

12.8 What Environmental Groups Want

Not all Brazilians want to see the Amazon basin developed. For example, environmental groups have worked for many years to attempt to slow the clearing of the rainforest. Their ideas have led to conflict with many other groups.

Protecting the Biodiversity of the Rainforest Scientists and **environmentalists** began coming to the rainforest in the 1970s. Some came to study rainforest plants, hoping to find plants that could cure diseases. Others came to study rainforest animals. Still others came to work with native peoples.

All of these groups want to protect the rainforest and its biodiversity. Scientists estimate that a 2.5-acre patch of rainforest contains about 750 species of trees and 1,500 species of flowering plants. The same patch is also home to approximately 125 species of mammals and 400 species of birds. And these numbers include only the plants and animals that scientists already know about. Countless unknown species also make their homes in the rainforest.

We Want Slower, Smarter Rainforest Development Environmental groups argue that all rainforest species have a right to exist, which means their rainforest home must be preserved. Environmentalists therefore want to slow down development of the rainforest. This would give scientists time to study the effects of new activities so that better decisions can be made for the future.

In 2000, environmental groups won a major victory against ranchers. The ranchers tried to get a law passed that would allow them to clear rainforest land without restriction. Environmental groups successfully blocked the law. Another victory came in 2004, when Brazil's government created two large rainforest reserves where only sustainable activities like rubber tapping are allowed. "We are extremely happy," said one environment leader, "with the government's decision to protect the planet's biggest tropical forest."

The Rainforest Is Home to Earth's Greatest Biodiversity

Experts estimate that we are losing over 100 plant, animal, and insect species every day to rainforest deforestation. Some of these species haven't even been discovered yet! Look closely at this illustration. Why are these plants and animals drawn in unusual sizes relative to one another?

Source: The Nature Conservancy, nature.org

