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ARGENTINA REPORT ON DEFORESTATION

2000-2024

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Argentina's native forests are essential components of the country's ecological and economic fabric. These ecosystems provide a wide array of services, from biodiversity conservation and water regulation to carbon storage and support for local livelihoods. However, human activity and natural events such as wildfires resulted in ongoing forest loss, particularly in regions like Gran Chaco. Understanding the dynamics of forest loss over time is crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of conservation policies and for guiding future land-use decisions.

This report provides an integrated view of Argentina's deforestation trends between 2000 and 2024. It reviews the legal and institutional framework established to manage native forests, including the 2007 Forest Law and international commitments. The objective is to assess the evolution of forest loss, evaluate regional variations, and reflect on the implications for sustainable development and forest governance in Argentina.

INTRODUCTION - NATIVE FORESTS IN ARGENTINA

Forests in Argentina represents an important resource with far-reaching ecological, social, and economic roles. Native forests serve as a resource base for productive activities such as agriculture, livestock farming, and forestry, while also contributing to biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The balance between economic development and forest conservation continues to be a topic of significant importance for policymakers, researchers, and local communities. Thus, analyzing the evolution of deforestation in recent decades is essential for developing effective conservation and sustainable management strategies.

A first step in this endeavor is to understand the characteristics and current state of Argentina's forest regions. With this objective, a key tool is the Second National Native Forest Inventory (INBN2, according to its acronym in Spanish) (Ministerio de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible, 2022), designed to provide updated general information on Argentina's native forests by collecting, processing, and reporting data on the composition of forests, conservation status, site attributes, evidence of human activity, and dasometric characteristics (such as three diameter and height). Following INBN2, Argentina's native forests are classified into seven regions (Figure 1), according to the type of vegetation and their biodiversity.

The forest region with the largest area of native forests in Argentina is ***Parque Chaqueño***, containing 31.6 million hectares of native forest. This biome accounts for 67% of the country's forested areas. It is characterized by a high diversity of environments, which translates into significant biodiversity. The main activities in the forest are extensive livestock farming and traditional timber exploitation.

This is the Argentinean portion of a larger ecoregion, which extends over 1,100,000 km^2 across Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay and Brazil denominated Gran Chaco, the largest continuous tropical dry forest in the world and harbors high biodiversity, including many endemic species.

Parque Chaqueño includes two sub-regions: the Dry Chaco and the Humid Chaco. The Dry Chaco includes a vast flatland that presents a smooth slope to the East. It spreads over the western half of the provinces of Formosa and Chaco, eastern Salta, almost all of Santiago del Estero, northern Santa Fe and Córdoba, and sectors of Catamarca, La Rioja and San Luis. The area occupied by the Dry Chaco is approximately 500,000 km^2. The Humid Chaco occupies approximately the eastern half of Chaco and Formosa provinces and part of northern Santa Fe. It is a flat plain with smooth slopes with a west-to-

east orientation. River and lake landscapes predominate in the area, composing a drainage network that flows into the Paraná and Paraguay rivers. The complex hydrologic cycles, along with edaphic, topologic, and climate characteristics, determined the existence of a large array of wetlands.

Figure 1. Native Forest Regions in Argentina

Forest region	Total area (ha)	Native forest area (ha)
Parque Chaqueño	66,829,044	31,646,885
Espinal	31,370,324	5,539,311
Yungas	5,475,307	3,617,086
Bosque Andino Patagónico	12,020,214	3,238,172
Selva Paranaense	4,032,190	1,428,250
Monte	49,012,582	776,571
Delta e Islas del Río Paraná	3,553,333	73,470
Total	**172,292,994**	**46,319,745**

Source: Authors based on MADES (2022).

The second extension of native forest can be found in the ***Espinal*** region, which is characterized by the presence of xerophytic deciduous forests that rarely exceed 10 meters in height, interspersed with palm groves and with grassy savannas, grassy steppes, and shrub steppes. This is a natural region with significant human intervention. Currently, the main productive activities in forested areas are livestock farming and, to a lesser extent, timber use.

Yungas is a subtropical mountain ecosystem organized into altitudinal levels that differ from each other in species composition, environmental conditions, topography, and land use. The main productive activities in this forest region are timber use and extensive livestock farming under forest cover.

