

Govt reduces area of forests protected by moratorium

The government issued a new version of a forest map, revising down the size of primary forests and conservation areas in the forest moratorium to 55 million hectares.

The new map, posted on the Forestry Ministry website Monday, highlights 55 million hectares of primary forests and conservation areas and 17 million hectares of peatland estimated to store 1 billion tons of carbon.

Previously, presidential aide on climate change Agus Purnomo and several officials said a moratorium would cover 64 million hectares of primary forests and conservation areas.

Following President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's issuance of a decree on the forest moratorium on May 20, officials declared the policy would protect 64 million hectares of primary forests and conservation areas in addition to between 20 million hectares and 30 million hectares of peatland.

If the government kept to its initial promise, the moratorium would have protected at least 84 million hectares of forests from commercial exploitation for two years. Forestry Ministry secretary-general Hadi Daryanto said the ministry found no indications permits were issued to companies to exploit areas within the 72 million hectares.

"[The 72 million hectares] is huge, equal to half of Indonesia's 133 million hectares of forest areas," Hadi said.

He said the ministry would revise the moratorium map every six month if it found any of the protected areas had been converted for other purposes.

The ministry said trees within the 72-million-hectare area stored at least 1 billion tons of carbon.

"If a ton of carbon is worth US\$2, Indonesia can claim \$2 billion. The question is, who would pay it. No country wants to pay that," Hadi said. The presidential taskforce on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD Plus) programs headed by Kuntoro Mangkusubroto ended its six-month term on June 30.

The taskforce was assigned to prepare the national strategy and implementation of REDD as well as mechanisms to ensure the programs are measurable, reportable and verifiable (MRV) and to set up REDD pilot projects.

At the end of its term, the taskforce has completed one task: selecting Central Kalimantan to host REDD pilot projects. Hadi said the taskforce had proposed alternatives for a REDD institution, but said the decision rested with the President.

Hadi, a former member of the taskforce, said it would be better if the REDD institution was under the Forestry Ministry. Activists have warned of the Forestry Ministry's incompetency in leading REDD programs, given the massive rate of deforestation. Indonesia is the third-largest forested country, but loses more than 1 million hectares of forests each year.

Greenomics Indonesia earlier accused Forestry Minister Zulkifli Hasan of issuing a decree converting the status of 81,490 hectares of protected forest conservation areas into production forests for REDD pilot projects in Central Kalimantan.

It said Zulkifli's decree, which affected forests in Tanjung Puting National Park and Sebangau National Park, among other locations, was issued less than two weeks after Yudhoyono signed the moratorium.