

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

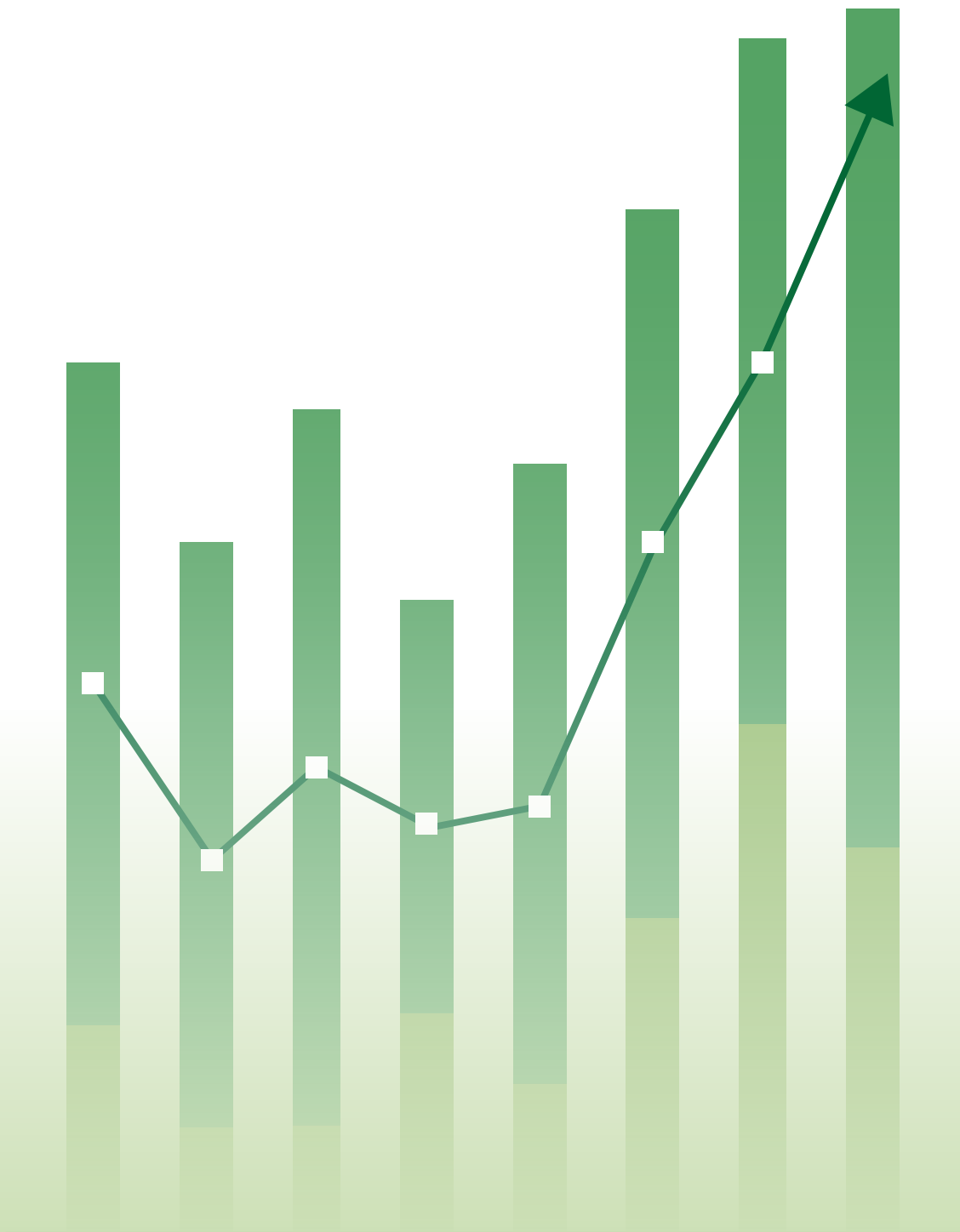
Illegal Deforestation and Conversion in the Amazon and Matopiba: lack of transparency and access to information

