

EDITORIAL Nº 3/2019

THREATENED AMAZON

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Wildfires that have destroyed vast areas of the Amazon and attract worldwide attention are just the most visible face of the exploitation and degradation of the world's largest rainforest. Behind the clearing of the forest and fire are several private economic interests that are far from generating any benefit to the Brazilian state or sharing any benefits with society. In most cases, these burnings occur on Union land, to the lawlessness and without any official authorization granted.

The fruit of these illegal occupations and activities - whether is wood, ore mined, the grain or animal protein produced - is, as a rule, traded in illegal markets because it is impossible to prove legal origin. They therefore feed a tax-free marketing chain and, in the case of agricultural products, are oblivious to any phytosanitary verification process.

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Often these areas are defended by armed militias who violently repel any attempt at oversight that is not accompanied by the Federal Police. Often, slave-like working conditions are also observed in these areas. This is just the economic and social aspect of these illegal occupations. There is a full environmental impact that extends beyond the deforested areas themselves.

In the 1970s only 1% of the Amazon was deforested. Currently the rate reaches 20%, according to a report from the Federal Prosecutor's Office of the Environment. According to the report, the destruction of the forest accompanied the evolution of the cattle herd in the Amazon, which has gone from 47 million animals in 2000 to about 85 million nowadays. Livestock occupies 80% of the deforested area in the region.

This shows that the economic exploitation of the Amazon is behind the 40,000 fire outbreaks that hit the forest between January 1 and August 23, detected by the National Institute for Space Research (INPE). This is the highest rate of burning since 2010. There is evidence that this exploration has been accompanied by a process of dismantling the monitoring and enforcement structures of deforestation practices commonly used in the Amazon. The current and worrying political process that is instituted also arises through radical discourses and inconceivable antagonisms. This picture has placed state institutions in a limiting position with regard to fulfilling their most fundamental functions.

The abrupt setbacks in the Amazon Fund, set up by Norway and Germany with the Ministry of the Environment, for example, illustrate that this initiative of decades of foreign funding not only stands as successful and audited, but has historically shown no threat to national sovereignty. In addition, about 60% of the financial resources received by this fund have been directed to government agencies. That is, when these resources are extinguished, in the situation of state financial crisis, there will probably be no other sources of financing, which will lead to more dismantling of the public command and control instruments.

The attitude of intolerance towards non-governmental organizations is also configured in an excessive, widespread and unreasonable way. Organized civil society is fundamental in any democracy, its role extends the reach of public policies by enabling closer and more adaptive dialogues to different socio-environmental contexts. In the Amazon, numerous NGO-led projects have been deservedly acknowledged, including contributing to innovations for sustainable development. Strengthening the construction of creative and transformative solutions from the Amazonian communities contributes more to sovereignty than the posture of yielding to external industrial models of destructive exploitation.

The fires that intensified between June and August 2019 are raising the risk of the 265 endangered species that exist today in the Amazon, warns WWF-Brazil. There are 180 species of fauna, of which 124 occur only in this biome, and 85 species of the flora. The risk is greater for species that are being hit by fire and are not subject to any protection mechanism.

The Amazon rainforest is home to about 30,000 plant species or 30% of all plant species in South America. Forests house well over half of the world's terrestrial species and are one of the main carbon capture agents, which aids mitigating the climate crisis.

Wildlife, in turn, is also vital, fulfilling functions such as pollination and seed dispersal, as well as other essential roles for its own regeneration and carbon storage.

Burning and climate change operate in a vicious cycle in which the more they increase, the more greenhouse gas emissions, and the more the planet warms, the more frequent extreme events such as recurring droughts in the Amazon. At the same time, social and environmental conflicts intensify, increasing land disputes and competition between predatory and sustainable ways of using forest and ecological resources.

Ambiente & Sociedade brings in this third editorial of the year, its position regarding the scope of this situation that is not new in the Amazon. But it is more worrying because of the current Brazilian government's position on environmental policy.

We highlight two aspects that are fundamental to understanding impacts, on the one hand, the risk of loss of ecosystem services linked to the water cycle, carbon capture and biodiversity. The second aspect is the few and limited response to illegal and violent methods of public land grabbing in the region. This illegality is also expressed in logging data, threats to what should be preserved and indigenous areas, illegal deforestation in private areas and the enhancement of a scenario of environmental injustice.

Until recently, Brazil had a positive public image for reducing emissions and had made visible an effort to move towards policies that propose to turn the forest into a foundation for sustainable development.

Due to the systemic importance of the Amazon in the national and global contexts, it is not possible to conceive that government attitudes contradict progress of decades made in the conservation of ecosystems and in the search for suitable alternatives given to the own social and environmental diversity contained in this biome.

