Jikalahari
Jaringan kerja penyelamat hutan Riau

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For immediate release

Jikalahari, University of Riau and Kampar Peninsula Community:
Stop conversion in Kampar Peninsula as it incites climate change

Pekanbaru, 22 May 2007 --- Riau NGOs Network for Forest Rescue (Jikalahari), University of Riau and representatives of 3 sub-districts in Kampar Peninsula today call for a halt to conversion of peatland-rich forests in the region to avoid escalating carbon (CO2) release. Climate change and severe ecological damage will occur if the peatland-rich Kampar Peninsula landscape continues to be converted.

A joint statement was released following a workshop organized by Jikalahari last month here titled, *Strategies to save Kampar Peninsula peat swamp forest ecosystem*. Academicians of University of Riau and representatives of the Kampar Peninsula community attended the event as well as NGOs like Kabut Riau, Mitra Insani, Yayasan Elang, Alam Sumatra and WWF-Indonesia Riau Conservation Program, all members of the network. Wetlands International–Indonesia Program and Global Environment Center presented their papers, as well as those from WWF-Indonesia and Jikalahari.

"We call on forest companies and plantations who currently operate in Kampar Peninsula or will in the future to stop conversion and land clearing immediately, as it is a cause of severe deforestation in the landscape," says Susanto Kurniawan, the coordinator of Jikalahari. "We also call on the Government to review conversion licenses issued in Kampar Peninsula."

He said climate change as well as unbearable ecological damage will occur if the peatland-rich Kampar Peninsula landscape is converted incessantly. Moreover, social conflict by increasingly marginalized locals could occur as they lose their natural forest and fishery resources, on which they largely depend for their livelihoods.

In general, communities in Kampar Peninsula still preserve existing natural resources such as non-timber forest products, fish, water resources and many others. The resources in peat swamp forest are used in traditional ways which are more sustainable and less exploitative than large-scale industrial timber or palm oil plantations.

To maintain Kampar Peninsula peat swamp ecosystem means an effort to provide an opportunity for communities to manage land and the natural resources sustainably where they will not be marginalized from the place where they survive.

The 700,000-ha Kampar Peninsula landscape, a size based on peatlands studied by Wetlands International, has rich peat swamp forest as well as biodiversity with protected four lakes (Wildlife Reserve) and rivers used by local communities for their livelihood. Unfortunately, half of its total size -- or approximately 350,000 ha -- has

already been converted into acacia and oil palm plantations.

In addition, threats caused by drainage like manmade canals built by acacia plantations concession-holders could pose danger to the ecosystem. Moreover, logging road development will lead to rampant illegal logging, encroachment and forest fires.

A study says peatlands have greater function in controlling climate change due to their ability to absorb and store world carbon reserves.[1] Peatlands also maintain hydrological resources as well as store and release water horizontally.

Each conversion or exploitation of peatlands will cause the release of carbon emissions, contributing to global increases and damaging the water table system. When emissions by peatlands are included, Indonesia is the world's third-largest carbon emission producer.

Riau is a province with the largest peatlands in Sumatra, with 4.044 million ha or 56 percent out of the island's total size of 7.2 million ha. Kampar Peninsula has two peat domes with a depth of more than 20 meters due to uncontrolled conversion.

Irwansyah Reza Lubis, a Wetlands International–Indonesia program officer, says that peat swamp forest conversion in the Kampar Peninsula peat swamp forest should be halted, while the depleted peatlands should be restored immediately for the sake of ecosystem function.

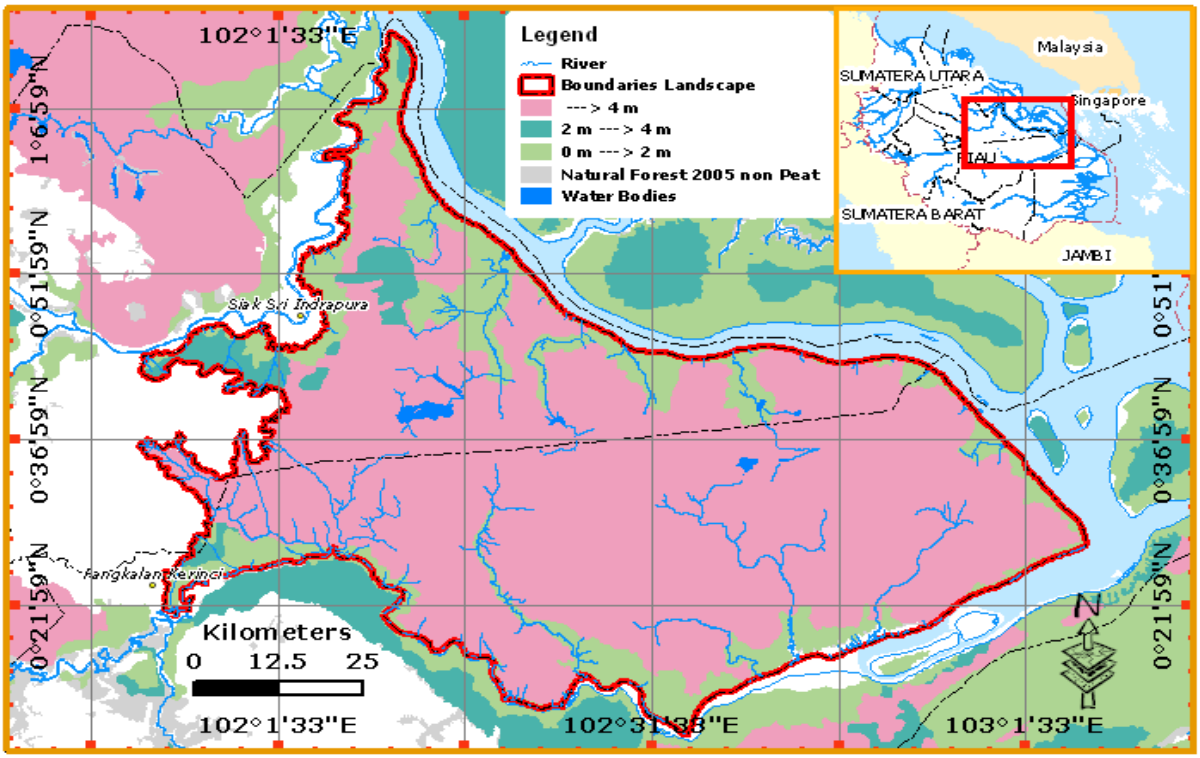
"The existence of forestry management pattern like HPH [selective logging concession] and HTI in peatlands was triggered by exclusion of peatlands by the Government from the start in determining protected forest and its management," Reza says.

