sovereignty. How many precious ecosystems were destroyed when New York or London or Paris was created? How about when the cities along the Mississippi were established? The message being set to Brazil and Bolsonaro by politicians like Macron is clear. “We can do what we want as far as developing our own countries, but you can’t.”

Bolsonaro and Brazil have already set aside large tracts of the Amazon — particularly areas that contain tribes indigenous to the land — where deforestation is strictly prohibited. In late August of this year, he issued a 60-day ban on clearing forest with fire. He also sent 44,000 Brazilian soldiers to assist with firefighting and appealed for a Latin American conference on preserving the rainforest. He’s doing his part, even accepting some foreign aid when it’s offered. The rest of the world needs to get out of Brazil’s business and allow that sovereign nation to govern its own land by itself.

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