

Liberia

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Location and area

Liberia is a republic in western Africa, bounded on the north by Sierra Leone and Guinea, on the east by Côte d'Ivoire, and on the south and west by the Atlantic Ocean. Liberia has an area of 99,067 km². (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Topography

From a narrow, flat coastal plain the country rises in a series of ill-defined plateaux to a higher interior covered with evergreen rainforest in the south and deciduous rainforest in the north. The coastal plain, 15 to 55 km wide, is virtually the only developed region. The interior mountains reach elevations of about 900 to 1,200 m. Many small rivers traverse the country. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Climate

The climate of Liberia is equatorial and humid, particularly during the rainy seasons from June to July and October to November. Annual rainfall varies from 1,800 mm in the interior to 5,000 mm along the coast. The annual mean temperature is about 28° C. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Land use

Until the outbreak of civil war in 1990 Liberia's economy was primarily agricultural. Minerals and forest products provided the most important export resources, but timber reserves declined in the mid-1990s. Iron ore and rubber account for over 80 per cent of export earnings. In the mid-1980s the Firestone and smaller plantations covered 668 km². Hydroelectric power plants were built on several rivers, including the St Paul. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Wetlands

Without further references, Lappalainen & & Žurek (1996c) give 400 km² for the total "wetland area" (incl. coastal mangroves and other wetlands) (cf. Bord na Mona 1985).

Peatlands

On the basis of information provided by the CEE Office in Monrovia, Bord na Mona (1985) estimates the extent of "peat deposits" in Liberia to be 400 km². The peat deposits are shallow, with peat thickness rarely exceeding 0.5 m. They are found in valley-bottom swamps dominated by e.g. *Raphia* and *Loeserna*. Shrier (1985), referring to the FAO/UNESCO 1971-1981 Soil Map of the World 1:5,000,000, uses the same figure for the "mire area". Also Andriess (1988) uses the figure of 400 km² for organic soils, whereas Schneider & Schneider (1990) and Pfadenhauer et al. (1993) mention that figure for the peatland area of Liberia. According to the interpreted World Soil Map (Van Engelen & Huting 2002) 26 km² of histosols exist in Liberia and 15,133 km² of gley soils.

Mire and peatland losses

According to Benneh et al. (1996) open peat mining takes place in littoral zones in Liberia.