

Damaged forests lead to major flooding in Riau

Floods in two regencies in Riau were believed to be caused by environmental damage in the upper reaches of the Rokan And Kampar river basin areas (DAS), said a conservationist.

The Riau chapter of the Indonesian Forum for the Environment (Walhi) executive coordinator Hariansyah Usman said the forested areas in the Rokan DAS (1,836,717 hectares) and Kampar DAS (2,753,050 hectares) were currently in severe condition.

“The remaining forested areas are no longer viable and only support growing underbrush, so their function of maintaining hydrological balance is gone,” Hariansyah said on Friday.

He said nearly all forested areas in Kampar DAS and Rokan DAS had become oil palm plantations, industrial forests, farmland or had been damaged by illegal logging.

The two protected forests buffering the upper reaches of Kampar DAS — the Bukit Rimbang Baling and Bukit Bungkok wildlife sanctuaries — are on the verge of destruction, including the Mahato and Suligi forest preserves at the upper reaches of Rokan River, where almost all of the forested areas have been converted into oil palm plantations.

“The catchment areas have vanished, despite the fact that it is prohibited to cut 30 percent of the forested areas in the upper reaches of the rivers. As a result, runoff is inevitable during rain. Rivers become badly silted due to erosion and easily overflow their banks during the rainy season,” said Hariansyah.

According to Hariansyah, a number of factors have caused degradation of the DAS, such as forest conversion not in line with the spatial planning of the conservation area. He also blamed lax supervision on the part of the Forestry Ministry and local forestry office.

“Weak law enforcement and lack of political will have also aggravated the condition,” he said.

Hariansyah urged the central government to immediately implement a logging moratorium as part of a solution to prevent flood recurrence.

“The moratorium is not only aimed at curbing logging and reviewing licensing, but also revive the function of damaged forested areas,” he said.

Meanwhile, the floods in Rokan Hulu and Kampar regencies have further swelled and engulfed more than 9,000 homes.