



PERSATUAN PENCINTA ALAM MALAYSIA

Malaysian Nature Society (Society No. 1288/50)

MALAYSIAN NATURE SOCIETY, TERENGGANU BRANCH

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The Terengganu Branch of the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) is deeply concerned about the recent announcement that 4,515 hectares of permanent forest reserves in the state of Terengganu have been degazetted. According to media reports, (TheEdgeMarkets and TheStarOnline, both January 3, 2018) the degazetted forest reserves, which are roughly the size of more than 4,500 football fields, are to be given to TDM Bhd, a government linked company, for their plantation expansion.

Malaysia is recognised as one of 12 mega biodiversity countries supporting an unprecedented wealth of wildlife contained within our natural tropical forests. However, our forests are dwindling. According to a study by the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM), high-resolution satellite images showed that forest areas in Peninsular Malaysia have declined by 200,000 ha between 2010 and 2015 due to conversion to other land uses. This same study also found that in Terengganu and other states, oil palm and rubber plantations have been the main drivers of deforestation.

Forests provide a variety of valuable ecosystem services to Malaysia's people, such as carbon storage, air and water purification, and flood control. Researchers from FRIM and Duke University have quantified the impact of deforestation on flood mitigation services in Peninsular Malaysia. They found that the conversion of 1 % of inland forest to oil palm increased the number of flooded days by 26.8 %. Also, they found that the number of human deaths and flood evacuees per year increased with expanding oil palm acreage.

MNS Mission : To promote the conservation of Malaysia's natural heritage

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MNS Terengganu is not against palm oil as a crop, but its expansion has to follow strict guidelines set by the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), which prohibits the clearing of High Conservation Value forests according to the New Planting Procedure. Instead of converting more forests to oil palm, properly managed forests can provide Terengganu with a sustainable source of income in the form of timber, traditional herbal products, and ecotourism.

The state of Terengganu has long recognised the value of our forests, and hopes to shift emphasis towards nature-based tourism as a key income earner for its people. Blessed with beautiful islands, expansive sandy coastlines, and tropical forests supporting a diversity of wildlife, ecotourism is the natural solution. But ecotourism will only have a chance if the state is serious about protecting its natural heritage. By degazetting forest reserves, the state is sending the wrong signal to the world.

The state government of Terengganu has always maintained an open dialogue with NGOs such as MNS, supporting our initiatives and projects on a regular basis. The state has never refused a request from the branch to sit down together and hear our views, and for this the government must be commended.

We all want prosperity for Terengganu, but this requires an economy that balances development with a healthy environment. The current practice of degazetting forest reserves is not sustainable. Solutions where revenue can be generated from intact forests and biodiversity are now available – we need to start adopting these in order to provide a better future for us all.

Citation for studies referred to in the above press release:

Hamdan, O., Abd, R. K. & Samsudin, M. (2016). Quantifying rate of deforestation and CO2 emission in Peninsular Malaysian using palsar imageries. *Earth and Environmental Science*, 37(8). Doi:10.1088/1755-1315/37/1/012028

Tan, S. J. S., Adnan, N., Ahmad, I., Pattanayak, S. K. & Vincent, J. R. (2014). Econometric evidence on forest ecosystem services: deforestation and flooding in Malaysia. *The Official Journal of the European Association of Environmental and Resource Economists*, 59(2). doi:10.1007/s10640-014-9834-4