



WE ARE GUARDIANS

As the Indigenous forest guardians fend off the incessant encroachment of illegal loggers and invaders, a global story erupts entwining science, politics and ultimately the fate of the Amazon rainforest.



ABOUT THE FILM

We Are Guardians follows Indigenous forest guardian Marçal Guajajara and activist Puyr Tembê as they fight to protect their territories from deforestation, an illegal logger who has no choice but to cut the forest down, and a large landowner at the mercy of thousands of invaders and extractive industry. Through intimate, character focused storytelling, the film brings the issues to the forefront — from the science of the Amazon Rainforest and its pivotal role in our global climate stability to the economic drivers of deforestation. The film weaves together politics, history, economics, science, and consciousness, providing an in-depth exploration of this incredibly complex and critical situation — the origins and the impact of which ripple out far beyond the boundaries of the Amazon itself.

Directed by Indigenous activist Edivan Guajajara and filmmakers Chelsea Greene and Rob Grobman; produced by Academy Award winner Fisher Stevens and executive produced by Leonardo DiCaprio.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENTS

Este filme é muito importante. Não conta só a história do meu povo e da minha comunidade, ele reforça um pedido de que precisamos estarmos atentos e nos unir cada vez mais para cuidar de nossa Mãe-terra e cuidarmos daqueles que dão a vida pela pelas florestas, pela preservação e manutenção da biodiversidade no mundo. Esta é a nossa força. Estamos juntos nessa luta.

[This film is very important. It not only tells the story of my people and my community, it reinforces the need to be attentive and unite more and more to take care of our Mother Earth and take care of those who give their lives for forests, for the preservation and maintenance of biodiversity in the world. This is our strength. We are all together in this fight.]

- Edivan Guajajara, Director/Producer/Cinematographer

When we heard the Amazon was burning in 2019, wildfires were tearing across our home state of Oregon and the western United States. We felt called to find out what was really happening in Brazil: were these wildfires as well? Were they being set intentionally, and if so, who was doing it, and why? With so much of the world on fire from the escalating effects of climate change, how could people also be burning one of our last hopes of climate stabilization? Through the smoke and confusion of the media coming from Brazil and the international community, we decided to mobilize and uncover the truth. We wanted to hear from those closest to the forest, and the fires, what was happening, from their perspective. This film is a small window into the lives of these courageous people and the landscape of the Brazilian Amazon today. Our hearts have been deeply moved by all of them, but most of all by the power and beauty of this incredible forest.

- Chelsea Greene & Rob Grobman of One Forest,
Directors/Producers/Cinematographers/Editor

USEFUL TERMS

Climate Change: Long-term changes in the temperature, precipitation, and other atmospheric conditions on Earth, often attributed to human activities.

Climate Literacy: The understanding of climate-related topics, including the science, impacts, and actions related to climate change.

Conservation: The act of preserving, protecting, or restoring the natural environment, ecosystems, or wildlife.

Deforestation: The clearing or removal of forests or trees, often for agricultural or industrial purposes.

Economy: The system of production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services within a particular geographic area.

Indigenous Peoples: Communities with a distinct cultural identity, often connected to a particular territory, who have historical continuity with pre-colonial or pre-settler societies.

Natural Resource: Materials or substances found in the environment that are used by humans for various purposes, such as energy, food, or raw materials.

Preservation: The act of protecting and maintaining natural or cultural resources in their existing state, often to prevent degradation or loss.

Reforestation: The process of replanting trees in areas where they have been cut down or removed.

Regenerative Economics: an economic system that focuses on moving beyond the sustainability of resources to actively working to regenerate and revitalize them. Its goal is to improve and enhance the health and well-being of both people and the planet.

Resource Extraction: The removal or harvesting of natural resources, such as minerals, oil, or timber, from the earth for human use.

Sustainability: Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs; often applied to environmental, social, and economic practices.

Solidarity: The recognition of our shared humanity and the commitment to support others, especially during times of challenge or injustice. Solidarity means refusing to let people face difficulties alone and working together to foster understanding, empathy, and positive change.

The Amazon: A Global Treasure Worth Protecting

The Amazon Rainforest holds a profound significance for all of humanity. Tropical rainforests account for less than 3 percent of Earth's surface, yet they play an essential role in ensuring climate stability and regulating global rainfall patterns. In 2022, deforestation and wildfires in the Brazilian Amazon soared to a staggering 15-year high, casting a shadow of urgency over this vital ecosystem.