MARCH 2021

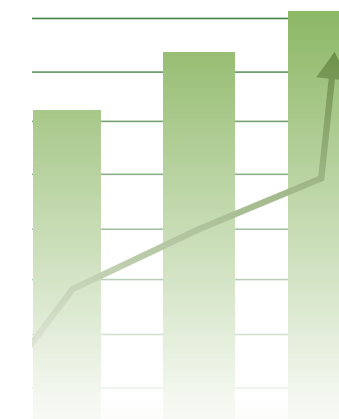
IMPLEMENTATION



SUPPORT



- 1.** The differentiation between legal and illegal deforestation is a key factor to ensure that Brazil's agricultural and forestry production is not contaminated by environmental crimes practiced by a small portion of farmers and land grabbers.
- 2.** This study evaluated the transparency and quality of the deforestation/conversion permits databases issued by 11 states of the Amazon and the Matopiba until the second half of 2020, comparing this information to the clear-cutting rates from INPE's Deforestation Satellite Monitoring Project in the Brazilian Amazon (PRODES).
- 3.** The overall situation of the states' official databases is worrying due to the low-quality of the data, as well as a limited or even impaired access to environmental information that, according to the Brazilian law, should be available to the public.
- 4.** The comparison between deforestation/conversion permits and the PRODES indicates that 94% of the converted area in the analyzed period can be considered illegal, amounting 18 million hectares – an area superior to the combined territories of Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Switzerland.
- 5.** Urgent action is needed in terms of greater technical efforts and political willingness to comply both with Brazil's environmental legislation as well as with the Access to Information Brazilian Law (LAI). Otherwise, the lack of transparency will continue to mask the ongoing destruction of ecosystems.



Almost all the deforestation that occurred in the states of the Legal Amazon and part of the Cerrado biome – especially in the region called Matopiba¹ – has not been backed by ecosystem clearing permits. According to the law, ecosystem clearing permits should be publicly available on the states’ environmental agencies websites and/or transparency portals.

The lack of transparency undermines the work of researchers, law enforcers, and market due diligence, putting the image of companies, banks, and investors at risk. The states’ lacking and inaccessible data on deforestation/conversion prevents the differentiation of compliant farmers and environmental criminals in the Brazilian agribusiness. It, thus, compromises the reputation of a key sector of the Brazilian economy. The study points out that transparency is crucial in democratic regimes, being a fundamental condition for market and social control.

¹. The region is an agricultural frontier that encompasses areas of the Cerrado in the states of Maranhão, Tocantins, Piauí and Bahia. In addition to presenting geographic conditions favorable to the cultivation of relatively cheap grains and land, Matopiba is home to the last fully preserved remnants of the Cerrado biome. Currently, there is much tension between agricultural production and environmental protection. The region is responsible for the largest expansion of Brazilian agribusiness exports.

These are some of the conclusions of the **Illegal Deforestation and Conversion in the Amazon and Matopiba: lack of transparency and access to information** study, developed by researchers² from different Brazilian institutions operating in the Amazon and the Cerrado: Instituto Centro de Vida (ICV), Institute of Forestry and Agricultural Management and Certification (IMAFLORA), and the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) - with support from WWF-Brazil.

This new study brings about new data and layers of analysis, adding efforts to previously published studies, including ICV³, MapBiomass⁴, and Rajão *et al*⁵.

². Ana Paula Valdiones, Paula Bernasconi, Vinícius Silgueiro, Vinícius Guidotti, Frederico Miranda, Julia Costa, Raoni Rajão and Bruno Manzolli.

³. Transparência Florestal Mato Grosso: avaliação da transparência das informações ambientais na Amazônia/ Ana Paula Valdiones, Alice Thuault. Ano 6, n. 10 (fev. 2019). – Cuiabá: Instituto Centro de Vida, 2019.

⁴. MapBiomass Alerta (2020). Relatório anual do desmatamento no Brasil. 49p. Available at: <http://alerta.mapbiomas.org/>

⁵. Rajão *et al*. (2020). The rotten apples of Brazil’s agribusiness. Science, v. 369, n. 6501, p. 246-248. DOI: [10.1126/science.aba6646](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aba6646)

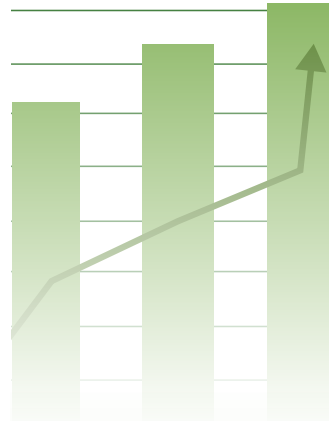
The study provides evidence that an area of natural ecosystems of approximately 18 million hectares – greater than all the territories of Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Switzerland combined – was illegally deforested, according to the available data in each state during the survey.

The authors pointed out that differentiating between legal forest clearing and illegal deforestation is key to preventing farmers, companies, and financial institutions that follow the rules of the game from being defiled by a small portion of environmental offenders.

Transparency is a crucial factor if Brazil really wants to eliminate illegal deforestation/conversion by 2030, as promised by President Jair Bolsonaro during the Climate Leaders Summit, held in April 2021 at the initiative of the President of the United States, Joe Biden.

The new study points out that Brazil lacks the necessary transparency standards to show exactly how much deforestation in the Amazon and the Cerrado is legal or illegal.

