PT Sumatera Riang Lestari, affiliated company to APRIL, clear-cuts natural forests in Rupat Island, eliminates endangered Ramin habitat, threatens indigenous Suku Akit and degrades peat ecosystem in the small island

Investigative Report - Eyes on the Forest
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Eyes on the Forest (EoF) is a coalition of environmental NGOs in Riau, Sumatra: Friends of the Earth Riau Office, Jikalahari "Riau Forest Rescue Network" and WWF-Indonesia, Riau Program. EoF monitors the status of the remaining natural forests in Sumatra's Province of Riau and disseminates the information worldwide.
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Executive Summary

Eyes on the Forest (EoF) investigation has found that PT Sumatera Riang Lestari (SRL) in its Blok Rupat concession had destroyed habitat of protected Ramin species (Gonystylus sp) that internationally protected since 2003 by Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The Indonesian Government has banned all products derived from Ramin tree and its processed product, despite it is not used for paper production[i].

The loss of Ramin habitat as the company just set aside small-diameter trees --as EoF investigation team found-- should need further action by the authority whether Ramin trees are clear-cut and the CITES Red List breached by PT Sumatera Riang Lestari, an affiliated company to Asia Pacific Resources International Limited (APRIL).

In Sumatera, Ramin trees are found in eastern part of Riau Province stretching out to South Sumatra. Good price of Ramin and huge demand by international market for this product possibly drive massive clear-cutting in this peat forest.

Rupat Island is one of islands in Riau Province which is located in Eastern plains of Sumatera. With its 15-square kilometer size, Pulau Rupat is considered as a small island that must be protected and requires sustainable development and environmental-friendly condition in order to provide prosperity to its 30,000 population. Devastating impact made by development should be avoided. It's a highly strategic island that should be preserved as it's bordered to neighboring Malaysia. The Indonesian Coordinating Minister for Economy visited Pulau Rupat and mentioned the

island has potential to be an integrated tourism destination as long as its environment is well-preserved, media reported[ii].

Natural forest clearing by PT SRL in Rupat Island threatened mangrove and peat ecosystem which also incites carbon emission and global climate.

Based on a study by Wetlands International & Canadian International Development Agency 2003, the entire concession of PT SRL in Blok Pulau Rupat has deep peat more than 2-4 meters.

Rupat Island is an important place for migration raptors, particularly for birds of prey, and as the resting site and exit of the species migration from and to Indonesia through the Malayan Peninsula. Results of series of the study which are conducted by Raptor Indonesia (Rain) and the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) have shown there are several flights of large flock of Oriental honey buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus orientalis*) during February until April yearly when they fly home in a wave of migration (spring migration).

Raptor Indonesia in 2004 had confirmed that Rupat Island is important area called the "bottleneck site" migration of certain bird species (especially *Pernis ptilorhynchus orientalis* or Oriental honey buzzard) and must be protected and conserved for the continuation of migration of species in the area.

PT SRL pulpwood plantation expansion obviously will also marginalize indigenous Suku Akit tribe who have been dwelling in Rupat island for centuries. Clear-cutting forest and draining peatlands will affect much to livelihoods of Akit Tribe community who rely upon natural resources such as forest and river. Devastating ecosystem in the island due to peat drainage and forest clearance is obviously a misery that should be swallowed by Akit Tribe community.

In March 2010, at least 2000 families had signed a petition to the Government to protest the pulpwood plantation expansion of PT SRL, an

affiliated company to APRIL, as they fear the operation would cause devastating impact to the small island and misery to people living there.

EoF calls on PT SRL and APRIL to stop natural forest clearing and draining peat canals in Rupat Island as its license is legally questionable and possibly creates social conflict, jeopardizes community economy as well as poses threats to High Conservation Value Area and affects negatively global climate.

Background

Pulau Rupat, where PT SRL, affiliated company to APRIL, expands pulpwood plantation

Rupat Island is an island located at Bengkalis regency, Riau Province. This island has approximately 1500 square km size and is inhabited by some 30,000 population based on the official website[iii] in 2009. According to Article 1 paragraph (3) of the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 27 Year 2007 Concerning to Management on Coastal Areas and Small Islands, Pulau Rupat is categorized as a small island because it has a size less than 2000 square km.

It has consequence that Rupat Island must be managed in a sustainable development and with global perspective, and in line with community's aspirations and participation under nationally legal norms. Pulau Rupat is a small Island with a variety of highly potential natural resources which are very significant to social, economic, cultural, and environmental developments, and it supports the sovereignty of nations.

Suku Akit are indigenous tribe community who are long-time inhabitants of Rupat Island, dwelling in the villages of Titi Akar, Hutan Panjang, Pangkalan Nyirih, and so on. Akit Community have livelihoods to survive by relying upon the surrounding natural resources. Fishing on freshwaters to make money is just like planting sago trees in mangrove or peat swamp area. While, forest that enriched with flora and fauna is available and help boost economic activities to meet the daily life needs.