The ***Bosque Andino Patagónico*** is a cold and humid climate forest that develops in mountainous environments favored by high rainfall. The main economic activities in the region are tourism, wood production, and livestock farming.

The ***Delta e Islas del Río Paraná*** region is a set of wetland macrosystems of fluvial origin that extends north-south, mainly along the floodplains of the middle and lower course of the Paraná River. Native forests occupy a small part of the region, as herbaceous formations cover most of the area. In the lower delta, the main economic activity is forestry, followed by tourism, while in the middle and upper delta, the main activities are livestock farming and firewood extraction.

The ***Selva Paranaense*** is characterized by dense vegetation corresponding to heterogeneous subtropical forests that display high biological diversity. These are multi-stratified forest formations between 20 and 30 meters in height. Industrial crops, such as tea, yerba mate, tobacco, and exotic tree plantations like pine, act as permanent replacements for native forest areas.

The ***Monte*** region is a vast region with low forest coverage. Historically, algarrobo forests have been a source of both timber and non-timber resources, alongside extensive livestock farming, with the type and number of animals varying according to prevailing conditions.

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK / REVIEW OF DEFORESTATION-RELATED REGULATIONS

Evaluation of National Regulations

Forest Law

Argentina's Forest Law (No. 26.331) on Minimum Standards for the Environmental Protection of Native Forests[1], enacted in 2007, is the country primary forest regulation instrument. This legislation aims to preserve, protect, and promote the sustainable management of Argentina's native forests.

Under this law, a native forest is defined as any natural forest ecosystem, whether in primary or secondary stages of development, with native species tree canopy cover of 20% or more. These forests must feature trees reaching a minimum height of 3 meters, occupying a continuous area of more than 0.5 hectares, including palm groves.

The law provides a regulatory framework to ensure the conservation and responsible use of forest ecosystems, recognizing their critical role in protecting soil, maintaining biodiversity, regulating the water cycle, and delivering other essential environmental services. Additionally, it seeks to regulate and monitor activities that may impact forests, such as deforestation, land-use changes, and the implementation of development projects. Key provisions of Argentina's Forest Law include:

- **Zoning:** Establishes the Territorial Planning of Native Forests (OTBN, for its acronym in Spanish), which categorizes forested areas based on their conservation value. This zoning allows for sustainable productive activities in designated areas while prioritizing preservation in others.
- **Restrictions on Land Clearing:** Prohibits land clearing in protected areas without the appropriate permits, except in exceptional and properly justified cases.
- **Enforcement Authority:** Designates a Forest Law Enforcement Authority responsible for monitoring compliance, supervising activities, and promoting the conservation and sustainable management of native forests.
- **Compensation Funds:** Creates the National Fund for the Enrichment and Conservation of Native Forests, providing financial support for initiatives focused on forest conservation, restoration, and sustainable management.

OTBN is overseen by the Native Forest Law Enforcement Authority. This intergovernmental body, comprised of representatives from the national government and provinces, is responsible for supervising and ensuring compliance with environmental regulations pertaining to forests.

The Authority's primary function is to coordinate and facilitate the implementation of the OTBN. This involves zoning forested areas and designating conservation and utilization categories for each zone.

Furthermore, the Enforcement Authority is responsible for approving and monitoring activities within native forests, such as deforestation, land-use changes, and the execution of development projects. It also

[1] See http://servicios.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/135000-139999/136125/norma.htm

administers the National Fund for the Enrichment and Conservation of Native Forests, which is funded by resources used to compensate for forest conservation efforts.

It is important to notice that in Argentina, the decentralization of power and provincial autonomy means that each province has its own entity responsible for implementing and supervising the OTBN at the local level, in accordance with the guidelines set by the national Enforcement Authority.

Thus, the zoning of the OTBN was carried out progressively by the provinces following the enactment of the Forest Law in 2007. Each province was tasked with developing its zoning plan, adhering to the criteria outlined by the law. Given the complexity and vast territorial extent of Argentina, combined with the diverse contexts and characteristics of each province, the timeline for completing zoning varied widely.

