

Alert | Environmental



December 2024

Latin America Environmental Updates: September and October 2024

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Introduction

This GT Alert highlights significant environmental developments in Latin America from September to October 2024.

A. Argentina

Argentina faced several environmental challenges during this period:

1. **Water crisis:** Ongoing drought due to La Niña affected agricultural production and the economy, increasing tensions over water management and water conservation policies.
2. **Lithium and extractivism:** The government's push for increased lithium production, an important resource in the global energy transition, clashed with local communities' concerns about environmental and social impacts. This may reflect a wider conflict between economic development and environmental protection.

3. **Forest fires:** Major fires increased greenhouse gas emissions, raising concerns about the effects of climate change and deforestation and their long-term impacts on biodiversity and public health.
4. **Action on biodiversity and environmental legislation:** Despite economic pressure, environmental groups continued to advocate for laws like the wetlands protection bill, which deals with a key issue in the debate on sustainability and the protection of vulnerable ecosystems.

B. Brazil

Forest fires in Brazil

Brazil faced a significant increase in forest fires, especially in the Amazon and Cerrado regions. Cerrado experienced a 221% increase in burned areas compared to the previous year, resulting in biodiversity losses and local ecosystem alterations. These fires not only devastated local flora and fauna, but also compromised the hydrological cycle by destroying key water catchment areas.

In the Amazon, illegal deforestation activities, such as mining and cattle ranching expansion, contributed to the fires. These activities are often used to clear land and expand agricultural frontiers. The presence of criminal gangs profiting from these illegal activities hampered efforts to control the fires. Despite the government's efforts to combat these environmental crimes, resistance and illegal practices continue to be a challenge.

The fires' impact has been devastating for biodiversity, with serious damage to endemic species and an increase in greenhouse gas emissions, aggravating the climate crisis. Air quality has also deteriorated, affecting public health, especially in areas close to fire hotspots.

C. Chile

Water crisis in Chile

Chile's water crisis continues to be a key environmental issue. At the national level, authorities and agricultural associations expressed their concern about water scarcity, especially in the agricultural sector, which struggles to ensure availability. Various actors, such as the former Minister of Public Works Alfredo Moreno and the National Society of Agriculture, called for continuing the National Water Roundtable and proposed creating a Ministry of Water Resources to coordinate national water management policies.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) also expressed concerns about Chile's water crisis and recommended advancing green fiscal reforms, in addition to improving water allocation and quality. OECD highlighted the importance of implementing pilot projects in river basins and creating a scientific committee to address water-related conflicts.

Chile implements REP Law

Chile implemented the REP (Extended Producer Responsibility) Law, which seeks to promote the circular economy by making producers responsible for the waste of their products.

A September forum highlighted the increase in recycling rates and the reduction of single-use plastic waste, reflecting a positive transition towards more sustainable practices. Despite this progress, significant challenges remain, such as the lack of adequate recycling infrastructure and the need to improve public awareness and education on waste separation.

The event also discussed the possibility of extending the law to include more products and industrial sectors, which may further strengthen the country's waste management policy.

D. Colombia

Colombia was involved in several key environmental initiatives, including:

1. **Biodiversity preservation and land cover monitoring:** The Institute of Hydrology, Meteorology and Environmental Studies (IDEAM), in collaboration with Ecopetrol and Fundación Natura, presented a new generation of CORINE Land Cover maps. These maps allow the Institute to monitor the transformation of the country's natural land cover between 2000 and 2020, providing data for biodiversity conservation and sustainable land management.
2. **Glaciers and microbial life:** Research conducted in Colombian glaciers confirmed the presence of microbial life, highlighting the importance of these ecosystems to national biodiversity. This finding is significant as glaciers are retreating due to climate change.
3. **Events and seminars on sustainable forest management:** In October, IDEAM organized the Eighth National Forest Seminar, where experts discussed topics such as community participation in forest management and strategies for sustainable forest conservation.

E. Costa Rica

Costa Rica publishes National Marine Debris Plan

Costa Rica's National Marine Debris Plan, published in October 2024, seeks to address growing concerns of land-based waste reaching the sea. This plan aims to reduce these flows by 2030 through a series of strategic actions.

One initiative within the plan would be implementing the Methodological Guide for Solid Waste Sampling on Beaches, which would standardize the process of identifying and collecting waste on beaches. This would allow the collection of data to develop more effective local strategies to reduce the amount of waste on the coasts. The guide has already been successfully implemented in several beaches in the Limón province, such as Cieneguita, Puerto Viejo, and Tortuguero, with active participation from local communities and environmental protection organizations.

The plan takes a preventive approach and seeks to improve national regulations and enforcement while promoting education and awareness of the impacts of marine debris. Costa Rican authorities have emphasized the importance of promoting scientific innovation and improving monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to address this challenge. Collaboration between government sectors, non-governmental organizations, and local communities will be key to these initiatives' success.

F. Mexico

Hurricane John's impact on Mexico

Hurricane John caused severe damage to Acapulco and other areas of Guerrero and Oaxaca in October 2024. In Acapulco, heavy rains and winds caused massive flooding, downed trees, and the destruction of homes. Critical infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and power lines collapsed, leaving thousands of people without access to basic services such as electricity, drinking water, and communication. Tourist areas and ports also suffered severe damage, while landslides worsened the situation.

Storm surges and erosion affected coastal ecosystems, such as mangroves. The hurricane intensified climate change effects by increasing the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events in the country.

In terms of human losses, dozens of deaths were reported, and thousands of people were displaced. The government activated an emergency operation, collaborated with various agencies and civil organizations, and established temporary shelters. Despite efforts to restore services and rebuild infrastructure, recovery has taken several months.