Rupat and raptor migration

Rupat Island is an important place for birds as a bird migration area, particularly for birds of prey, and as the track entrance and exit of species migration from and to Indonesia through the Malayan Peninsula. Results of sustainable study which is conducted by Raptor Indonesia (Rain) and the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) has shown there is a movement of large flights of oriental honey buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus orientalis*) within February until April yearly during their flying home migration (spring migration).

In 2009, under the strategy and action plan on preventive measure against bird flu in Indonesia, National Commission for Avian Influenza and the several task forces of the Ministry of Forestry, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Health set Rupat location as an important location for monitoring the flow of migration of species and the monitoring of zoonosis traffic from its migrating species.

EoF Investigative findings on Rupat

In 2009, The Ministry of Forestry's Director of Development of Forest Plantation issued the Decree number 02/BPHT-3/2009 dated 23 March 2009 which approved permits of Industrial Timber Plantation for PT SRL in Riau covering 20,553 hectares of natural forest. Through the annual cutting approval, called formally Annual Work Plan (RKT) 2009, particularly PT SRL Blok Rupat alone was granted 2889 hectares. This concession enables conversion to generate natural forest wood amount to 352,727 cubic meter. This means that inside concession there is indeed a high potential of natural forest is prepared to supply raw material for pulp and paper industry. In the

Photo 1 shows the result of logging in PT SRL has the very high potential of natural wood and these areas should be maintained as natural forest.

Photo 1. Logs from natural forest that felled in PT SRL block Rupat concession show that the pulpwood plantation contain potential mixed tropical hardwoods, which should have been preserved as natural forest. The EoF team found a ple of woods in the length of more than 1 km with the height of 3-4 meters. Photo at the coordinate point N. 01 56 10.9 E. 101 34 41.9.

Eyes on the Forest investigation series conducted in December 2009, January, February, May and June 2010 have found that approximately 2000 hectares of natural forest has been felled in the area where PT SRL operates. From the reliable information on the ground, natural forest's clear-cutting in the concession of PT SRL in Rupat block had started in middle of May 2009. Furthermore, logs felled by PT SRL in Rupat block mostly still piled in the logging site during the investigation and only a small portion that has been delivered to pulp mill of APRIL, PT Riau Andalan Pulp and Paper (PT RAPP) in Pangkalan Kerinci town.

Since 2005, APRIL has committed to its buyers, investors and the general public to protect High Conservation Value Forests (HCVF) professionally and independently identified following the stakeholder driven HCVF Toolkit for Indonesia (APRIL's Fact Sheet available online[iv]).

In 2008, APRIL had signed a contract with the Rainforest Alliance to not clear any natural forests for which no professional HCVF assessments had been done and for which the company's HCVF delineation was disputed by stakeholders[v]. In 2010, the Rainforest Alliance suspended an interim FSC Controlled Wood certificate which it had issued to APRIL's Riau Andalan Pulp & Paper's Forestry Division (SW-CW/FM-003712)[vi].

