

Management of Peat Swamp Forest: Case Study for Loagan Bunut National Park, Sarawak, Malaysia

By

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Abstract

Peat swamp forests are unique habitats for flora and fauna, with a high proportion of endemic species. They play an important role in stabilizing the ecosystem, particularly in the control of drainage, microclimate, water purification and soil formation. They also serve as gene banks that harbour potentially useful varieties of plant species. Currently Malaysia has an estimated 1.5 million hectares of peatlands with more than 80% found in Sarawak. A part of these peatlands is currently under agriculture while the rest remains as peat swamp forests either as sustainably managed permanent forest reserves or state reserve lands. The large tracts of peatlands in Sarawak are those found within Sibu and Mukah. However, these PSFs are depleting at a very alarming rate due to logging which are usually followed by land developments. Substantial areas are also abandoned after being cleared but where drainage is limited because of deep peat layer. Relatively very small and scattered PSF areas are left intact to the detriment of their ecological functions and ecosystem integrity. These and other related issues threaten the ability of the remaining swamp to play the above roles and services. The Peat Swamp Forest Project (MAL/99/G31) is an initiative of the Government of Malaysia with the assistance of United Nations Development Programme/Global Environment Facility (UNDP/GEF) in three sites in Malaysia. Started in June 2002, this five-year Project aims to promote conservation and sustainable use of PSF and associated wetland ecosystems. The paper discusses on how the Project attempts to manage the peat swamp forest in three sites in Malaysia with more emphasis given to the Project site at Loagan Bunut National Park, Sarawak.

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