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Destruction of Sumatra forests driving global climate change and species extinction: WWF

Pekanbaru, Sumatra: Turning just one Sumatran province's forests and peat swamps into pulpwood and palm oil plantations is generating more annual greenhouse gas emissions than the Netherlands and rapidly driving the province's elephants into extinction, a new study by WWF and partners has found.

The study found that in central Sumatra's Riau Province 4.2 million hectares of tropical forests and peat swamp have been cleared in the last 25 years. Forest loss and degradation and peat decomposition and fires are behind average annual carbon emissions equivalent to 122 percent of the Netherlands total annual emissions, 58 percent of Australia's annual emissions, 39 per cent of annual UK emissions and 26 per cent of annual German emissions.

Riau was chosen for the study because it is home to vast peatlands estimated to hold Southeast Asia's largest store of carbon, and contains some of the most critical habitat for Sumatran elephants and tigers. It also has Indonesia's highest deforestation rate, substantially driven by the operations of global paper giants Asia Pulp & Paper (APP) and Asia Pacific Resources International Holdings Limited (APRIL).

At last December's Bali Climate Change Conference, the Indonesian minister of Forestry pledged to provide incentives to stop unsustainable forestry practices and protect Indonesia's forests. The governor of Riau province has also made a public commitment to protect the province's remaining forest.

"If the commitments by the Indonesian government are implemented, it will not only save its endangered species but actually slow the rate of global climate change through the carbon savings," said Ian Kosasih, director of WWF-Indonesia's forest programme.

Carbon emissions are likely to increase, the study predicted, as most future forest clearance will be conducted in areas with deep peat.

"If government and local industry were to create positive incentives for projects to reduce emissions by saving forests in Riau Province, it would both protect the province's massive carbon stores and also contribute to the economies of local communities that are dependent on these forests," said Kosasih.

The report by WWF, Remote Sensing Solution GmbH and Hokkaido University breaks new ground by analyzing for the first time the connection between deforestation and forest degradation, global climate change, and population declines of tigers and elephants.

The province has lost 65 per cent of its forests over the last 25 years and in recent years has suffered Indonesia's fastest deforestation rates. In the same period there was an 84 per cent decline in elephant populations, down to only 210 individuals, while tiger populations are estimated to have declined by 70 per cent to perhaps just 192 individuals.

"We found that Sumatra's elephants and tigers are disappearing even faster than their forests are in Riau," said WWF International's Species Programme Director, Dr Susan Lieberman. "This is happening because as wildlife search for new habitat and food sources, they increasingly come into conflict with people and are killed.

"The fragmentation and opening up of new forest areas also increases both the access and the opportunities for poaching. Therefore, a concerted effort to save these forests will contribute significantly to slowing the rate of



global climate change, and will give tigers, elephants, and local communities a real chance for a future in Sumatra.”

Led by global paper giants APP and APRIL, the pulp & paper and palm oil industries are driving Riau's Sumatran tigers and elephants to local extinction in just a few years by destroying their habitat, the study found.

As part of its efforts to save Sumatra's remaining natural forests, WWF is working urgently with the Indonesian government and the pulp and palm oil industries to identify and protect the forests that are home to elephants, tigers, orang-utans and rhinos. Sumatra is the only place on Earth where all four species co-exist.

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NOTES for EDITORS:

- A summary report How Pulp and Paper and Palm Oil from Sumatra increases Global Climate Change and Drives Tigers and Elephants to Local Extinction can be downloaded at http://assets.panda.org/downloads/riau_co2_report_short_wwf_id_27feb08_en_lr_.pdf
- The full report, “Deforestation, Forest Degradation, Biodiversity Loss, and CO₂ Emissions in Riau, Sumatra, Indonesia,” can be downloaded at http://assets.panda.org/downloads/riau_co2_report_wwf_id_27feb08_en_lr_.pdf High-resolution versions of these reports are also available, see below.
- Most of Riau's forests were cleared since 1982 to make way for new industrial plantations, with approximately 30 percent cleared for the palm oil plantations and around 25 percent for pulpwood plantations.
- Since 1982, as the forest were cleared, there was a clear correlation in Riau with declining Sumatran elephant populations, which suffered up to an 84 percent decline in numbers – down to as few as 210 individuals in 2007.
- Since 1982, Sumatran tiger population estimates are down 70 percent, to perhaps just 192 individuals. Unless the last remaining patches of tiger habitat are connected by wildlife corridors, Riau will no longer have a viable tiger population, the study predicts.
- The study's estimates may over- or underestimate actual carbon emissions due to the fact that for many processes, detailed data on carbon stocks and carbon emissions (stock decrease) are not available. Concerning the historical situation the study solely relied on Landsat satellite imagery, since no other data on land cover are available. Factoring in all possible errors and uncertainties, the study's authors believe that the results indicate at least the order of magnitude of the emissions correctly. More detail on the report authors and methodology is available at http://assets.panda.org/downloads/authors_and_methodology_of_riau_co2_report_25feb08_.doc
- A photograph album of images related to this report is accessible through a separate document emailed with this release.
- High-resolution copies of the summary and full reports and photographs and maps from the report are available through <https://intranet.panda.org/documents/folder.cfm?uFolderID=61441> To access this material, log in with user name: intranet@wwfint.org and password: dropbox
- Broadcast-quality footage of Sumatran elephants and tigers and deforestation are available for download at www.panda.org/broadcast.
- WWF-Indonesia's collection of documents on Asia Pulp and Paper is accessible through <http://www.wwf.or.id/index.php?fuseaction=news.detail&language=e&id=NWS1151055588>

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