The Territorial Planning of Native Forests is a process for managing native forest resources based on ecological, social, and economic criteria. The law classifies forest areas into three categories, depending on the level of intervention permitted:

- **Category I (Red)**: Areas of very high conservation value where transformation is prohibited. These include regions with significant biological value, watershed protection roles, or key location. Such areas are to be fully preserved but may support indigenous communities or scientific research.
- **Category II (Yellow)**: Areas of medium conservation value, which may be degraded but, with the implementation of restoration activities, may have a high conservation value. These areas allow for sustainable use, tourism, data collection, and scientific research.
- **Category III (Green)**: Areas of low conservation value that may be partially or fully transformed, provided the interventions comply with the law's criteria.

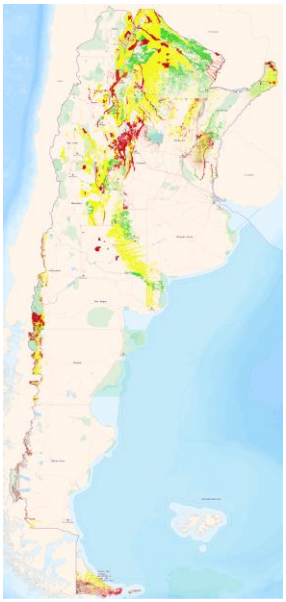
Most provinces finalized their OTBN plans in the years immediately following the law's enactment, though some required more time due to factors such as resource availability, technical capacity, geographical challenges, and the need for public consultation and participation. However, although all 23 provinces submitted their OBTNs, in most cases they are outdated, as the Forestry Law requires them to be updated every five years (Secretaría de Turismo, Ambiente y Deportes, 2024).

As can be seen in the preceding graph, according to the provincial OBTNs, the total protected area is 53.2 million hectares, distributed according to the following percentages: category I (red), 19%; category II (yellow), 60%; category III (green), 21%.

The Forest Law stipulates that any proposed intervention in native forests must be designed and endorsed by qualified professionals and approved by local authorities. These interventions fall under one of four plans: Conservation Plans (CP), Sustainable Management Plans (MP), Formulation Projects (FP), Land Use Change Plans (LUCP).

Likewise, a National Registry of Infractors has been created to consolidate information on those who fail to comply with the law. Non-normative, although its operation is limited and dependent on the provisions for its implementation. The law also establishes a general framework for sanctions regimes determined by the provinces.

Figure 2. OTBN zoning in 2024



Categories	Area (ha)
Category I	11,009,843
Category II	31,990,587
Category III	10,192,063
Total	53,192,493

Source: Authors based on MADES (2023), Subsecretaría de Ambiente (2025)

Integrated Environmental Information System (SINIA)

The SINIA is the platform for much of the official forest monitoring information in Argentina. The SINIA has the following components:

I. National Native Forest Monitoring System

Argentina's National Native Forest Monitoring System provides unified information for the entire country on the extent, changes, conservation status, composition, structure, production, and fires of native forests, and updates on the country's native forest resources.

Native forest monitoring works to detect, quantify, and monitor natural or anthropogenic processes that modify the structure and extent of natural forest ecosystems. This monitoring primarily utilizes remote sensing techniques and a Geographic Information System (GIS).

The native forest coverage monitoring and update reports, as well as the vector files, can be found in the documents available for download on the website of the National Environment Undersecretariat. To date, the latest monitoring report compiles information from 2023.[2]

II. Deforestation early warning system

The Deforestation Early Warning System (SAT) is a tool that continuously monitors the loss of native forests through automated processes based on satellite images.

For the analysis, the Forest Land (TF) and Other Forest Land (OTF) classes are considered, which correspond to the classification proposed by FAO through the Forest Resources Assessment to the year 2000 (FRA 2000) adapted to the characteristics and particularities of Argentina.

[2] See https://www.argentina.gob.ar/ambiente/bosques/umsef

Initially, the National Undersecretariat of the Environment began implementing the SAT in the *Parque Chaqueño* forest region and later incorporated parts of the *Yungas* region and the *Andean Patagonian Forest* region. New developments were also made to improve the current system and expand it to the *Paraná Forest*, *Espinal*, and other subregions of the *Parque Chaqueño* and *Yungas* regions.