The picture is more hopeful than it once was, but still precarious. After Brazil's 2022 presidential election, a renewed focus on enforcement drove Amazon deforestation down sharply, real proof that policy can work. But scientists warn the forest remains dangerously close to a tipping point, where climate-driven heat and drought compound the damage of lost tree cover. One major study estimates that up to 47 percent of the Amazon could face pressures severe enough to push it toward collapse by 2050. Even at a slower pace, deforestation remains higher than the forest can safely absorb, and the gains are fragile: protections built by one government can be weakened by the next, and progress made over years can be undone far more quickly.

For millennia, Indigenous communities have nurtured and cherished the Amazon as their ancestral home. Astoundingly, 45 percent of the Amazon's forests lies within Indigenous territories. These lands are the lifeline for nearly 400 unique Indigenous peoples, relying on the Rainforest for their cultural survival and way of life. Remarkably, uncontacted Indigenous peoples continue to thrive in the heart of the Amazon, hidden from the modern world. A comprehensive global report published in October 2025 puts their number at 196 worldwide, with about 95 percent living in the Amazon and Brazil alone home to 124 groups.

The Amazon Rainforest stands as an unparalleled force of biodiversity. One-third of Earth's diverse species call this land home, and a quarter of modern medicines trace their origins to the rich biodiversity of Amazonian flora. When it is healthy, one-fifth of the world's flowing freshwater courses through its veins, and another fifth of the world's atmospheric water travels over the forest in what scientists call "flying rivers," with a single tree capable of releasing up to 100 gallons of water into the atmosphere each day.

Yet, a looming crisis shadows this natural wonder. Over the past half-century, we have witnessed the devastation of over 20 percent of the Amazon's forests, with up to 60 percent suffering degradation. Alarming predictions from scientists suggest that we stand perilously close to an irreversible tipping point. In this dangerous scenario, the forest's water system is disrupted, starting a risky cycle that eventually turns the land into a dry savannah.

The nature of the threat is shifting: while clear-cutting for cattle and soy has fallen to its lowest levels in over a decade, forest degradation, driven largely by fire, rose 163 percent between 2022 and 2024, though 2025 saw that disturbance drop back down 62 percent from its 2024 peak. Cutting is down, but fire has become the newer frontier of the crisis. Scientists now put a sharper number on the danger ahead: a December 2025 study estimates that 10 to 47 percent of Amazonian forest is at risk of collapse by 2050 if current climate and deforestation trends continue.

The Forest Guardians and Their Allies

PUYR TEMBÉ lives and works in the Amazonian city of Belém, a bustling metropolis of 2 million people known as the “Gateway to the Amazon.” As an activist and leader on the front line of the Indigenous people's movement, she's dedicated her life to encouraging Indigenous involvement at the city, state, and federal level throughout Brazil and the world.

“It's a duty of indigenous people to occupy spaces of power, to decide our lives,” she explains. The Tembé people of Brazil have a deep connection to the forest, believing that they ARE the forest and must live in a symbiotic relationship with the spirits, plants, and animals. The Alto Rio Guama territory, where the Tembé live, is one of the last standing forests in the state of Pará. According to climate scientists, it is of crucial importance that this ecosystem remain intact- but it has been a prime target for deforestation, and the Tembé have been battling for 40 years to save their land.

As illegal logging on their reserve has increased, the Tembé have been forced to take up arms and confront the loggers, sparking violent clashes deep in the jungle. As a member of the Forest Guardians, Puyr has led countless patrols, and has had many confrontations with illegal loggers and land invaders who threaten her family's land. Puyr says she'd prefer a simple life in the village as a grandmother, but she knows that the fight is too important and that her determination and drive as a leader is too greatly needed. She devotes much of her time to campaigning and negotiating on behalf of the Tembé and other Indigenous peoples with the government in Brasília, organizing large rallies and marches in the nation's capital.

She previously served as the Manager of Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Indigenous People at the Department of Human Rights offices for the state of Pará, Brazil, and as the President of FEPIPA (Federation of Indigenous Peoples in Pará), an Indigenous-run NGO that facilitates and supports Indigenous leaders presenting to government officials. In early 2023 after President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva took office, Puyr was appointed as the Minister of Indigenous Peoples for the State of Pará.

TADEU FERNANDES came to the Amazon in 1967, like many others with a dream of creating a new life for himself. In the 1990s he and his business partner Paulo transformed 28,000 hectares into an ecological hotel and sanctuary. Satellite maps of the sanctuary in 1997 show it was 100% green and untouched, as was the Jacundá National Forest reservation next to their land. Over time, however, logging roads and illegal invasions began giving way to more and more deforestation throughout the area.