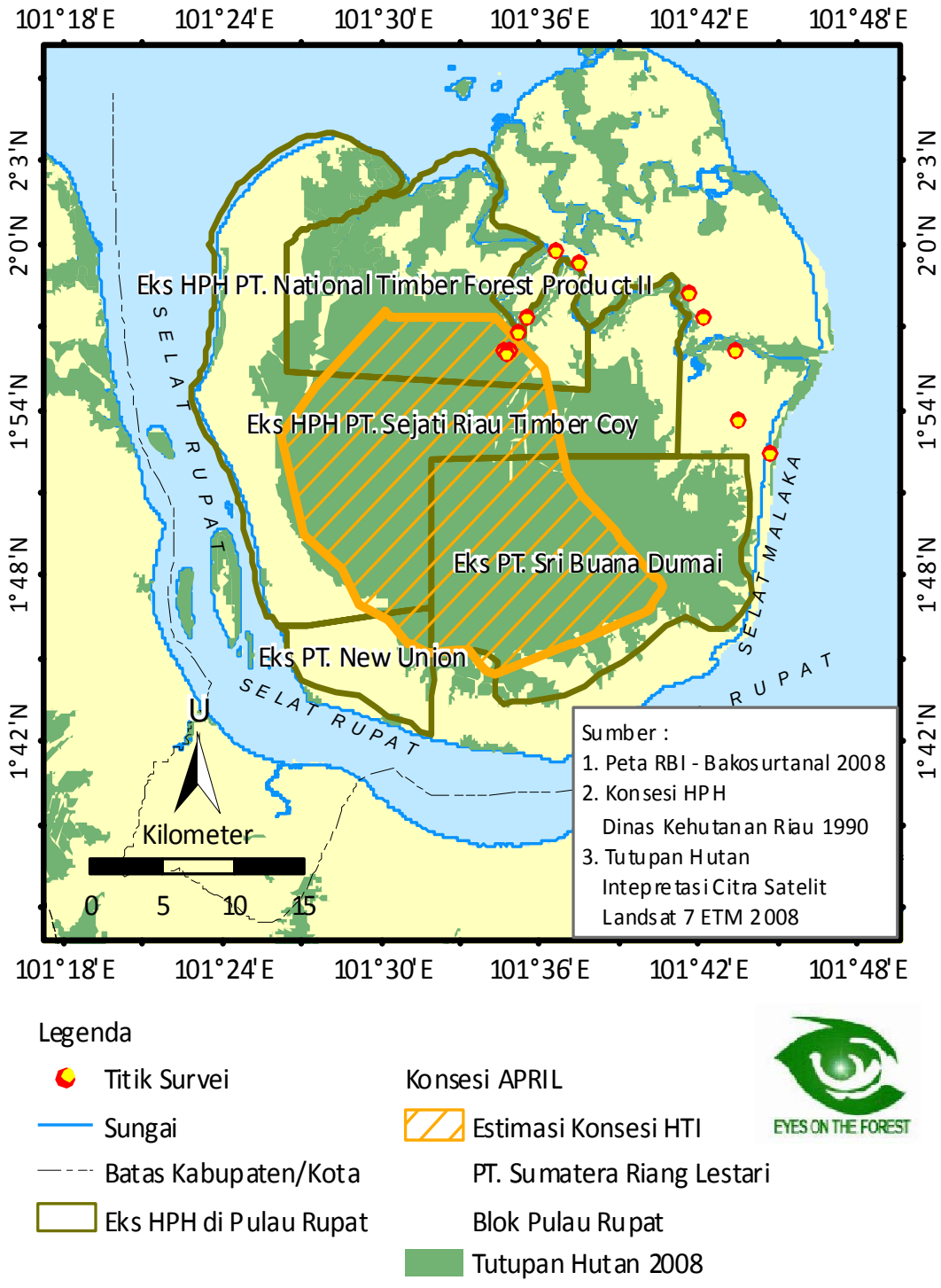
A. Natural forests clear-cutting by PT SRL in Rupat block questionably breaches the Law?

Pulpwood plantation (HTI) license that granted to PT SRL which issued on 25 May 2007 based on the Minister of Forestry Decree Number 208/Menhut-II/2007 with a total area of 215,305 hectares. The size covering 67,230 hectares is located at province of North Sumatra and the rest 148,075 hectares included to Riau province. PT SRL Rupat block itself has concession of 38,210 hectares.

Regarding to Government Regulation (PP) of the Republic of Indonesia Number 6 Year 2007, concerning to Forest Management and Plan Preparation of Forest Management as well as Forest Utilization, Article 38 paragraph (3) said "Utilization of timber forest product on the Industrial Timber Plantation, shall be performed on production forests which is not productive." It is in line with another regulation, PP 34/2002 on Article 30 paragraph (3), stipulates "Industrial Timber Plantation (HTI) or Business in managing forest products on timber plantation, shall be performed on barren land, grasslands and/or shrubs on the forest production."

Based on Landsat satellite image 2008, good condition forest cover appeared inside the concession of PT Sumatra Riang Lestari in Rupat block, one year prior to the clear-cutting of natural forests (Map, 1). EoF team's findings in the field showed a stack of commercial logs felled in the concession. This means that the area converted into pulpwood plantation contain good cover,