Every two weeks, the system automatically processes Sentinel and Landsat 8 satellite images, applying algorithms that analyze time series and spatial patterns using various techniques. All alerts are then validated and processed in a GIS environment, to be cross-referenced with related secondary information such as the OTBN and the National Registry of Plans.

Finally, a report is sent to each province detailing the alerts and requesting information on the legality of each deforestation event (whether it was authorized or not, the instrument authorizing the clearing, the file number, and measures to be taken in the case of illegal events, among other information).

Every year, the Undersecretariat of the Environment compiles the early warning reports into an annual report. The latest available status report covers events that occurred in 2024.[3]

III. National inventory of native forests

The National Inventory of Native Forests is a tool that provides up-to-date general information on Argentina's native forests. It collects, processes, and reports data on the floristic composition of woody individuals, conservation status, site attributes, evidence of human activity, and the volume and dasometric characteristics—such as diameter at breast height (DBH) and height—of the individuals recorded in the study area.

It is a national-scale inventory, covering a large area of the country and therefore providing a consistent level of detail. The Second National Inventory of Native Forests (INBN2) began in 2015, and its results were published in 2022.[4]

IV. Forest Administration, Control and Verification System (SACVeFor)

SACVeFor is a tool developed by the Directorate of Native Forests, in collaboration with the provinces, to optimize the management of the forest product traceability process through the administration, control, and verification of the various processes involved, such as extraction authorizations, movement planning, issuance of transport guides, in-transit control of each movement, and receipt by recipients. The program contributes to transparency regarding the legal origin of wood embedded in finished products.

Additionally, SINIA includes the National Forest Statistics Program, with information on timber harvesting and foreign trade.[5]

International Commitments

Argentina has displayed a commitment to environmental sustainability, both domestically and through active participation in international agreements and initiatives. Over recent decades, global challenges like climate change, natural resource degradation, biodiversity loss, and the rise of new diseases have threatened food security and environmental sustainability.

[3] See https://www.argentina.gob.ar/ambiente/bosques/alerta-deforestacion
[4] See https://www.argentina.gob.ar/ambiente/bosques/segundo-inventario-nacional-bosques-nativos
[5] See https://www.argentina.gob.ar/ambiente/bosques/estadistica-forestal

In this context, a global sustainability agenda has emerged, aiming to make production and trade systems more efficient, environmentally responsible, and sustainable. Here, a key milestone in this agenda is the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are closely linked to the agricultural sector. Relevant SDGs include:

- SDG 2.3: Doubling agricultural productivity.
- SDG 2.4: Ensuring sustainable food production systems and implementing resilient agricultural practices.
- SDG 6.3: Improving water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping, and minimizing the release of chemicals and hazardous materials.
- SDG 12.2: Achieving sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources.
- SDG 12.4: Achieving the environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle.
- SDG 15.3: Combating desertification, restoring degraded land and soils (including those affected by desertification, drought, and floods), and striving for a land degradation-neutral world.

Argentina has actively promoted sustainability, ratified the SDGs and worked towards their national implementation. The country has also played a significant role in international environmental negotiations, demonstrating a consistent commitment to environmental protection. Key examples of Argentina's participation include:

- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC): As a party since 1992, Argentina has actively participated in the Conferences of the Parties (COP), supporting climate action and contributing to international agreements, notably the Paris Agreement.
- Paris Agreement: Argentina played a significant role in negotiating the 2015 Paris Agreement, which aims to limit global temperature rise to below 2 degrees Celsius. Argentina has ratified the agreement, submitted its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and implemented measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD): Since 1994, Argentina has actively participated in CBD negotiations, focusing on biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource use. The country has established protected areas and implemented policies to preserve its diverse ecosystems, including forests, wetlands, and marine areas.
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES): As a party since 1975, Argentina supports international efforts to regulate trade in endangered species, implementing measures to protect wild flora and fauna and collaborating internationally to combat illegal wildlife trafficking.
- Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage: Argentina has contributed to the designation of several World Heritage sites, including Los Glaciares National Park and the Jesuit Missions of the Guaranis.

