

The veto does not guarantee forest protection

The Provisional Measures 756 and 758 proposed by the Brazilian government and modified by the Brazilian congress would reduce the level of protection of almost 600 thousand hectares of Protected Areas. The Provisional Measure 756 turns 480,000 hectares of the Jamanxim National Forest, in the State of Pará, into an Environmental Protection Area (APA), and reduces the size of the National Park of São Joaquim, in the State of Santa Catarina, to 80% of its original extent. Furthermore, the Provisional Measure 758 turns 100,000 hectares of the Jamanxim National Park into APA, which is also in Pará. These measures are undeniably reducing protection because “APA” is a category of protected area with very low protection standards, where deforestation, cattle ranching and land sale is allowed – not unlike National Forests of the United States. This will result in the legalization of the land claims of all those who have staked land claims in their interior, including some of the largest land grabbers and deforesters in the Brazilian Amazon.

According to the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMbio), more than 67% of the inhabitants of the Jamanxin National Forest entered shortly before or shortly after the creation of the area. Deforestation from this irregular occupation resulted in the loss of 117 thousand hectares of forest between 2004 and 2016, generating an estimate of 70 million tons of CO₂ emissions. National and international outcry for a veto of these Provisional Measures has been broad, bringing together researchers, environmentalists, artists, governments, international agencies, sectors of the agribusiness themselves and the Ministry of the Environment.

The Planalto Palace – Brazil’s executive branch - announced the full veto to MP 756 and the partial veto of MP 758.

Recently, a video has been released where Environment Minister Sarney Filho says the president will veto MP 756. However, the problem is that, along with the veto, a new bill will be sent to Congress, under an expedited process, proposing the transformation of those same 480 thousand hectares of the Jamanxim National Forest into APA. This means that the veto only serves to transfer the responsibility from the president to the Congress - now dominated by parliamentarians with no commitment to environmental conservation, - for upending protection of this significant portion of the Amazon rainforest.

Last week a series of reports in the Brazilian and international press revealed the real beneficiaries of this reduction in forest protection. Among them are businessman Ezequiel Castanha, who the Public Federal Ministry has indicted as one of the largest deforesters in the Amazon; Ubiraci Soares da Silva, mayor of Novo Progresso (PA), who owes R \$ 1.9 million in fines for deforestation; Pedro Cordeiro, publicly known as the largest illegal deforester of the Jamanxim

National Forest, among other land grabbers that invaded and logged the area in hopes of legalizing their land claims.

It is worth noting that Provisional Measures 756 and 758 were radically amended in their passage through Congress. Likewise, it is foreseeable that this draft law will also receive amendments to unprotect other protected areas. The government's maneuver resurrects the initial threat, with the aim of reusing all the text that was vetoed, bringing with it the possibility of even more damage.