

WWF Indonesia Press Release

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Protecting Forest for Endangered Species & Better Livelihoods *Indonesia to establish 1 million hectares of new protected areas*

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - The Indonesian government declared its commitment to protect the nation's forests by establishing 12 new protected areas covering approximately 1 million hectares, including Tesso Nilo in Riau, Sumatra and Sebangau in Central Kalimantan, in 2004. The Director General of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation, Koes Saparjadi, announced this at COP 7 of the Convention on Biological Diversity at a side event.

“Indonesia is among the world's mega-biodiversity countries, but now its forests are under extreme threats. Illegal logging, forest conversion, habitat fragmentation and habitat degradation are the biggest causes of biodiversity loss and species extinction. If this trend continues, the world's most diverse forest would disappear gradually,” he said in the side event co-hosted by WWF Indonesia and the Ministry of Forestry (MoF).

He said local community livelihoods are the key to conservation success. One example is the effort by WWF Indonesia, MoF and others to create sustainable income sources for local community. The pristine forests, including Tesso Nilo and Sebangau, now have a new potential source of income - the wild honey business.

Tesso Nilo, located in Riau, is one of the largest remaining blocks of flat, dry lowland rainforest in Sumatra. The latest survey found that only about 350 Sumatran elephants (*Elephas maximus sumatranus*) are left in Riau's rapidly disappearing forests. WWF research also found Tesso Nilo to have 218 vascular plant species in a 200 square meter plot -- the world highest biodiversity. Meanwhile, Kalimantan's Sebangau peat swamp forest is the most valuable, largest remaining lowland forest refuge for a significant population (2,500-4,500 individuals) of the endangered Bornean orang-utan. This important forest will be lost entirely if it is deforested, drained and converted to an alternative land use.

H.M. Rusli Zainal, SE, Governor of Riau said, “Tesso Nilo is more than just home for elephants and tigers, as it has been found to contain the world's richest vascular biodiversity. Protecting Tesso Nilo will alleviate human-wildlife conflicts and prove that conservation can go with economic development in harmony.”

“The failure of ‘the million hectares peat land for paddy field initiative’ gave us a tough lesson: we should opt for sustainable development strategies that put the environmental issues up front in importance. Saving Sebangau is important for both the local community's livelihoods and orang-utan conservation -- the two are linked,” explained Drs. H. Asmawi Agani, Governor of Central Kalimantan, Indonesia.

Working With Partners and Stakeholders

WWF Indonesia Executive Director Mubariq Ahmad said the greatest threats to forests conservation --illegal logging and forest conversion -- have now become global issues. “These threats are too big to be handled by one organization solely. Concerted transboundary conservation has become more crucial than ever.”

“In Borneo, WWF Indonesia is taking the lead on a large-scale transboundary conservation initiative -- involving multiple stakeholders and partners from Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and other participating countries -- called ‘Heart of Borneo.’ Tesso Nilo, Sebangau and Heart of Borneo need support from all partners and stakeholders to ensure the rich and unique biodiversity of this area is conserved for the local people’s sustainable livelihoods and environmental benefits for the global community,” said Mubariq.

Meanwhile, significant financial support from CEPF (the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund) for WWF’s work in Tesso Nilo helped make this protected area declaration possible. As part of this long-term support, CEPF is helping WWF and its partners to ensure the sustainable financial future of Tesso Nilo.

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