According to the study, to reach the necessary level of transparency, easy access to the ecosystems clearing



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permit data issued by the states must be guaranteed. Furthermore, the state databases must be integrated with federal systems, such as the National System for the Control of the Origin of Forest Products (SINAFLOR), under federal regulations.

However, this has not been the practice in most states of the Legal Amazon or Matopiba. The states of Mato Grosso and Amazonas provide the databases with best quality, according to the study. Even so, there are relevant limitations.

The state of Amazonas does not have vector data in the public database, making spatial analysis difficult. Despite having the best database among the states observed in the study, the state of Mato Grosso does not update the database frequently, bearing intervals of up to two months, which prevents infractions from being monitored in real-time.

To understand the picture of illegalities and the situation of data availability in the Legal Amazon and Matopiba, the authors surveyed ecosystems clearing permit databases issued until the second half of 2020 in 11 states. The data obtained was analyzed based on essential criteria to

the transparency of official procedures for granting native vegetation clearing permits; such as identifying applicants, format, date of issue, expiration date, and total authorized area.

More evidence

In addition to denouncing a lack of transparency in the management of forests and other natural ecosystems, the research confirms previous studies by estimating that areas with evidence of illegality (deforested/converted areas that do not have a ecosystem clearing permit) correspond to 94% of the total deforested/converted areas in the states combined. While Amazonas, Roraima, Pará and Bahia have issued less than 2% of ecosystem clearing permits for the overall deforestation/conversion in the period, in Amapá and Roraima, this value was 30% and 35%, respectively, as shown in the **table 1**, taken from the report.

Recommendations

To address the problem, the authors recommend that actions are taken to organize and standardize (in vectors) public data on deforestation/conversion permits, effec-

tively managing the databases, and allowing an easy access to it. Also, they emphasize the urgency to accelerate the integration of this data with SINAFLOR.

They further advocate strengthening the culture of transparency in environmental agencies and the ongoing dialogue between them and the public, facilitating social and private sector accountability over illegal activities in agricultural production. The Researchers consider these points essential to safeguarding the reputation of Brazilian supply chains as well as the country’s image abroad.

Otherwise, the chronic lack of transparency, compounded with the alarming picture of illegalities within deforestation/conversion patterns, will continue masking the destruction of our ecosystems, the heritage of all Brazilians and human kind.

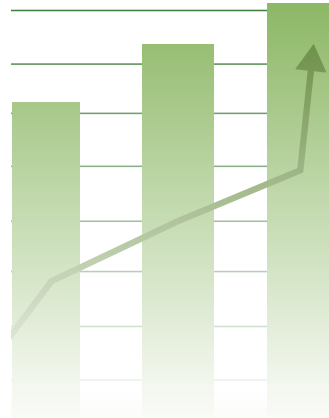


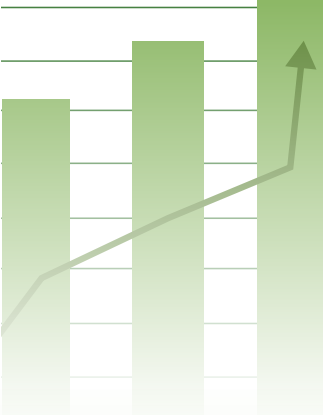
Table 1 •
Approximate relationship between deforestation and ecosystem clearing permits in the databases*, by state

State	Period covered by the ecosystem clearing permit database	Number of ecosystem clearing permits	Area covered by natural ecosystem clearing permits (thousand ha)	Total deforestation/conversion* (thousand ha)	Deforestation/conversion and ecosystem clearing permit ratio (%)
AC	2019 – 2020	14	5,98	133	4,5
AP	2018 – 2020	226	4,12	13,7	30
AM	2018 – 2020	34	4,16	400	1
BA	2020	2	0,32	91,9	0,3
MA	2018 – 2020	194	124	539	23
MT	2000 – 2020	1.028	442	12.399	3,6
PA	2010 – 2020	38	9,0	3.243	0,3
PI	2018 – 2020	42	1,64	155	1,1
RO	2019 – 2020	35	5,34	251	2,1
RR	2010 – 2020	418	87,4	248	35
TO	2013 – 2020	1.880	395	1.633	24

Legend: **AC:** Acre; **AP:** Amapá; **AM:** Amazonas; **BA:** Bahia; **MA:** Maranhão; **MT:** Mato Grosso; **PA:** Pará; **PI:** Piauí; **RO:** Rondônia; **RR:** Roraima; **TO:** Tocantins.

* Total deforestation/conversion corresponds to the period covered by the ecosystem clearing permits accessed.

The full document can be read **here**.



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