In 2023, over half their forest is completely gone and in its place lies an entire illegal logging community with approximately 3,200 people, 240 illegally claimed properties, and 8 illegal sawmills. “This is the biggest environmental crime in Brazil.” Tadeu has taken his fight to the government, making complaint after complaint at the regional, state, and national levels-- but with no resolution in sight. “There are incentives for invasions: sawmills that process stolen wood, exporters that export it, and importers in the US and Europe, who buy the wood knowing it is stolen. Politicians order the authorities to look the other way; this is happening throughout the Amazon.”

The Forest Guardians and Their Allies

MARÇAL GUAJAJARA is the Regional Coordinator of the Forest Guardians in his home village of Zutiwa in the Arariboia Indigenous Territory. He and a growing number of Indigenous people conduct routine surveillance missions to protect their territories from illegal logging, mining, and land grabbing. Their work is completely unpaid, and very dangerous-- invaders shoot at them regularly, and numerous Guardians have been assassinated. Marçal's family worry for his safety, but he continues on, so his children will have a territory to grow up in.

"The forest offers us everything. We don't need that much money. But we need the forest, the river, fish, animals to hunt," he explains. "We are always fighting for the forests that are still standing today. Guardians are protectors; we are the true protectors of the water, the forest, and the animals."

VALDIR DUARTE's work is cutting trees in the Indigenous territory, a job with harsh conditions, long hours, and extreme poverty. After being forced to quit school at the age of eight to help provide for his family, he learned to log from his dad and never looked back. It's dangerous work and keeps him away from his home and family for 25 days out of the month-- but without it he and his family would have no way to survive. Valdir and his fellow loggers are constantly in danger of being arrested, beaten and jailed for harvesting wood in indigenous territories-- but they see it as their only option.

LUCIANA GATTI is a senior researcher in climate change for the Brazilian National Institute for Space Research (INPE). She is a high-precision greenhouse gas specialist, who's dedicated three decades of her life to coordinating projects in Amazonia and the Brazilian coast. She is best known for conducting the first comprehensive atmospheric measurement of the entire Amazon basin, collecting numerous air samples across the Amazon rainforest and publishing findings from her years of research in the New York Times, July 2021. She desperately hopes the study will be a wake-up call, and inspire people around the world to take action; the findings are clear evidence that if we don't stop deforestation now, the world will suffer dire consequences.

SÔNIA GUAJAJARA is a Brazilian indigenous activist, environmentalist, and politician, named one of the 100 most influential people in the world by Time. Sônia was born to a Guajajara family on Araribóia Indigenous Land in the Brazilian state of Maranhão, and became interested in politics at a very young age.

"I was born an activist. I've spent my whole life fighting against anonymity, against indigenous peoples' invisibility. I always wanted to find a path, a way to bring the history and way of life of the indigenous people to light for society as a whole," she explains.

She earned her master's degree in culture and society from the Institute of Humanities, Arts, and Culture at the Federal University of Bahia. A longtime human rights activist, she is also the leader of the Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil (Articulation of the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil, or "APIB"), an organization that represents around 300 indigenous ethnic groups in Brazil. She was the first indigenous person to run for a federal executive position in Brazil in 2018. In January 2023, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva appointed Guajajara to lead Brazil's Ministry of Indigenous Peoples.

The Forest Guardians and Their Allies

BRUNO STANKEVICIUS BASSI is a researcher at the journalistic observatory De Olho nos Ruralistas and has written for The Intercept. He specializes in topics surrounding the Brazilian Ruralist party and transnational investments involving Brazilian land issues and economies.

Reflection: Select one of the Forest Guardians or allies whose experience, words, and work speaks the most to you. Reflect on what they are doing: what are their motivations, how are they inspiring others? What challenges are they facing? Consider if there is something you believe about deeply that you would commit yourself to in a similar way. What might that be? What actions might you take? (Write your response below or make notes for a share out with a partner or the class.)

The Amazon: A Global Treasure Worth Protecting

The Amazon's plight is the world's concern, a shared responsibility that transcends borders. Together, we can rewrite this narrative, fortifying the rainforest's resilience and ensuring a harmonious coexistence. Our choices today determine the fate of this precious global treasure, and in protecting the Amazon, we safeguard our planet's very livelihood.

Driving Question: How can we cultivate a shared responsibility for the environment? (Consider what has inspired you to care about the environment and what actions you could take to encourage others to also care about protecting our natural resources.)

Show or Create: Draw a picture or write about a natural place of importance to you.

A New Way Forward: Ending Deforestation in the Amazon*

70 percent of South America's GDP is produced in areas that receive rainfall or water from the Amazon. But the current economy of the Amazon is finite. The bio-economy is infinite and valued much higher.

Brazil has the potential to enhance its economic growth and generate thousands of new jobs without resorting to additional deforestation. This can be achieved by transitioning lands to sustainable agriculture and livestock production, prioritizing the restoration of degraded lands, investing in reforestation efforts, and harnessing low-carbon technologies, particularly in energy and transportation.