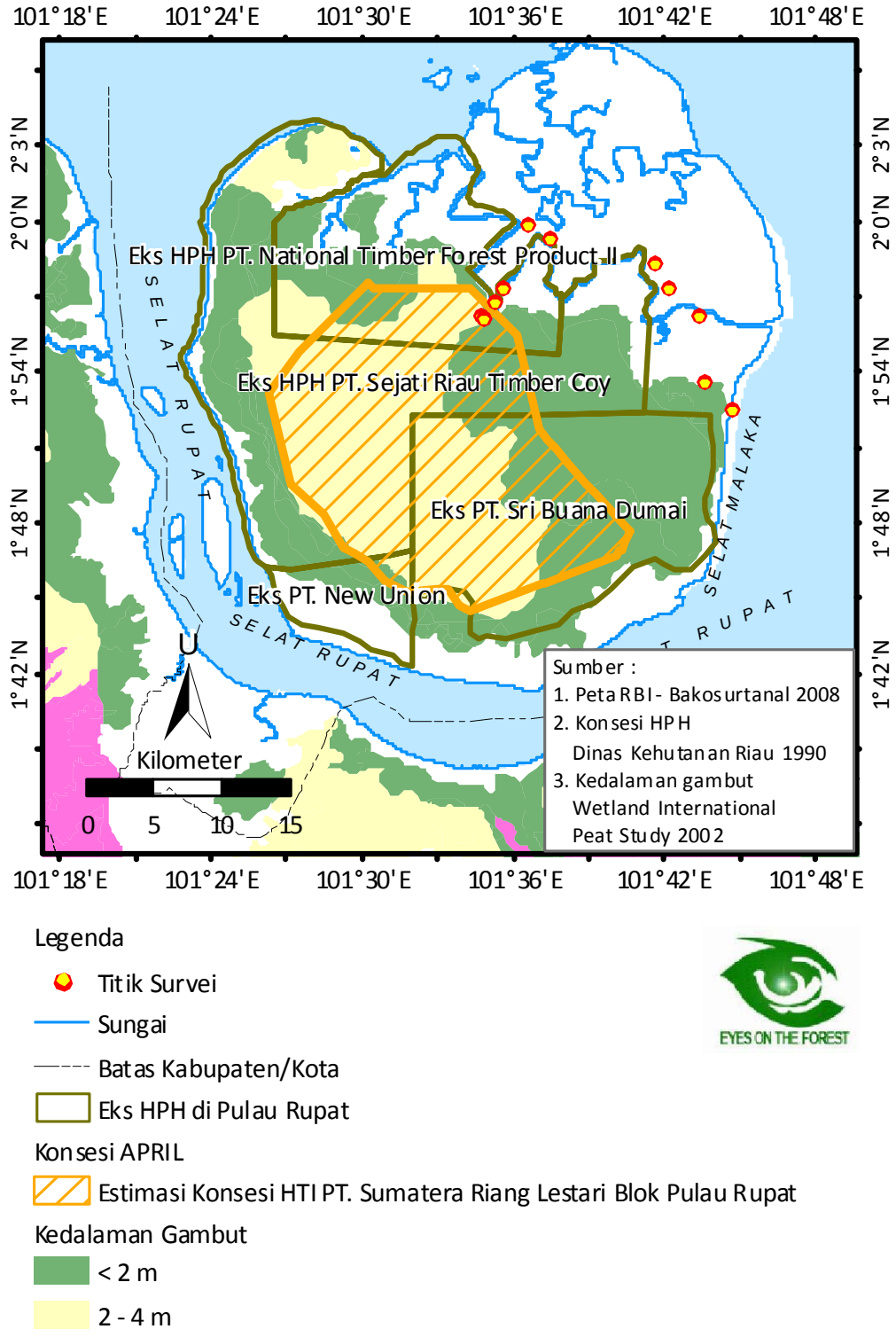
suggesting the concession should have been preserved as natural forest (Picture 2).



Map 1. PT Sumatera Riang Lestari concession in Rupat Island (yellow line) is overlaid to Landsat TM 5 satellite image 2008 which has showed a good forest cover that should be protected.

Photo 2. Woods that logged from natural forests in PT SRL Rupat block show that the industrial timber plantation concession contains highly potential of mixed tropical hardwoods, which should be preserved as natural forest. Photo at the coordinate point N. 01 56 10.9 E. 101 34 41.9.

The entire concession of PT SRL Rupat island block has peat depth between **2-4 meters**[vii]**.** According to Presidential Decree No. 32/1990, natural forests which are located on peat land with a depth of three meters or more that situated in upstream river and wetlands should be protected (Map 2). Photo 3 shows the drainage of peat canal at a depth of more than 3 meters.

