

Environment Watch: Water catchment plan opposed

West Java's plan to expand its water catchment in a bid to combat the water crisis threat has received opposition from farmers. The plan entails altering the status of forests to conservation parks, which will see, if the Perhutani State Forestry Firm grants its expected consent, an expansion of up to 3,276.98 hectares of water catchment area from the current 526.98 hectares, known as Djuanda National Park north of Bandung.

Water reserves from the water catchment area is said to be inadequate to cater to the 7.8 million Bandung population and a water crisis is expected in 2015 if no water-preservation efforts are undertaken. However, the plan has drawn objection from farmers who fear it will threaten their livelihood.

Around 200 vegetable farmers and 800 farmers who obtain their clean water supply from the conservation forest in Wangunharja village in Lembang district objected to the planned expansion program. About 1,500 dairy farmers who benefit from grass growing on the edge of the forest also objected to the plan.

Residents in three villages around Gunung Manglayang, Sukasarai district, Sumedang, have additionally voiced their rejection. West Java Forestry Office chief Anang Sudarna said according to a forestry ministerial decree, vegetable farming was prohibited from the forest if it changed its status to a conservation park.

Governor Ahmad Heryawan said that his intention to expand the conservation forest would be in no way depriving the people because the area was owned by Perhutani, which would not restrain those living around the forest from benefiting from its resources.

"This is just a matter of a lack of communication. We must stop the discourse until an agreement with residents is reached," said Ahmad. Perhutani has yet to approve the proposal made by the provincial administration on expansion. Anang disclosed that the expansion proposal was submitted to the Forestry Ministry on March 26, 2010.

The proposal has been supported by an agreement from the Plantology and Forest Protection and Natural Conservation directorate generals through a formal letter in June 2010. However, Perhutani has yet to issue a technical consideration, one of the requirements to change a forest's status.

"We have sent letters to the West Java provincial secretary twice, but have yet to receive a reply," Anang told reporters in Bandung on Thursday.

The West Bandung regent is also yet to issue a technical recommendation letter, despite the fact that the regents of West Bandung and Sumedang, whose area jurisdiction would be included in the expansion program have supported the idea of the expansion on social grounds.

West Bandung Regent Abubakar said he must also consider opposition from some of the residents.

– JP/Yuli Tri Suwarni