Furthermore, Argentina joined 144 other countries in signing the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use at COP26. This declaration aims to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030, encompassing objectives such as ecosystem conservation and restoration, sustainable commodity production and consumption, support for indigenous peoples and local communities, sustainable agriculture policies, global financial commitments, and financial alignment with global climate and sustainability goals.

These examples highlight Argentina's commitment to collaborating with the international community to address global environmental challenges and promote sustainable development.

According to Article 75 of the Argentine Constitution, treaties and concordats hold a higher legal standing than national laws. This underscores the importance of international law for Argentina, facilitating global integration, strengthening international relations, protecting human rights, promoting sustainable development, and resolving international conflicts.

In December 2024 Argentina, together with its Mercosur partners, concluded the negotiation of the European Union – Mercosur Association Agreement. This instrument contains an Annex to the Trade and Sustainable Development Chapter, including the commitment to prevent further deforestation and enhance efforts to stabilize or increase forest cover from 2030.

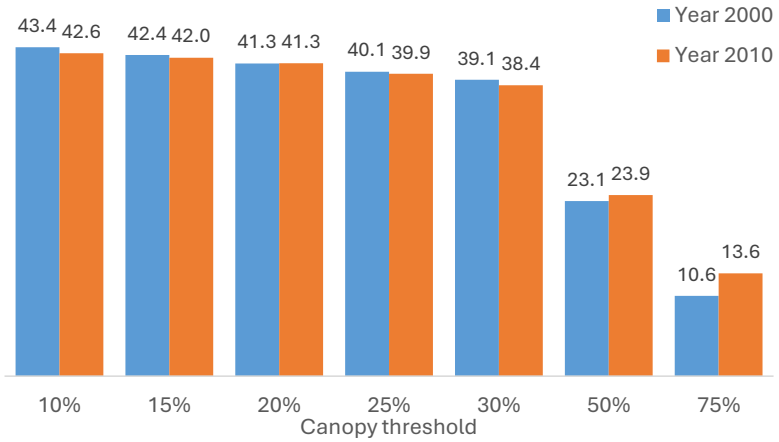
Argentina's engagement in international environmental discussions and its integration of sustainability principles into domestic policy reflect a commitment to aligning with global development goals. Through its active role in climate, biodiversity, and land use initiatives, and by reinforcing these efforts in trade agreements such as the EU-Mercosur Association Agreement, Argentina is positioning itself as a responsible global actor.

THE DEFORESTATION EVOLUTION IN ARGENTINA (2000-2023)

Overview

To analyze a longer-term period, a useful data source is the Global Forest Change dataset, that was developed by the Global Land Analysis and Discovery (GLAD) lab in the Department of Geographic Sciences at the University of Maryland, in collaboration with Google, USGS, and NASA (See Hansen, 2013). This working group investigates methods, causes, and impacts of global land change, primarily from satellite imagery.

Figure 3. Tree cover in Argentina as per minimum canopy percentage (000 ha).

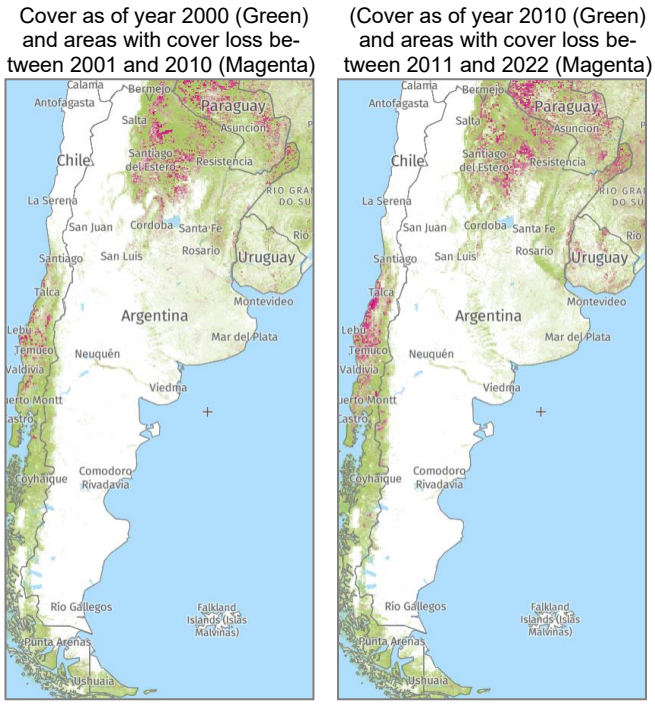


Source: Authors based on GLAD, Hansen/UMD/Google/USGS/NASA, accessed by Global Forest Watch