The conception that the Amazon is ours to be exploited voraciously and destructively in favor of a monoculture of ideas and little and diverse production leads us to a past of extremely restricted visions and incompatible with contemporary challenges. This also brings us to intolerant postures, which conform to unilateral and authoritarian discourses, conveniently unaware of the intrinsic phenomenology and plurality of the Amazon. It is worth noting that possible consequences go beyond the Amazonian territory and may affect other ecosystems associated with it, such as the agricultural production itself in the Southeast and Midwest, dependent on rainfall produced in the remarkable continuum of tropical forests of the largest watershed of the world.

The counterpoint to sustainable development for the Amazon represents what Carlos Nobre, a prominent INPE researcher, has termed the transition from an economy of nature destruction to an economy of nature knowledge. Ambiente & Sociedade understands that in one of the territories containing the greatest biodiversity on the planet, it is essential to support all initiatives aimed at protecting an area of 70 million hectares covered by forests in the Amazon, which is currently threatened by illegal land grabbers and loggers. It is therefore essential that these areas are designed to promote activities that encourage sustainable use of the forest. This demands widespread recognition and legitimate commitment from the whole of society and, fundamentally, from the government.

After this brief reflection, we invite everyone to enjoy reading the new articles published corresponding to the Annual Volume 2019.

Opening this new group of articles, we present our Featured Themes section, with the theme “Oceans”, which brings the article Antarctica and ABNJ in the Anthropocene: challenges to the sustainable management of marine genetic resources? In this paper, authors Ana Flávia Barros-Platiau and Leandra Regina Gonçalves, from an interdisciplinary approach to international relations, the legal and environmental science literature, conclude that Agenda 2030 needs to include companies (global actors) to improve the effectiveness of future regulations in light of new technology challenges for sustainable biodiversity management and access to marine genetic resources.

As original articles, the work: Payment for Environmental Services: Guidelines for the Identifying Priority Areas Focusing on Biodiversity, by authors Caroline Picharillo and Victor Eduardo Lima Ranieri, identifies in the scientific literature the important elements to prioritize areas for the implementation of schemes. PES to be used as a reference to guide the implementation of other PES schemes based on restoration and maintenance of natural areas.

The authors Daniella de Souza Marcondes and Sidnei Raimundo, in the article Traditional population and tourism: TAUS as a tool for dispute management? analyze the granting of the Sustainable Use Authorization Term (TAUS), a land regularization instrument based on the recognition of the right to housing and the management of socioeconomic practices, to the Caiçaras Traditional Communities, located in Praia de Castelhanos, Ilhabela (SP). They conclude that TAUS may give caiçara the power of decision, however, it presents challenging aspects regarding territorial management and conflicts with external agents.

Through semi-structured interviews and evaluation of herbs, based on a specific script, the article: Yerba Mate landscapes: forest use and socio-environmental conservation, by the authors Anésio da Cunha Marques, Maurício Sedrez dos Reis and Valdir Frigo Denardin, studies the different landscapes of the highlands of Planalto Norte Catarinense (PNC) - the main native yerba mate producing region of Santa Catarina - and their relationship with social and environmental conservation. They conclude that the herbage activity is of great importance for the socio-environmental conservation in the PNC.

In the article: Threats to the biodiversity of the Brazilian Pantanal due to land use and occupation, the authors Cleber J. R. Alho, Simone Mamede, Maristela Benites, Bruna da Silva Andrade and Jose J. O. Sepúlveda, considering land use and occupation, and employing the experience in research in the region, identify and analyze the threats to the biodiversity of the Pantanal biome. Although this biome still retains 80% of its vegetation cover, habitat destruction and alteration have affected terrestrial and aquatic environments. Based on this, they propose strategies to conserve the biodiversity in the Brazilian Pantanal.

The authors Bruno Benzaquen Perosa and Paulo Furquim Azevedo present their research that reveals that the efficiency of environmental governance mechanisms depends on the costs that will be incurred by producers in order to meet the criteria required by certifications, affected by the pre-established level of public regulation. This regulation should be designed considering its effects on producers as well as on the criteria establi-

shed in private certifications. The article is: The evolution of environmental governance mechanisms: an institutional framework applied to biofuels.

Next, we present our Narratives and Reflection section, which is contributed by the researchers Jeroen Warner, Elizabeth Nunes Alves, and Robert Coates of Wageningen University. The work of these authors, entitled: Swiss Cheese in Brazil: Disaster culture and safety culture in disasters, points out structural reasons in Brazil related to “disaster culture” and “safety culture” and how these aspects influence disaster management, especially those with low incidence and high consequence, which do not give evidence for preventive decision making. This discussion considers the “Swiss Cheese Model” of risk analysis proposed by James Reason.

Finally, authors Diego Carlos Zanella, Anor Sganzerla, and Leocir Pessini present a Book Review: VR Potter’s Global Bioethics, analyzing the concept of global bioethics in Van Rensselaer Potter’s eponymous work. The authors emphasize Potter’s broader view, which encompasses the ecological dimension of life of all living beings while addressing and relating to the issues of biomedical ethics.

We wish you all a good read!

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Editorial