

## Brazil's Pantanal Wetlands Doomed to Disappear in a Few Decades

Contributed by O.Ch.  
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The growth of farming and cattle ranching in western Brazil could destroy the world's largest freshwater wetlands by 2050, researchers said Wednesday.

Farming has already wiped out nearly 45 percent of the original vegetation in the Paraguay River Basin, which includes the 145,000-square-kilometer (56,000-square-mile) Pantanal wetlands, according to a new study by Conservation International-Brazil.

While most of the destruction is outside the Pantanal, the wetlands have lost 17 percent of their original vegetation, degrading soil and altering the flood plain's dry and wet cycles, which help sustain the region's rich biodiversity, the study said.

"It is extremely important to conserve the areas surrounding the Pantanal lowlands because they are the headwaters of the rivers that make up the Pantanal," said Sandro Menezes, manager of the conservation group's Pantanal program.

The report said that if the destruction continues at its current rate, the Pantanal's native plant life could be wiped out in 45 years.

Scientists say the Pantanal, which sprawls across the midwestern states of Mato Grosso and Mato Grosso do Sul and part of neighboring Bolivia, is home to some 650 bird species, 230 fish species, 80 varieties of mammals and more than 1,000 kinds of butterflies.

Conservation International said Brazil must take urgent action to protect the Pantanal, including increased regulation of land use and better coordination of conservation efforts by government authorities.

State governments have proposed to develop the region by dredging the Paraguay River to open shipping lanes or by building power plants.

In November, environmentalist Francisco Anselmo de Barros, 65, set himself on fire and died protesting plans to build a sugarcane alcohol plant in Mato Grosso do Sul. After his suicide, the state legislature shelved the proposal.

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