This dataset results from time-series analysis of Landsat multispectral imagery, applying a supervised learning algorithm to identify per pixel tree cover loss. It provides a grid with data at approximately 30×30 meter resolution, showing tree cover as of the year 2000, defined as vegetation greater than 5 meters in height, and a grid of cover loss, indicating the year of loss. The version used here, V. 1.10, covers the

period 2000 to 2022. Additionally, it includes forest cover gain grids, and reference images selected as per quality assessments for each year.

Figure 4. Tree cover and cover loss data.



Source: GLAD. Hansen/UMD/Google/USGS/NASA, accessed by Global Forest Watch

It is worth noting that the authors define loss as the removal or mortality of tree cover that can be due to various factors, including mechanical harvesting, fire, disease or storm damage, so that loss is not necessarily equivalent to deforestation, but is rather a broader concept.

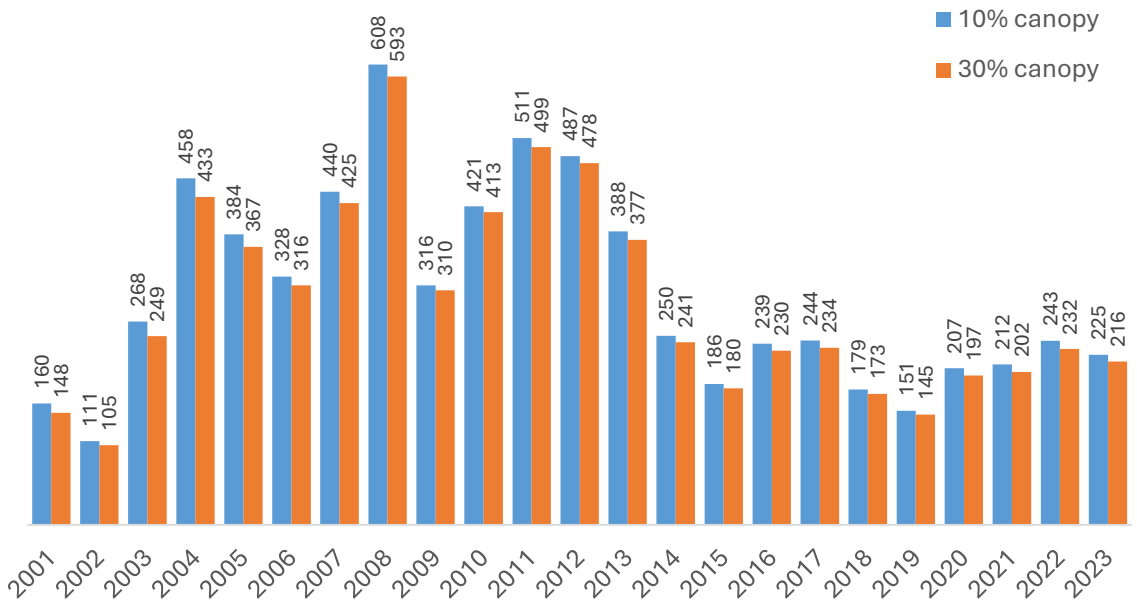
The set feeds data into the Global Forest Watch (GFW) platform, which provides data for forest monitoring and becomes a very useful tool for this kind of study. Furthermore, as it provides global coverage, the results can be compared between countries.

The Global Forest Change information is presented for different forest canopy density thresholds, i.e., percent of canopy cover. This is useful since the measurement of area loss requires the assumption of a coverage threshold above which each pixel is included in the estimation. This avoids overestimation as would be the case, for example, if one hectare is considered a loss when it originally contained only one tree.

The default canopy threshold in the GFW Platform is 30%. As shown in **Figure 4**, this implies that in 2000 there were 39.1 million ha of forest, and in 2010 there were 38 million, according to GLAD's estimate.