This disaster highlighted coastal areas' vulnerability and the need to strengthen climate change prevention and adaptation policies, in addition to improving infrastructure in areas prone to hurricanes and other extreme weather events.

Mexico intensifies forest protection efforts

Mexico intensified its forest protection efforts through various programs and policies. The National Forestry Commission (Conafor), under the leadership of Sergio Graf, launched a comprehensive plan to address the causes of deforestation, stressing the importance of prevention and collaboration with other institutions, such as the Ministries of Environment and Agriculture. One of the key approaches has been promoting sustainable cattle ranching and agriculture to reduce pressure on forest ecosystems, and combating practices such as illegal logging, which has reached significant levels in the country.

In addition, Conafor has implemented reforestation projects that have restored hundreds of thousands of hectares, using native species to support biodiversity recovery and improve ecosystem services. However, challenges remain, such as the need for an adequate budget and constant monitoring to ensure the planted trees' survival.

Transfer Station and Sorting Plant Opens in Azcapotzalco

The Azcapotzalco Transfer Station and Sorting Plant, inaugurated in September 2024, is considered the most modern of its kind in Latin America. With an investment of 385 million pesos, this facility was designed to process up to 1,400 tons per day of solid waste from several Mexico City municipalities, including Azcapotzalco, Cuauhtémoc, Gustavo A. Madero, and Miguel Hidalgo.

Its advanced German technology enables mechanical and manual separation of different types of waste, such as plastics, PET, and aluminum, contributing to recycling and reducing landfill waste. The plant includes innovations such as automatic sprinkler systems that capture odor particles and acoustic insulation technology to minimize environmental impact. This infrastructure integrates both waste transfer and sorting at the same site.

The plant is part of a broader effort to modernize the capital's waste infrastructure and promote sustainable practices, aligning with the city's environmental commitments and collaboration with international entities such as the European Union.

Sustainable farming initiatives

Mexico continued to promote various initiatives supporting sustainable agricultural practices. The Production for Wellbeing Program implemented the Technical Accompaniment Strategy (EAT), which seeks to transform agriculture towards a more ecological model, emphasizing the use of bio-inputs instead of agrochemicals. The EAT created digital platforms to train producers and technicians to produce and use these inputs, supporting agroecology and the transition to regenerative agriculture.

Another component was the Farmer Field Schools, where farmers were trained in agroecological practices such as soil conservation and integrated pest management. The Farmer Field Schools also promoted Agroecological Lighthouses, or innovation centers that facilitate collaboration between technicians, researchers, and producers to apply these practices in the field. These efforts seek to increase the rural communities' resilience to climate change and improve the sustainability of agricultural production.

Claudia Sheinbaum's proposals

Claudia Sheinbaum presented several environmental proposals within her government project, including:

1. **Renewable energies:** Construction of photovoltaic, wind, and geothermal plants would promote the transition to clean energies. In addition, two million solar roofs would be installed on homes, seeking to reduce electricity and gas costs.
2. **Protecting forests and bodies of water:** The project would continue reforestation of forests and create a program to clean up rivers in the country's most polluted watersheds. Open-pit mining and hydrocarbon exploitation through fracking would stop.
3. **Electromobility:** The project would accelerate the transition to electric and hybrid vehicles and support the necessary infrastructure for adoption.
4. **Water management:** The project proposes creating a National Water Plan, which would include agriculture and industry's efficient water use, as well as constructing infrastructure to improve water supply and treatment.
5. **Recycling and waste management:** The project commits to building at least 10 recycling plants in the country's main cities.

G. Perú

Publishing the National Biodiversity Strategy

Peru's government approved the National Biodiversity Strategy (ENDB) to 2050 to establish concrete goals for conserving its natural resources. Published through Supreme Decree No. 008-2024-MINAM, this strategy establishes five strategic objectives with 29 national goals and 143 actions, including adapting to climate change, governing natural resources, and strengthening research and access to conservation financing.

This strategy was developed with the collaboration of various entities and communities and aligns with Peru's international commitments, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity. The document highlights indigenous peoples' role, specifying the importance of their ancestral knowledge in biodiversity conservation. It also promotes principles such as interculturality, equity and sustainability.

This strategy also aligns with other development frameworks in the country, such as the National Environmental Policy and the Strategic Plan for National Development to 2050.

H. Others

COP 29

Latin American countries actively prepared for the United Nations Climate Change Conference 2024 (COP 29) in the United Arab Emirates, including the following fronts:

1. **Reviewing Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs):** Countries such as Brazil, Mexico, and Chile adjusted their climate commitments, focusing on energy transition, climate neutrality, and promoting renewable energies.
2. **Regional Initiatives:** CELAC and the Pacific Alliance promoted climate cooperation and the integration of sustainable energy policies in the region, seeking to strengthen Latin America's role in the COP 29 negotiations.
3. **Decarbonization and Renewable Energies:** Countries such as Costa Rica, Colombia, and Argentina have made progress in their decarbonization policies, emphasizing renewable energies and protecting ecosystems.
4. **Climate Vulnerability and Financing:** The countries of the region intensified their demand for climate financing for adaptation and resilience projects, especially for nations vulnerable to the effects of climate change.
5. **Including Indigenous Peoples and Civil Society:** Countries promoted indigenous peoples and civil society's participation in climate decisions, seeking to protect their rights and integrate their perspectives in climate policies.
6. **Expectations for COP 29:** Latin American countries expected COP 29 to be a key opportunity to strengthen climate finance, advance the Paris Agreement implementation, and secure commitments on climate change adaptation and mitigation.

In summary, Latin American countries focused on strengthening their climate commitments, increasing regional cooperation, and ensuring that their needs and expectations were considered at COP 29.

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