

Flooding postpones new urban forest

The Surakarta city administration has decided to postpone the development of its fourth urban forest after the first three developed last year were destroyed by floods that hit the region earlier this year.

The three urban forests, located in Pucang Sawit subdistrict, Jebres district, along the Bengawan Solo riverbanks, were all covered with mud and garbage after the floods.

The worst affected was the third urban forest, with its plants also being carried away by flood currents.

“This is a valuable lesson for us, so we can better plan how to make use of riverbanks in the future,” Surakarta city secretary Budi Suharto said on Friday.

He said that before moving forward with the development of the fourth urban forest, good planning on how to develop and manage it was needed based on the evaluation of the three existing urban forests.

The first three forests, which cover an area of 1,500 square meters (sqm), 2,700 sqm and 3,500 sqm respectively, were built with a fund of between Rp 260 million (US\$26,720) and Rp 290 million. Yet, none of the forests came with a management and maintenance fund.

As a consequence, damage to the first two urban forests were feared irreparable because there was no fund allocated. There third urban forest is in better condition because its maintenance is still under the responsibility of the contractor until May 2013.

Budi also said that the city administration did not expect the damage as it thought the expansion of the riverbanks and the dredging of the river would prevent floods from reaching the forests. This was proved to be not the case.

With the postponement of the fourth urban forest, Surakarta Mayor FX Hadi Rudyatmo said the city administration was currently communicating with the city council to switch the Rp 600 million fund earmarked for the project to instead go to building additional public facilities at the 45 Banjarsari Monument.

“It’s time for the monument to have more representative facilities, such as a children’s playground,” Rudy said.

So far, the monument is only surrounded by a fence to protect it.

City councilor Honda Hendarto said that switching the fund would not violate prevailing regulations.

“The budget is already there. What is needed is just adjusting the location,” said Honda, who is also a member of council’s budget committee.