One of the characteristics of the Global Forest Change assessment, as described by the authors, is the fact that the tree cover, loss and gain data sets cannot be accurately compared to each other, so it is not possible to estimate a net loss by subtracting the tree cover gain figures from the tree cover loss. This, however, is not a limitation for the current report because this assessment is not intended to measure potential compensation for lost areas.

Figure 5. Tree cover in Argentina as per minimum canopy percentage (000 ha).



Source: Authors based on GFW, Hansen/UMD/Google/USGS/NASA, accessed by Global Forest Watch

Also, the authors mentioned that methodological improvements have been introduced in the data from 2011 to 2022, so some caution is necessary when comparing the 2001-2010 and 2011-2022 periods. New updates of the dataset will use a single unified methodology. The conclusions of this report will not rely on this update, since it would only affect data prior to 2011, but it may still be interesting to incorporate the updated data when it becomes available.

The original paper (Hansen, 2013) also includes a result validation exercise, carried out independently from the estimation of the maps, using a stratified random sampling. There, the authors find that the algorithm allows correctly identifying the year in which the loss occurs with 75% confidence, which goes up to 97% if one year back and one year forward are also included in the interval.

Local monitoring

Official monitoring of forest areas has been carried out since 2006, prior to the implementation of the Forest Law. The latest published report on monitoring native forest area refers to data from 2023 (Undersecretariat of Environment, 2024).[6]

Monitoring integrates the analysis of forest cover loss areas with the coverage of the OTBN for each province, calculating forest cover loss within each conservation category. In addition, data on native forest loss is presented by provinces and departments. It also cross-references forest loss information with information from plans approved by the Local Implementing Authorities (ALA), available in the National Registry of Plans (RNP) of the Integrated Forest Information System (SIIF), and with information provided by the ALAs within the framework of the Deforestation Early Warning System (SAT).

An analysis of the annual rate of native forest loss in the monitored regions reveals a marked decrease in the rate of cover loss since the enactment of the Forest Law (2007). Starting from an annual rate of

[6] See https://www.argentina.gob.ar/ambiente/bosques/umsef

around 1%, it fell to 0.35% in 2014. Subsequently, values ranged from 0.34% (2015) to 0.48% (2022), with the exception of 2020, when a peak of 0.74% was recorded due to the occurrence of fires that affected large areas of native forests.

