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Brazil approves clearing of Amazon forest to make way for controversial dam

Brazil's environmental agency has approved the clearing of nearly 600 acres of Amazon forest so that work can begin on a controversial hydroelectric dam.



Image 1 of 2

The Xingu River - the proposed location of the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam Photo: Rex Features



Image 1 of 2

A deforested area is seen along the Xingu river, in the region where the dam is to be built Photo: AFP/GETTY



By [Robin Yapp](#), Sao Paulo 6:30AM GMT 28 Jan 2011

The Belo Monte dam, which will be the third-largest such project in the world, has been strongly opposed by environmental campaigners and indigenous people who face being displaced.

Last year James Cameron, the film director, compared the plans to the plot of his box office hit Avatar, in which the Na'vi race fight to protect their planet from outside forces seeking to extract resources.

Ibama, the [Brazilian](#) environment agency, said on its website that it has approved the clearing of 588 acres (238 hectares) of forest at the site where the dam will be built in the state of Para.

It also said that Norte Energia, the consortium that won the bidding to construct the dam, can begin building roads to reach the remote site on the Xingu River, a tributary to the Amazon.

Contracts for the dam - which the government expects to cost nearly £10bn - were finally signed last August after decades of disputes about plans for a dam in the area and a series of court injunctions.

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But several potential legal hurdles remain, with licences still to be granted for the actual building of the plant, which the government wants to see completed by 2015.

The 3.7 mile wide dam will lead to around 190 square miles of land being flooded.

Environmental groups have warned that this could displace tens of thousands of people and threaten the survival of indigenous groups in the area.

But Brazil's government has been determined to press ahead with Belo Monte, which is crucial to efforts to keep up with rising demand for energy as the country's rapid economic growth continues.

Ministers have also defended the scheme as a source of clean and renewable energy and Edison Lobao, the Energy Minister, has referred to it as "the jewel in the crown."

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