

Bolivia lost 1.2 mn hectares to fires this year, govt says

August 29 2019



An aerial view of damage caused by wildfires in Otuquis National Park, in the Pantanal ecoregion of Bolivia, southeast of the Amazon basin, is seen on August 26, 2019

Fires have destroyed 1.2 million hectares (3.2 million acres) of forest and grasslands in Bolivia this year, the government said on Wednesday, though environmentalists claim the true figure is much greater.

The news comes after leftist President Evo Morales suspended his re-election campaign on Monday to direct the government's response to a growing environmental disaster in the Bolivian portion of the Amazon rainforest, where wildfires have been raging since May.

Morales has faced mounting fury, both over his failure to act and over policies his critics say favor greater deforestation.

Bolivia's total forest area has been steadily shrinking in recent years, from 47.3 million hectares in 2005 to 43.8 million hectares in 2017, according to a study published by Bolivian environmental and human rights organization the Solon Foundation.

The Friends of Nature Foundation NGO says the true extent of [forest](#) destruction this year is 1.8 million hectares.

Ecologists have attacked a law promulgated by Morales that offers incentives to burn [forest areas](#) to transform them into pastureland.

A group of 80 environmental and professional institutions are demanding that Morales recall the 2016 law.

The government, though, blames dry weather and strong winds for the voracious wildfires.

Morales's [government](#) has plans to plant 4.5 million hectares by 2030, to comply with commitments given to the United Nations, but environmental activist Marielle Cautin, also cited by the Solon Foundation, says that over the last three years "not even 50,000 hectares" have been planted.

On Tuesday, Morales mocked a G7 pledge of \$20 million to help fight the Amazon fires as "tiny."

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