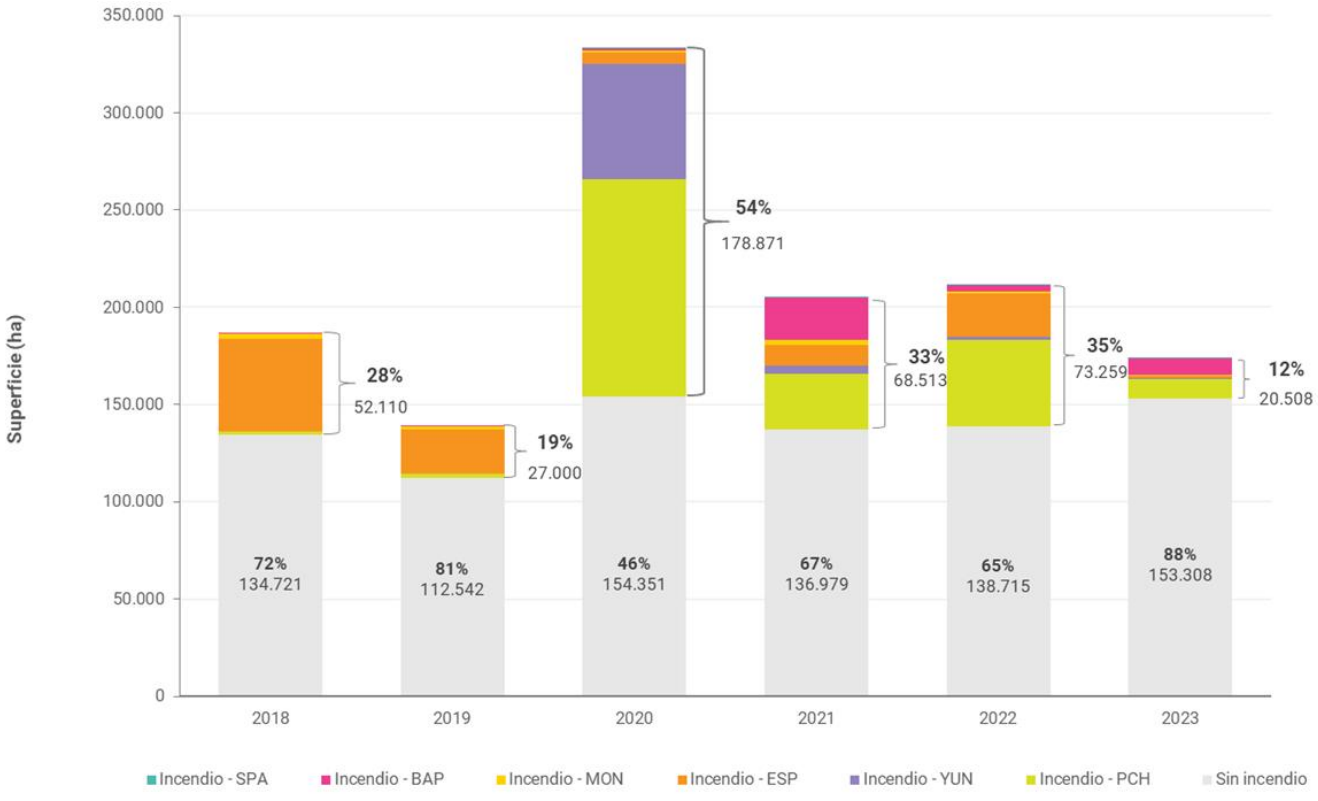
The *Parque Chaqueño* region has the highest annual percentage of native forest loss over time, although a sharp decline in the rate was evident in 2014. This region has the largest forest area, but also the one with the greatest changes due to agricultural activity. Since 2014, the rate has varied between 0.38 and 0.53, except for 2020 as a result of the fires that occurred mainly in the provinces of Córdoba, Salta, and Formosa.

The incidence of wildfires has been a major cause of forest cover loss and forest degradation in recent years. In 2020, 54% of the area lost was due to this cause. It was also over 30% in 2021 and 2022 (Figure 6).

Of the 173,816 hectares of native forests lost in 2023, 47% were concentrated in Category II (yellow), followed by Category III - Green (34%), and then Category I - Red (6%), in addition to the 13% corresponding to uncategorized areas. The presence of uncategorized areas is because the native forest cover considered by the province to carry out the OTBN differs from the native forest cover used by the Undersecretariat of the Environment.

At the territorial level, 33.2% of the total forest loss in 2023 occurred in the province of Chaco, followed by Santiago del Estero (24.6%) and Formosa (14%), with the *Parque Chaqueño* being the most affected biome.

Figure 6. Loss of native forest from 2018 to 2023 in relation to the occurrence of forest fires



Source: Undersecretary of Environment, 2024.

CONCLUSIONS

This report provides an overview of deforestation in Argentina from 2000 to 2024, supported by both national inventories and globally recognized datasets. The combination of spatial analysis tools such as Global Forest Change, alongside official national sources like the INBN2, offers a more nuanced understanding of the evolution of forest cover and land use transitions across different regions of the country. While methodological differences between datasets exist, their convergence in key trends reinforces the reliability of the findings.

The availability of high-resolution, long-term datasets is critical for monitoring environmental change and provides a foundation for future analytical work. However, the complexity of land use dynamics and the heterogeneity of forest types in Argentina underscore the need for continued refinement of measurement approaches. Future research should aim to improve the comparability of sources, explore more in depth the drivers behind regional deforestation patterns in greater depth, and assess the ecological and economic consequences of these changes. Strengthening the empirical base will be essential for deepening our understanding of deforestation and supporting informed decision-making.

From the perspective of regulatory effectiveness, the implementation of the Forest Law has proven effective in reducing the annual rate of deforestation, although it has not eliminated it. However, thanks to the law, it has also been possible to create a robust national native forest monitoring system and a deforestation early warning system that allows for real-time verification of forest cover loss.

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