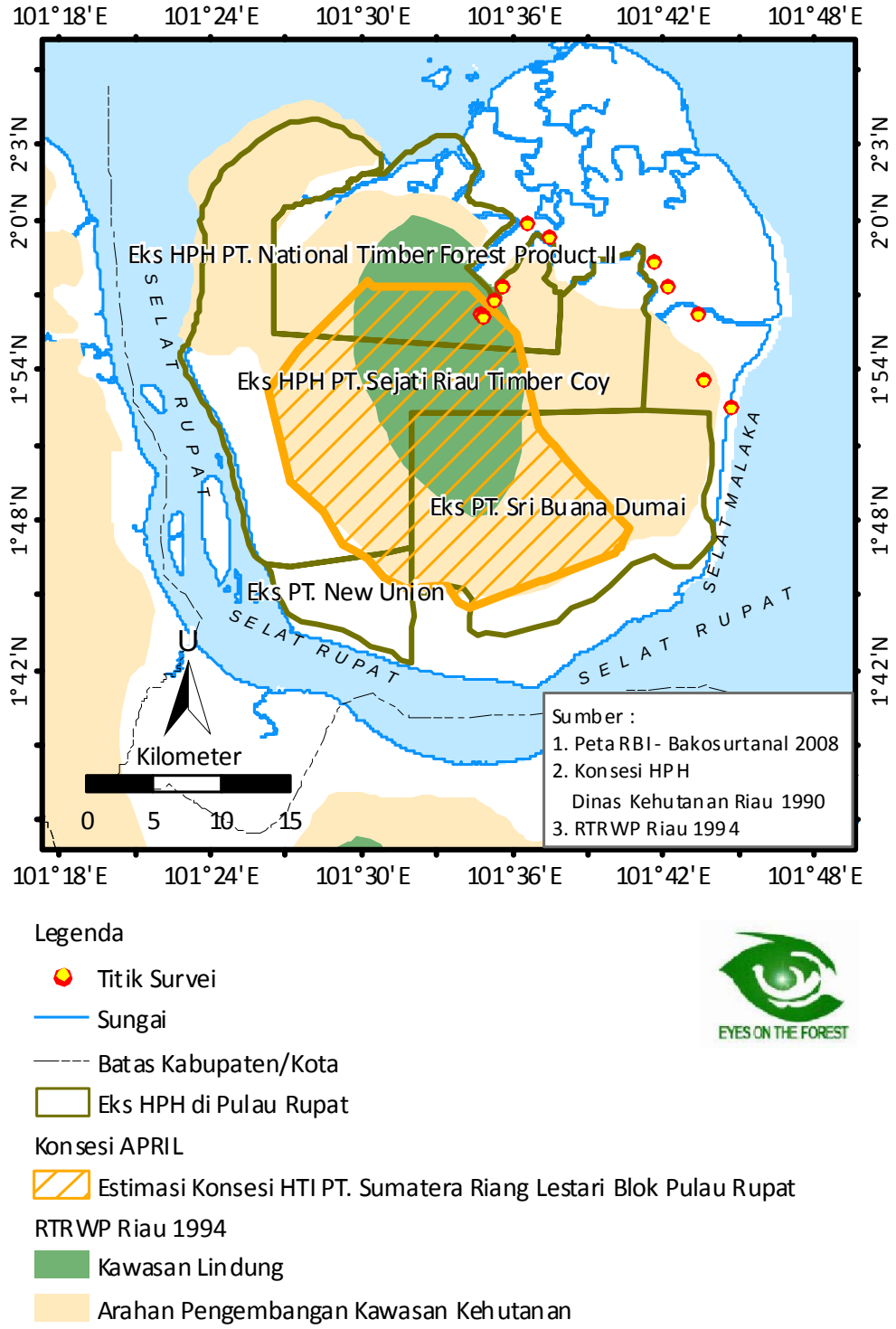


Map 2. PT Sumatra Riang Lestari concession Rupat island. Peat swamp forest in a depth of 2-4 meters (cream color) is dominant in this region, which signals a message that this area should have been protected.

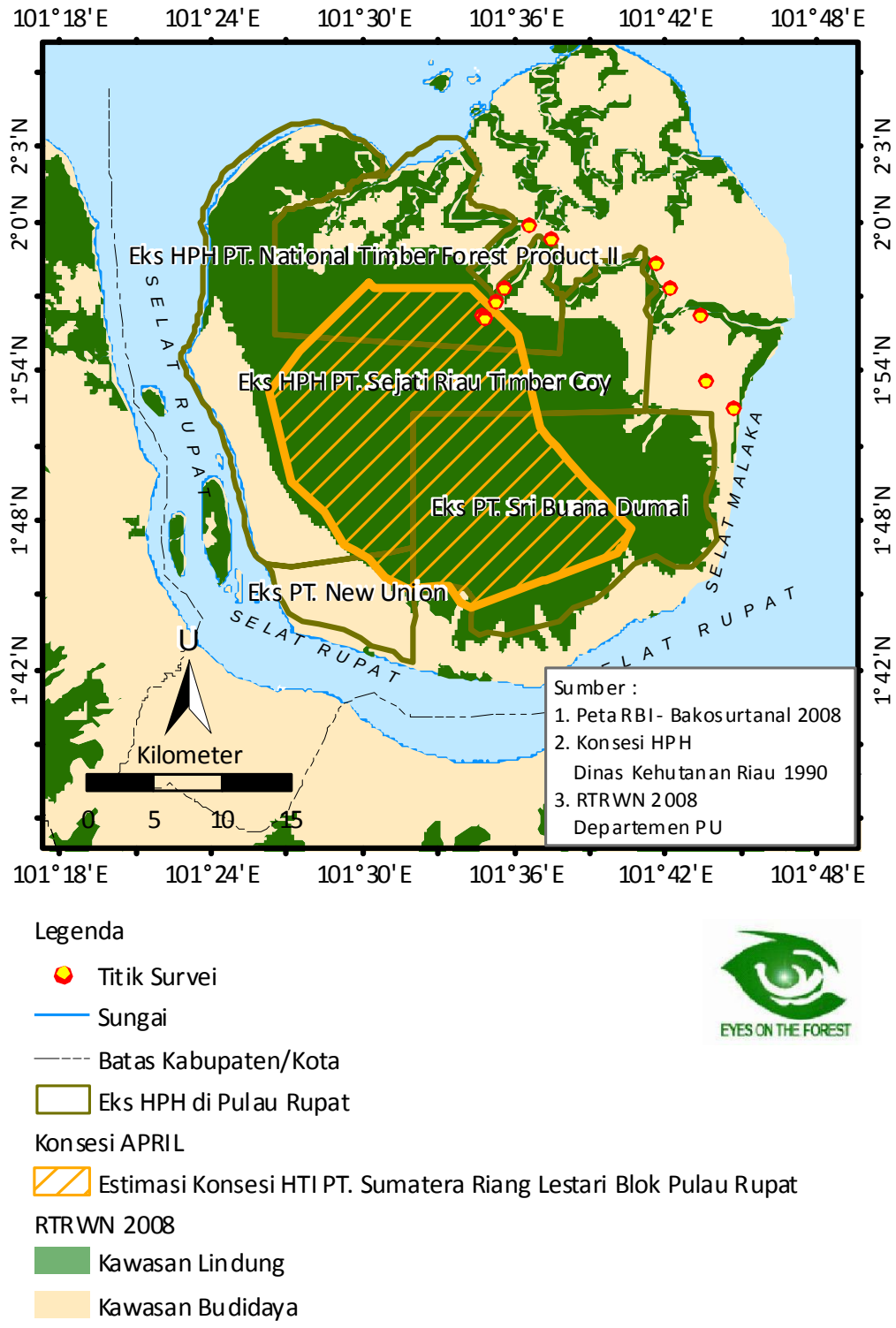
Picture 3. Peat canal drainage in the concession of PT SRL in Rupat block which affects severely ecology and global climate. Photo at the coordinate point N. 01 56 07,8 E. 34 101 50.8

