

S. Sumatra railway will harm forests: Walhi

: The Indonesian Forum for the Environment (Walhi) on Friday rejected the South Sumatra administration's plan to construct a 273-kilometer railway through the province, saying it will destroy up to 709 hectares of forest.

The railway is expected to help transport coal produced by state mining company PT Bukit Asam, from Tanjungenim to Tanjungcarat, both in South Sumatra, and is planned to run through Muaraenim, Musi Banyuasin and Banyuasin regencies.

The plan was initiated by PT Adani Sumsel, a subsidiary of PT Adani Global India, which specializes in coal transportation.

Walhi South Sumatra executive director Anwar Sadat said in Palembang on Friday that along with the railway construction project, a special port for coal, covering a 107-hectare area, was also planned.

Anwar said the construction of both the railway and the port would potentially harm 709.25 hectares of forest and affect other surrounding areas, some of which are part of the Air Telang protected mangrove forest reserve.

The project could also lead to the exploitation of coal in the province, since it was expected to help boost coal production from 12 million tons per year up to 50 million tons per year after the targeted completion of the project in 2013, he said.

Anwar further said that the production increase was meant to support exports to countries such as Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia, but not local needs.

"Walhi South Sumatra rejects the plan, and urges the government to immediately carry out efforts to save coal that belongs to South Sumatra, and at the same time save the forests and the people," Anwar said as quoted by Antara news agency.