

Wildfires destroy half of national park in West Manggarai

Officials say that they are unable to contain the wildfires that have been raging inside Wae Wuul National Park in West Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) for several days.

The blaze has destroyed about half of the 1,484-hectare park, Ora Yohanes, head of the Ruteng branch of the Natural Conservation Center, said on Friday.

No people or animals have been killed in the fire, which broke out on Tuesday morning, Yohanes said.

“Dry bushes and leaves in the area are prone to frequent fires during the dry season,” he added.

Yohanes, however, said that he also suspected that the fire was started by local residents setting fires to clear land for agriculture.

“We have a very limited number of officers to put out the blaze, while residents in the area do not seem to care much about natural conservation,” Yohanes added.

The forest is home to many plants, such as suren (*Toona sureni*), lontar (*Borassus flabellifer*), nyatoh (*Palaquim obovatum*), ampupu (*Eucalyptus urophylla*), and some species of bamboo.

Animals living in the park include the province’s renowned and rare komodo dragons, in addition to deer, bats and falcons.

Officials reportedly rescued two endangered deer from the fire in the national park.

According to Yohanes, the komodo dragons living in the park were safe and likely hiding underground.

“We have yet to receive any information on possible dead komodo dragons,” Yohanes added.

A team that was dispatched by the provincial conservation center in Kupang to Ruteng to control the blaze has been delayed by the high waves that have hit Warloka waters over the last several days.

Ruteng is situated on Flores Island, while Kupang, the capital of NTT, is located approximately 350 airline kilometers away across the Savu Sea.

“We can only wait. There’s nothing we can do to put off the blaze,” Yohanes said.

Wildfires have continued to plague several provinces throughout the nation during the extended dry season this year.

Last week, for example, wildfires in Jambi on Sumatra Island reportedly almost reached the province’s three major national parks: Bukit Tiga Puluh, Kerinci Seblat and Sembilang.

Meanwhile, in Lampung, wildfires have threatened Way Kambas National Park in East Lampung regency; and Batam, Riau, has reported choking haze from the fires in Sumatra.