



New APP Logging Road Threatens One of World's Biggest Carbon-Storing Forests, Tigers

Press Release

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Pekanbaru, INDONESIA – In an investigative report published today by Eyes on the Forest, evidence shows that a new logging road in Riau Province -- strongly indicated as illegally built by companies connected to Asia Pulp & Paper (APP) -- is cutting into the heart of Sumatra's largest contiguous peatland forest, a rare hydrological ecosystem that acts as one of the planet's biggest carbon stores.

The road would allow APP and affiliated companies to restart clearance of natural forest and destruction of deep peat soil at any time in a globally recognized conservation area, according to Eyes on the Forest, a coalition of local NGO network Jikalauhari, Walhi Riau, and WWF-Indonesia. The Kampar peninsula is one of the world's largest contiguous tropical peat swamp forests, with more carbon per hectare than any other ecosystem on Earth.

"It is morally reprehensible for one of the world's largest paper companies to so brazenly ignore Indonesian laws and destroy the natural resources that belong to the people of Riau," said Teguh Surya of Walhi Riau. "We strongly urge APP to join the ranks of responsible businesses and conduct its operations within the law. Until that time, the world's paper buyers and investors should stop doing business with APP."

The Kampar peninsula area is also considered one of the last havens for critically endangered Sumatran tigers, whose wild population is estimated to be down to just 400-500. The landscape was designated a "regional priority" tiger conservation landscape by the world's leading tiger scientists in 2006. A preliminary estimate by WWF-Indonesia shows that a well-managed Kampar peninsula could be home to as many as 60 tigers.

"Even as our investigators were out surveying the site last month, they came across tiger tracks walking along the APP logging road," said Nursamsu of WWF-Indonesia and Eyes on the Forest coordinator. "But the tigers of Kampar don't stand a chance once APP begins logging full-scale and the poachers discover there's easy access to this critical tiger habitat."

APP's logging highway and the accompanying drainage of the peat could cause devastating effects on Kampar's whole peat dome. Kampar peninsula can be considered a single hydro-ecological system, consisting entirely of a single dome of peat at depths mostly over 10 meters – extremely deep for a peatland, with an enormous store of carbon. Drainage and plantation development activities on the top of the Kampar peat dome could even cause the peat dome to collapse and emit large amounts of carbon, according to Eyes on the Forest.

Local NGO network Jikalahari and WWF have formally proposed that the Ministry of Forestry protect the natural forest of Kampar. Jikalahari also jointly signed an MoU with Siak and Pelalawan District Administrations at the UN Climate Change conference in Bali last year. It is the Siak district government that APP told Eyes of the Forest had granted the company permission to build the logging highway, to connect two remote villages. But satellite images show that the road was not built anywhere close to the two villages, Teluk Lanus and Sungai Rawa.

"APP claimed that it was building this state-of-the-art, paved highway for the benefit of the local communities," said Susanto Kurniawan of Jikalahari. "It's shameful to see a multibillion-dollar enterprise hiding behind the needs of desperately poor, isolated villagers, who will receive absolutely no benefit from this road but will likely suffer the consequences of APP's activities."

The two new logging concessions that the road does connect to are affiliated with APP and both are based on licenses issued by District heads, who are not supposed to issue such licenses. The Ministry of Forestry has issued definitive licenses to the two concessions. However, clearance of natural forest for plantation development in these concessions would not be allowed as it is considered deep peat soil and is natural forest in good condition.

APP is currently threatening at least three other forest blocks in central Sumatra: Bukit Tigapuluh dry lowland forest block, Senepis and Kerumutan peatland forests.

Kampar peninsula is a contiguous peat soil area of around 700,000 hectares. Until 2002, it was still fully covered by natural forest, but only around 400,000 of that remained in 2007. Most of the lost forest was cleared to supply natural forest wood to mills run by APP and its competitor, Asia Pacific Resources International Holding (APRIL), and then planted in acacia plantations to supply the pulp mills. A small part has been converted into oil palm plantations or wastelands.

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Notes to Editor:

Eyes on the Forest is a coalition of environmental NGOs in Riau, Sumatra: WALHI 'Friends of the Earth' Riau Office, Jikalahari "Riau Forest Rescue Network" and WWF-Indonesia. Eyes on the Forest monitors the status of the remaining natural forests in Sumatra's Province of Riau and disseminates the information worldwide. More news on Eyes on the Forest, go to: <http://www.eyesontheforest.or.id>

Full report can be downloaded at <http://www.eyesontheforest.or.id>.