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Peatlands of Amazonia

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Substantial peat deposits are known to exist across Amazonia. The peatlands of the Pastaza-Marañon Foreland Basin in Northern Peru have received increasing attention from researchers in the past decade, however, peatlands found in other Amazonian countries remain relatively unstudied. Most notably the peatlands of Brazil and Venezuela, which are predicted to cover 260,000 km² and 39,000 km², respectively. Peatlands are known to be the most carbon dense terrestrial ecosystem, once soil carbon is accounted for, and due to the remote and inaccessible location of many Amazonian peatlands most of them are believed to remain relatively intact. Thus, these ecosystems are likely to harbour large stocks of carbon, which need to be protected. We review the current state of knowledge of Amazonian peatlands to test the current predictions of peat distribution and extent, assess the ecological and social importance of these ecosystems, determine the potential threats to peatlands and evaluate the existing policy and regulatory frameworks and how they may help or hinder peatland protection. Finally, we highlight key areas where further research is needed and make recommendations for policy makers, to help improve our knowledge of this important ecosystem.