Rupat peatland forest in Riau is one of the areas that represents the global carbon reserves. With the existence of peat which is very deep and rich in carbon, so just by cutting down trees or destroy the land area alone would lead to significant carbon emissions that affect global climate change.

Based on the Riau Province Spatial Plan 1994, majority of the expanding Industrial Timber Plantation concession for PT SRL in Rupat Island is part of Protected Areas (Map 3). Then based on the Indonesian Government Regulation Number 26 Year 2008 on National Regional spatial plan, the entire concession PT SRL in Rupat block is considered within the National Protected Area, this is due to in this area has a depth of peat more than 3 meters (Map 4). In addition, the Presidential Decree No. 32/1990 states that natural forest which located on peat soil with a depth of three meters or more, and located in the upstream river and wetlands should be protected.



Map 3. PT Sumatera Riang Lestari concession in Rupat island which overlaid with Riau RTRWP 1994 (green color) that confirms this area must be protected



Map 4. PT SRL concession in Rupat island which overlaid with RTRWN (National Land Use) based on the Government Regulation Number 26 Year 2008 on National Regional spatial plan, the entire

concession of PT SRL block in Rupat island is within the National Protected Area (green color), which means this area has a depth of peat more than 3 meters.

The expansion of pulpwood plantation concession of PT SRL in Rupat island is Ramin habitat (Picture 4). In Riau Province, the majority of the remaining natural forests are peat forest which indicated the habitat of Ramin. Shifting function of natural forests into industrial timber plantation neglects sustainability of the Ramin ecosystem. Despite the company set aside a few of Ramin trees in smaller size, it does not help. However, the protection of Ramin is genuinely intended to maintain its population and its habitat. Clear-cutting of natural forest including the habitat of Ramin rampantly is a clear signal that Ramin logs trade remains flourishing in both foreign and local markets.

Based on the study report of domestic and international trade in Ramin wood by Forest Watch Indonesia 2002, in Indonesia nowadays Ramin species can only be found in the peat swamp forests in Sumatra, the islands in the Strait Karimata, and Kalimantan. In Sumatra, Ramin wood is found in the eastern area from Riau to South Sumatra. The higher selling price and demand of international market to this kind of wood has incited rampant logging activities in the area of peat swamp forest.

Minister of Forestry Decree number 168/Kpts-IV/2001 dated 11 June 2001 on the Utilization and Distribution of Ramin species (Gonystylus Spp), Article 2 paragraph (3) stipulates that Wood Utilization Permit Holder (GPA) and Forest Product Harvesting Rights / permissions of Wood Harvesting and Utilization (HPHH / IPPK) since 11 April 2001 has banned the logging of Ramin wood.

Due to Ramin species has already been endangered, on the other hand the international trade is increasing along with the existence of illegal logging and illegal trade, so the world needs an international control

mechanism. With the inclusion of Ramin in CITES Appendix II it is expected that the population of this species will not be extinct and its trade can be controlled[viii].

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in a convention in Bangkok, Thailand on 3-14 October 2004 agreed to fall into the category of Ramin Appendix II, so that the Ramin timber trade should be regulated and closely monitored not only by producing countries but also all countries of CITES members. Ramin species is covered in the Appendix II with annotation entry I, which includes all parts and derivatives. Unusually, entry to appendix for the types of wood which included in annotations five or six (only cover logs, sawn timber, veneer and plywood), but for Ramin species it is set to annotation I due to the traded products have been processed in semi-finished products like moldings, dowels, frames, pool cues and furniture[ix].

