

NTT sets up tree bank for reforestation drive

The East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) provincial administration has made a breakthrough in overcoming forest destruction by initiating a tree bank. The program is aimed at preparing tree seedlings to reforest critical areas spanning 15,163 hectares.

When reached in Kupang on Thursday, NTT Environmental Office head Alexander Oematan urged every party to support the community-based reforestation program.

"The rapid rate of forest destruction has pushed the government to encourage residents to work together. The government has provided tree seedlings through the tree bank program. The seedlings are of the sandalwood and mahogany tree varieties and are productive trees with economic value," he said.

According to Alexander, the reforestation drive is aimed at restoring the function of the forest and boosting the economic benefits of forestry products.

"Areas included as conservation forest span 661,680 hectares outside the estimated 1.44 million hectares of forested areas. The program is aimed at restoring the function of the forest as the lungs of the city," he added.

"In the past two decades, deforestation in NTT has reached 15,163 hectares of the 2.10 million hectares of potential forests, or 44.55 percent of NTT's land area, spanning 47,350 square kilometers," said Oematan.

He said forest destruction in NTT was mainly attributed to widespread illegal logging and forest conversion into residential areas.

"The nomadic farming system, landslides and natural disasters are among the causes of forest destruction. Other factors include population growth, which drives people to open new residential areas in forested areas," said Oematan.

He added that forest destruction had taken place evenly across all regencies and mayoralities in NTT, where most of the areas that were once previously covered by forest had now become barren.

NTT Environmental Resources program manager Hery Naif said severe forest destruction was attributed to lax law enforcement and the lack of a clear definition between protected forest, conservation forest and community-based forestland.