

Muaro Jambi struggling to protect peatland forests

The tropical peatland forests in Muaro Jambi regency – which are integral to the local ecosystem as they preserve water resources and serve as a flood and biodiversity buffer – are depleting due to bad management and exploitation.

Based on a survey conducted by the Jambi River Catchment Management Agency (BP DAS) in 2012, 16,324.2 hectares (ha) of peatland in the regency was in a critical condition and 50,016.2 ha was in a very critical condition. An area of 73,174.2 ha was in a relatively critical condition and would immediately become critical as a result of the ineffective management system, especially macro water management.

“The Climate Smart Agriculture [CSA] model and Community-based Forest Management [PHBM] could be used to save the peatland and empower the local community,” said Indonesian Conservation Community (KKI) Warsi coordinator Nelly Akbar recently.

She added that ecofriendly farming methods were included in the CSA model.

“The concept emphasizes land utility and pays attention to the environment, especially peatland. We know that peatland management is important and if it is not managed properly it could become a major contributor to gas emissions,” said Nelly.

“We have initiated the program in Kota Kandis Dendang and Sungai Beras through an interspersed crop system, whereby, crops are planted among areca nut palm, coffee and pepper.”

Community-based forest management, she went on, was also a step in the right direction to improve access and community empowerment in and around forested areas and peatland.

Nelly said KKI Warsi had submitted proposals for community-based forests in peatland areas.

“We have submitted four proposals, three have been verified – in the villages of Sei Beras, Sinar Wajo and Kota Kandis Dendang – and one is still pending for Pematang Rahim,” she said.

Jambi University Agriculture School lecturer Asmadi Sa’ad expressed a similar thought. He said all stakeholders needed to be involved in conservation efforts because the annual floods and haze in Jambi were a result of bad peatland management.

“The government must be firm when taking action against companies that have breached regulations. The community must also support efforts to save peatland because it is everyone’s responsibility,” said Asmadi.

Meanwhile, Deputy Muaro Jambi Regent David Rozano acknowledged that many corporations had failed to comply with regulations to protect peatland. Many companies, he said, had failed to provide sufficient fire-fighting equipment.

“The problem is that many companies in Muaro Jambi lack fire-fighting equipment, despite widespread fires in their concessions,” said Rozano.

The peatland ecosystem is part of buffer for hydrology and carbon reserves, which is very important for the environment. The legal aspect of peatland conservation is regulated in Presidential Decree No. 32/1990 on conservation area. Protection of peatland is aimed at controlling the area’s watershed, which retains water and prevents flooding, as well as minimizing carbon emissions.