

Forest protection: WWF donates firefighting equipment to Amazon brigades

- **Donation involves 1,410 items such as fire hoods, helmets, boots, gloves, and rakes**
- **Equipment will be used in 20 different Protected Areas**
- **The initiative seeks to reinforce the fire prevention works that are being done in the largest Brazilian state**

Equipping groups of volunteers and preparing them to fight forest fires in the Amazon has been one of the greatest challenges for Brazilian society for decades. After the record numbers of fires seen in 2019, this demand became even more urgent and necessary.

Because of that, WWF-Brazil and the Amazonas State Environmental Department (SEMA-AM, in Portuguese) signed a donation term this week, in which the non-governmental organization donates equipment that will be used by several fire brigades throughout the state.

The donation includes 1,410 items, such as gloves, glasses, helmets, balaclavas, shovels, hoes, thermoses, machetes, rakes, boots and chainsaw chains. About BRL 189,900.00 were invested in the purchase of these materials – and all of them were acquired in Brasília (Distrito Federal) and Manaus (Amazonas).



WWF-Brazil Conservation Coordinator, Jasy Abreu, shows to the Environment Secretary of the State, Eduardo Taveira, some of the items donated by WWF-Brazil in the beginning of March *Photo: Michael Dantas/WWF-Brazil*





"The equipment will help the managers of Protected Areas to prepare in advance and will reinforce the preventive work that we are already doing", said the Environment Secretary of the State, Eduardo Taveira (left) *Photo: Michael Dantas/WWF-Brasil*



The Amazonas State Environmental Department (SEMA-AM) operates in a new building, opened in February 2020
Photo: Michael Dantas/WWF-Brasil



Twenty Protected Areas that already have some work with brigades will benefit from the donation of the equipment. The kits will benefit volunteers, adding up 110 brigade members who, at the end of the process, will be fully equipped for their job.

These Protected Areas are located in municipalities that are geographically spread out, ranging from southern Amazonas - such as Manicoré, Humaitá, Novo Aripuanã, and Apuí - to cities close to Manaus, such as Manacapuru, Iranduba, and Novo Airão.

Among the Protected Areas that will receive these materials are a series of Sustainable Development Reserves (RDS) such as Juma, Rio Amapá, Uatumã and Igapó-Açu. The State Forest and the Canutama Extractive Reserve will also receive kits of equipments.

Numbers

The Amazonian forest was badly damaged last year. According to the Brazilian National Institute for Space Research (Inpe, in Portuguese), between 2018 and 2019, 9,742 km² were deforested in that biome - the highest index of the decade. This is the worst deforestation registered since 2008.

Also, August 2019 recorded an impressive amount of fires in the Amazon: 30.901. This number, which is about three times higher than that seen in August 2018 and the highest since 2010, generated an international crisis that revealed to the world the fragile situation in which the largest tropical forest on the planet is found.



SEMA and WWF-Brazil staff discussed the destination of the equipment and how they can help the firefighting in Amazonas *Photo: Michael Dantas/WWF-Brazil*

Prevention

Environment Secretary of the State, Eduardo Taveira, said the donation made by WWF-Brazil reinforces the preventive work that has been done by the Government of Amazonas to combat fire in 2020.

“We know that deforestation rates are still very high and everything suggests that in 2020 we will again have significant numbers of hot spots and the occurrence of fires. This equipment will help the managers of Protected Areas to prepare in advance and will reinforce the preventive work that is already underway”, he said, mentioning the environmental education initiatives and the territorial monitoring actions that SEMA has been working on.

Taveira said that to fight the Amazonian forest fire season – expected to the second half of 2020 – SEMA will invest in the formation of rapid-response groups, which will benefit from the donation of equipment.

For the manager of the Rio Negro Sustainable Development Reserve, Miqueias Souza, the donation came at a good time. He stated that in December 2019, the area in which he works carried out training for 38 fire brigade members – in other words, there is a new and newly formed team in that region ready to act in fighting fires. This training mentioned by Souza was carried out by Fundação Vitória Amazônica (FVA, in Portuguese) under a contract with WWF-Brazil.

“We trained our volunteer brigadiers, and we needed to equip them. Now, with this donation, we will be able to do this, reinforcing the work that is taking place in the Baixo Rio Negro Mosaic”, explained the manager. Rio Negro Sustainable Development Reserve has 19 communities and is home to 720 families.



The manager of the Rio Negro Sustainable Development Reserve, Miqueias Souza, said the donation came in a good time. He works with 38 fire brigade members defending an area close to Manaus Photo: *Michael Dantas/WWF-Brazil*

Erfrany Leal is the manager of two Sustainable Development Reserves located in the South of Amazonas: Juma and Canumã. He said he had many problems with the fires in 2019, mainly around these Protected Areas, close to the AM-174 highway, which connects the cities of Apuí and Novo Aripuanã. "Many cattle ranchers used fire to clear their land and this really threatened our forests", he declared.

The two reserves will receive the equipment that will be used by the fire brigade of the Juma Reserve – which is being formed and will receive a training workshop in April.

Conservation Coordinator of WWF-Brazil, Jasy Abreu said that the donation of the equipment is part of a broader work done by the organization, to support various initiatives to fight fires throughout the Amazon: "We feel that 2020 is also going to be a difficult year in combating fires and that is why we are getting ahead of ourselves, supporting various social and governmental organizations".



The manager of the Sustainable Development Reserves of Juma and Canumã, Erfrany Leal, said the equipment will be used by 40 firefighters around de Juma Reserve Photo: *Michael Dantas/WWF-Brazil*

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