

Brazil to Protect Stretch of Amazon Rain Forest

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RIO DE JANEIRO, Dec. 4 (AP) — A swath of Amazon rain forest larger than Alabama was placed under government protection on Monday in a region infamous for violent conflicts among loggers, ranchers and environmentalists.

The protected territory totals 57,915 square miles of the Guyana Shield region, an area of Amazon forest stretching across international borders that contains more than 25 percent of the world's remaining humid tropical forests and the largest remaining unpolluted fresh water reserves in the American tropics.

The protected areas will link to existing reserves to form a vast preservation corridor eventually stretching into neighboring Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana. While the entire Guyana Shield corridor is not yet protected, portions of it in each country are now covered.

The Washington-based environmental group Conservation International put up \$1 million to facilitate the expansion, which preserves much of the jungle's largely untouched north.

It is not clear, though, how much creation of the new reserves will do to stall Amazon destruction, since most of the deforestation is taking place along the rain forest's southern border.

“If any tropical rain forest on Earth remains intact a century from now, it will be this portion of northern Amazonia,” said Russell Mittermeier, Conservation International's president. “The region has more undisturbed rain forest than anywhere else.”

The Amazon region covers 60 percent of [Brazil](#) and 20 percent of its forest — 1.6 million square miles — has already been destroyed by development, logging and farming. The new protected areas will help break the power of ranchers who often claim ownership of huge areas and rule them as their own personal fiefs, said Raul Porto, Para State's environment secretary.

Two of the new protected areas, covering 22,239 square miles, would place the land completely off limits to the general public and be accessible only to researchers.

The remaining areas have been designated for sustainable use, allowing local communities to manage the natural resources and permitting limited logging under strict management.