Picture 4. Clear-cutting of natural forests by PT SRL in Rupat island which only leaves a few of Ramin trees (*Gonystylus Spp)* at a certain size. These trees will not survive any longer and will fell too as their trunks have no strong support to grow because of the change of natural forest ecosystem into acacia plantation. This illustrates how severe the expansion of pulpwood plantation by PT SRL in Rupat Island is, as it eliminates Ramin habitat. The national and international regulations clearly protect Ramin species and its habitat. Photo at the coordinate point N. 01 56 4.6 E. 101 34 47

Analysis of license issuance and logging of natural forests in the expansion of pulpwood plantation of PT SRL in Rupat island which situated on the good condition forest cover and at a depth of over three meters of peat. It is also located in the provincial and national protected areas. In addition, the concession affiliated to APRIL is potentially destroying the habitat of Ramin, so the natural forest logging operations and canal drainage by PT SRL, the affiliated company to APRIL, in Rupat is questionable breaching the laws.

A. Clear-cutting of natural forests by PT SRL in Rupat Island potentially destroys the habitat of migratory birds

Rupat is an important location for birds migration especially birds of prey and as an entrance and exit of the species migration from and to Indonesia through the Malay Peninsula. Results of series of study conducted by Raptor Indonesia (Rain) and the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) show the movement of large flows of Asian Honey Sikep (*Varnishes ptilorhynchus orientalis)* in the period of February - April in going home migration (spring migration). At average, it is estimated that there are 1000 - 2000 individuals of the bird that come to the Peninsula daily. In addition, large numbers of Asian swallow *Hirundo rustica* also crossed over the region every year in migration flow between October - November and February-March.

Raptor Indonesia in 2004 had confirmed that the area of Rupat island is important as the "bottleneck site" migration of certain species (especially Sikep Madu Asia) and must be protected and conserved for the survival of migration of species in the region. In 2009 as discussed in the strategy and action plan for preventive measures against bird flu in Indonesia, National Commission for Avian Influenza and the various task forces of the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry, the Ministry of Agriculture and Health Ministry's have set Rupat Island as an important location for monitoring the flow of migration of species and the monitoring of zoonosis traffic from the migration of species.[x],[xi],[xii]

B. Clear-cutting of natural forests by PT SRL in Rupat island potentially brings a misery to the lives of indigenous people and community of Akit Tribe as well as other locals

Concession of PT SRL in Rupat island is located around the village in the sub-districts of North Rupat and South Rupat, covering the village of Titi Akar (sub-district of North Rupat), Hutan Panjang Village, Batu Panjang Village, Teluk Recah Village, Mesim Village, Peregam Village, Terekul Village, Tanjung Kapal Village, Pangkalan Nyirih, Makhruh Village, Cingam Village, Kebumen Village and Kampung Aman Village (South Rupat sub-district).

According to community leaders, ZK (43), of Terekul Village and Hs (49), of Teluk Recah Village, inhabitants of Rupat Island strongly reject the presence of PT SRL's pulpwood expansion in Rupat island. The protest is expressed through a petition rejecting the operation of PT SRL Rupat Island block concession by all farmers' group and community leaders of Rupat District in March 2010. The petition to reject the company's clear-cutting operation was signed by about 2000 families in almost all villages in the Rupat area. The protest petition was also submitted to the Minister of Forestry, Minister of the Internal Affairs, the Governor of Riau, and 12 related agencies in March 2010. Some considerations the residents of Rupat Island to protest PT SRL operation in Rupat as follows:

- Hutan Panjang, Pangkalan Nyirih, and Titian Akar villages are widely inhabited by Akit tribe community who count their livelihoods on hunting and farming activities. Native Akit community consider highly that the forest is very important for the survival of Akit tribe.
- Remaining forest in Rupat Island for a long time has been a source of raw materials for housing and building construction as well as survival stuff by Rupat community. Water transportation is urgently used by residents of

Rupat Island to transport to Sumatra Island and vice versa, in particular to carry their livelihood stuffs as majority of them are farmers and fishermen.

- Expansion of pulpwood plantation of PT SRL will hamper the government plans to reduce poverty which attempted with the development of other plantations on Teluk Recah, Hutan Panjang, Pangkalan Nyirih, Mesim, Peregam, Terekul, Batu Panjang, Tanjung Kapal and Tanjung Aman villages.

B. Clear-cutting of natural forests by PT SRL in Rupat Island which contains potentially High Conservation Value Area (HCVF)

Based on the study by Wetlands International & Canadian International Development Agency in 2003, the entirel concession of PT SRL Rupat island block has the depth of peat more than 2-4 meters. In the map of Riau Province Land Use (RTRWP) 1994 and the Indonesian Government Regulation Number 26 Year 2008 on National Regional Spatial Plan (RTRWN), the entire concession of PT SRL Rupat island block is within the National Protected Area, it's also due to the depth of peat more than 3 meters in the area. This means that the concession of PT SRL in Rupat Island potentially has a value of **HCV 1.1** (Areas that have or provide support functions for the biodiversity of protected areas or conservation) and the **HCV 3** (Areas that have rare or endangered ecosystems). Furthermore, logging of natural forests in the region at a depth of peat more than 3 meters, will contribute a direct impact to the function of river flow (**HCV 4.1**).