The adoption of this "new economy" model has the capacity to yield more substantial and more equitable growth compared to the current carbon-intensive economy, benefiting both Indigenous and local communities in the Amazon region and the nation as a whole.

*Supporting resources for learners this section: <https://www.wri.org/insights/zero-amazon-deforestation-can-grow-brazil-gdp>; <https://worldrainforests.com/amazon/amazon-rainforest-facts.html> (We recommend having students read these articles or reviewing them together as a class)

1. What role has economic development played in the Amazon? How might it be reimagined in a more economically and environmentally sustainable way?

Learner Name

A New Way Forward: Ending Deforestation in the Amazon

2. Compare and contrast the impact of community-led initiatives with externally imposed solutions in providing long-term environmental sustainability within communities. What additional resources may help support initiatives of this kind?

3. Consider the impact of multinational corporations on deforestation in the rainforest. How do their activities contribute to deforestation in the region?

A New Way Forward: Ending Deforestation in the Amazon

4. Consider the relationship between economic growth, patterns of land use, and environmental conservation in the work of the Forest Guardians. What is their approach to reforestation? What strategies might influence the potential for other communities worldwide to pursue a similar path in transitioning from deforestation to reforestation alongside economic growth?

4. Share your top 3-5 takeaways from the film. What was the most memorable? What surprised you the most? What did you learn? What would you want to share with others?



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EXTENDED LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- **Learn about Mongabay:** Mongabay is an independent, nonprofit media organization reporting on nature and planetary challenges with a global network of local journalists. Mongabay serves a diverse audience by providing free access to news and information in numerous languages and formats to address knowledge gaps and improve transparency.
 - Explore the [Mongabay website](#).
 - Have learners select a story or two to summarize and share with others through a presentation or speech.
 - In small groups, have learners create their own newsletter/newspaper/media pieces about nature and/or the environment. Encourage learners to focus on local issues in their community so that they can conduct interviews as part of their research and reporting process.
- **Learn about Lobbying:** Behind closed doors, the agribusiness lobby in Brazil is funded by shockingly large corporations.
 - Have learners research the role of multinational companies in the funding chain of an agribusiness think tank called Pensar Agro Institute.
 - Review this [Agribusiness Watch report](#) on lobbying together as a class/group. Take it further by breaking into smaller groups and creating a pitch to government leadership on the importance of conservation, reforestation, preservation, regenerative practices and the protection of Indigenous rights.
- **Learn about economic incentives/factors:** Major European and U.S. banks pose high risk of funding corruption, environmental harms, and human rights violations in the Amazon basin. These banks have relationships with fossil fuel companies and traders, which also contribute to the climate emergency. These banks have policies with loopholes that allow money to flow to companies involved in activities such as oil expansion, deforestation, pollution, corruption, and the violation of Indigenous peoples' rights.
 - Read [this article](#) as a class to learn more about banking and fossil fuel financing.
 - Have learners research green banks in their community. Extend further through student creation of an awareness campaign about green banks and their benefits. ([Green Banks](#) research tool.) Take it even further by having learners call their local credit unions to find out if they are involved in fossil fuel financing or are a green bank.
- **Explore the We Are Guardians website:** The [We Are Guardians website](#) is rich with information, including a Toolkit in their Take Action part of the website and news about the film. Have learners/group explore the site as a way to understand how a film can be used to create action and engagement. In the News section, there are film reviews and other articles about the film that learners can explore as well.



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EXTENDED LEARNING ACTIVITIES(cont.)

- **Learn About Companies Behind the Deforestation of the Amazon:** The incentive for the destruction of the Amazon comes from large-scale international meat and soy animal feed companies like JBS and Cargill, and global brands like Stop & Shop, Costco, McDonald's, Walmart/Asda, and Sysco that buy from them and sell to the public. It is these companies that are creating the international demand that finances the fires and deforestation.
 - Have learners research local ranchers who raise and sell meat in their community. Extend further through student creation of an awareness campaign about locally-sourced meat and its benefits.
 - As a class/group, create a vegetarian cookbook. Encourage individuals to share family/community recipes using protein rich ingredients like beans, legumes, nuts, etc.
 - [Read this article](#) exploring the relationship between cattle and soy animal feed production facilities and wildfires in the region.
 - Explore this [deforestation tracker](#) and related [articles](#) and [materials](#) together as a class/group. Then have individuals and/or small groups put together a "pitch" to one of these companies about their environmental impact and improved ways of working.



The chart above by Mighty Earth shows the largest customers of the slaughterhouses and soy animal feed traders most associated with cattle and soy deforestation, respectively.