Kampar Peninsula natural forest's biodiversity includes internationally protected Ramin trees (*gonystylus bancanus* Kurz) as well as meranti lilin (*shorea teysmaniana* Dyer) and other 32 species.[2] Crown cover on average is 76 percent, which is relatively good and useful to protect arboreal fauna habitat.[3]

Sumatran tigers (*Panthera tigris sumatrae*), arwana fish, crocodile and sun bear are among the species potentially present in Kampar, besides another 21 species on the brink of local extinction due to rampant conversion in the Kampar landscape.

The most comprehensive tiger habitat assessment ever done, "Setting Priorities for the Conservation and Recovery of Wild Tigers: 2005-2015," recently published by Wildlife Conservation Society, WWF, the Smithsonian Institute and NFWF-STF identified Kampar Peninsula as a Tiger Conservation Landscape of Class II: landscapes that have sufficient habitat for 50 tigers, moderate levels of threat, and a basis for conservation that needs improvement.

Zulfahmi, a Riau conservationist, says that companies operating in Kampar Peninsula have severely depleted peat swamp forest by digging out canals to transport felled timbers to the river. "They completely underestimate the impact of global ecological damage from peatlands depletion. Loss of peatlands carries a much higher costly financially and ecologically than the profit they make," says Zulfahmi.



"The economic interest of a few people should not take priority over the needs of many people globally. Peatlands ecosystem depletion of Kampar obviously escalates climate change," says Susanto Kurniawan. "Moreover, the ecological disaster such as huge floods will hit Riau residents first."

Suhandri, a WWF-Indonesia conservationist, says, "It is time for all related sides to pay attention to global threats as faced by Kampar Peninsula today." He adds, "Unless pro-conservation policy is taken [by the authority], not just Indonesia will suffer its impact, but also regional and global communities due to climate change triggered by the Kampar peatlands depletion."

Deforestation threats as well as ecosystem damage derive from conversion perpetrated by companies granted HPH, HTI and palm oil plantation concessions. Halting conversion is a must. Efforts to restore and conserve Kampar Peninsula peat swamp forest should only be applied with an impartial, ecosystem approach, due to the threat of subsiding water levels and defunct peatlands from deforestation.

Reliable data show that some forest companies have clearcut natural forest here, some are doing so and others plan to convert it. In general, they have partnerships or are associated with two pulp and paper giants, Asia Pulp & Paper (APP) and Asia Pacific Resources International Holdings Limited (APRIL).

This group calls on international financial institutions, global pulp and paper buyers as well as other interested groups to stop financing this kind of project and buying products that obviously deplete ecology and trigger climate change and global

warming.

The NGOs call on creditors and buyers to reconsider their relationships with companies contributing to deforestation, carbon reserve destruction, peat swamp forest and water resources exploitation, jeopardizing biodiversity and displacing locals.

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[1)] *peatlands. do you care?;* Coordinating Committee for Global Action on Peatlands (CC-GAP), 2005
[2)] Jonotoro research, Jikalahari, 2005
[3)] Jonotoro research in Kampar Peninsula, Jikalahari, April 2007

Notes to editor:

1 CC-GAP define peatlands as wetland ecosystems characterized by the accumulation of organic matter called “peat” derives from dead and decaying plant material under high water saturation conditions.
2 Peatlands function is to preserve water resources, to prevent floods, to avoid water sea intrusion, to support biodiversity and climate change controller.
3 Sumatra’s peatlands are able to restore carbon of 7 x 10^2 ton/ha/year; peatlands usually restore water reserve by 15-20 times dried peatlands weight, inflammable, and inextinguishable.
4 Minister of Forestry decree number 101/Menhut-II/2004 and Presidential Decree number 32 year 1992 stipulate natural forests located on peat soil with depth of 3 meter or more situated in upstream and swamp should be maintained.

Article link:

- Forest Fires Rage Again -- Stop Conversion on Peatlands
- Sumatra's Peat Swamp Forest
- APRIL's New Road Threatens Natural Forest in Kampar

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