The concession of PT SRL in Rupat Island is the habitat for the species or groups of species that used temporarily (**HCV 1.4**). Results of continuous studies conducted by Raptor Indonesia (Rain) and the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) show that the movement of large flows of Varnishes ptilorhynchus orientalis (Asian Honey Sikep) during February - April in yearly going home migration (spring migration). At average, it is estimated that there are 1000 - 2000 individuals of the bird that come to the Peninsula daily.

Based on Landsat satellite image 2008, good condition forest cover appeared inside the concession of PT Sumatra Riang Lestari in Rupat block, one year prior to the clear-cutting of natural forests (Map, 1). EoF team's findings in the field showed a stack of commercial logs felled in the concession. This means that the area converted into pulpwood plantation contain good cover, suggesting the concession should have been preserved as natural forest (Picture 2). In conclusion, this area has the potential of **HCV 4.3** where the area can prevent forest and land fires.

In addition, the location where PT SRL clear-cut natural forest for pulpwood plantation conversion is a home to indigenous Suku Akit. The Akit tribe are indigenous tribe community who are long-time inhabitants of Rupat Island, dwelling in the villages of Titi Akar, Hutan Panjang, Pangkalan Nyirih, et cetera. Akit Community have livelihoods to survive by relying upon the surrounding natural resources. Fishing on freshwaters to make money is just like planting sago trees in peat swamp area. While, forest that enriched with flora and fauna is available and help boost economic activities to meet the daily life needs (**HCV 5 and 6**).

Considering the high conservation values in the concession area of PT SRL in Rupat Island, PT SRL or APRIL should carry out assessment of High

Conservation Value (HCV) and should discuss then get approval from this assessment of the parties before felling natural forests or drain canals or other infrastructures.

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) defines High Conservation Value Forests as "forests of outstanding and critical importance due to their environmental, socio-economic, cultural, biodiversity and landscape values".

The concept of HCVF was first developed by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) in 1999 as their "Principle 9: Maintenance of High Conservation Value Forests". To ensure that High Conservation Values are protected, FSC Principle 9 states that: *"Management activities in high conservation value forests shall maintain or enhance the attributes which define such forests. Decisions regarding high conservation value forests shall always be considered in the context of a precautionary approach."* In practice this means that no forests should be cleared without prior assessment of High Conservation Values in the forest and its surrounding landscape combined with identification of the measures needed to maintain and enhance such values.

EoF has been informed that APRIL has already assessed the HCVF through cooperation with third party. However, this assessment has not been verified and no other parties which invited to discussion during such a process. Therefore, EoF considers that there is no acceptable HCVF assessment to this concession and that the clear-cutting of natural forests and logging operations by PT SRL has violated public policy of APRIL which is committed to not "source the timber from the areas of high conservation value."

C. Clear-cutting of natural forests by PT SRL in Rupat Island will cause a huge impact on global climate

Natural forest conversion and peat canal drainage as well as expansion of acacia plantation in Rupat Island may dry out the peatland and cause serious CO2 emissions. Rupat Island is a low-lying one which also considered as an area that contains single hydrological system, where most of the peat depth ranging at 2-4 meters, with huge amount of carbon stock. The entire peat is really rich water, with the water content 90% or more. The dried out of water through drainage canals may cause peat subsidence and function change as well as structural changes of peat dome.

Therefore, canal drainage and plantation development practices in the island within one area or landscape can bring about devastating impact to the remaining natural forest in hydrological units. Peat and forest areas are the largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions in Indonesia. Emissions from peat has reached about 45 percent of the total greenhouse gas emissions in Indonesia today. For the forestry sector, the emission is are more than 35 percent. The largest reduction potential for GHG emission rate can be obtained from the efforts of reduction on the deforestation and through the restoration of drained peat.

Eyes on the Forest calls on PT Sumatera Riang Lestari and APRIL and stakeholders to:

1. Immediately halt clear-cutting natural forests and draining peat canal in the concession of PT SRL in Rupat block due to its license is questionably against the Law, will cause social conflict and threaten the community's economy, as well as a threat posed to the High Conservation Values Area and potentially negative impacts to global climate;

2. Dismantle / close any newly-constructed infrastructures to prevent more severe canal drainage on peat ecosystem of Rupat Island and resultant of CO_2 emissions, and;

3. Set aside the entire concession for conservation and restricted management to boost the locals' economy, by considering the management is implemented under a fair and beneficial scheme to the community.

4. EoF will continue monitoring APRIL's field operations in Sumatra. EoF calls on APRIL's business partners to check www.eyesontheforest.or.id to get the latest updates, and take into account to information posted by EoF in evaluating the environmental and social performance of APRIL and their business relationship with that company.

END

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