Development of an Integrated Forest Conservation and Rehabilitation Program in the Area of PT Agro Indomas, East Kalimantan, Indonesia

Response to:

Mongabay Article 'Palm oil processing industry taking over habitat of endangered proboscis monkey' / 'Palm oil processors top plantations in destroying proboscis monkey habitat'

Toulec et. al 2020 Shrimp farms, fire or palm oil? Changing causes of proboscis monkey habitat loss (*Global Ecology and Conservation, Volume 21)*.

24th January 2020

An article Hans Nicholas Jong published on the environmental news platform Mongabay (first on 8th January 2020 and again on 22nd January 2020) reports on the findings of a study by Toulec *et. al* 2020 Shrimp farms, fire or palm oil? Changing causes of proboscis monkey habitat loss (*Global Ecology and Conservation, Volume 21)*.

The study published in the journal Global Ecology and Conservation, provides detailed information on the extent and causes of proboscis monkey habitat changes in Balikpapan Bay (East Kalimantan, Indonesia) over a period of 17 years (2000-2017). It identifies areas of lost habitat and associates every identified fragment of lost habitat with a likely cause. In doing so, the clearing of land for oil palm plantations has been identified as one of the main causes of the loss of proboscis monkey habitat, particularly from the year 2000-2007.

The study identifies that the majority of proboscis monkey habitat in Balikpapan Bay in 2000 was represented by 168.00 km^2 of mangroves (72.50% of the total habitat), completed with 63.71 km^2 of non-mangroves. The research findings confirm that since then, there have been multiple causes of proboscis monkey habitat loss, from smallholder aquaculture to large-scale plantations and then to industry, in particular palm oil bulking stations, refineries, and biodiesel plants, that are currently operating or under construction.

Goodhope's PT Agro Indomas East Kalimantan (AIEK) is cited as a prominent cause of proboscis monkey habitat loss in Balikpapan Bay (according the results of the study, the company is responsible for the loss of 3.9% of the total extent of habitat that existed in the year 2000).

PT AIEK has a concession are of 6,767 ha located in District of Sepaku, Penajam Paser Utara, East Kalimantan Province and has been operating since 2006. The company is a member of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) and is working towards attaining RSPO certification.

The company has made considerable efforts to meet the prerequisites of sustainable oil palm plantation management including commissioning assessments to identify High Conservation Values (HCVs). The first HCV Assessment was conducted prior to any corporate land clearance in 2007, and a second re-assessment was completed in 2009. The assessments listed Proboscis monkeys (*Nasalis larvatus*) as an endangered and endemic species found in the assessment area and classified 2270 Ha (33.55% of PT. AIEK concession area) as HCV area. The assessments listed threats against the identified HCVs and provided recommendations to the company regarding plans for HCV monitoring and management activities.

The study by Toulec *et. al* 2020 stated that "the company cleared 8.96 km^2 (3.46 square miles) of non-mangrove proboscis monkey habitat for plantations". Using the map of habitat loss published in the research article, an approximate overlay indicates the location of PT AIEK's planted area (oil palm) and HCV areas alongside the identified habitat loss. The result suggests that much of the habitat loss extends from the boundary of PT AIEK planted area, occurring on land belonging to local communities.

The findings in the study provide useful information to support our drive to step up efforts to protect HCV areas and promote forest conservation in the wider landscapes. In particular, we seek support to address concerns that the rate of habitat loss in Balikpapan Bay looks to increase in the coming years. It is well acknowledged that the expansion plan and the translocation of the national capital from Jakarta to a large area on the boundary of the PPU and Kutai Kartanegara Regencies is likely to result in to further loss of habitat for numerous species, including the proboscis monkey.

On a recent survey in January 2020 along Sepaku River, Balikpapan Bay, three key existing and emerging threats were identified:

- Shrimp and milkfish ponds have already encroached into mangrove areas.
- There is good access by road to the mangrove forest.
- Land ownership of mangrove areas has been declared by the installment of signboards.

The survey was conducted on 16th January with participants from PT AIEK and ELTI.

Goodhope recognizes the significance of PT AIEK as a main stakeholder to urge the protection of forest that holds high carbon stock / high levels of biodiversity and that provides habitats for Rare Threatened or Endangered species. With increasing engagement and conservation efforts, we aim to help ensure that Balikpapan Bay remains a stronghold as natural habitat of the proboscis monkey. In order to do so, it is clear that we must work together with multiple stakeholders to maximize potential for positive impact and effectively mitigate the threats of development. Collaborative partnerships will be utilized to strengthen conservation efforts in an Integrated Forest Conservation and Rehabilitation Program comprising the following main components:

1. **Raising awareness of the importance of both mangrove and surrounding non-mangrove forest in and around PT AIEK concession**
   A more concerted effort is needed to promote the importance of both mangrove and non-mangrove forest. The study confirms that the loss of habitat caused by oil palm plantations in Balikpapan Bay has affected primarily the non-mangrove forest and that these areas will be most at risk of further destruction. Furthermore, although the rate of habitat loss due to plantation development has slowed down substantially, overall rate of habitat loss is expected to increase due to development for other purposes. We will therefore work to improve recognition of non-mangrove as well as mangrove forest among AIEK employees, local communities and local businesses through purposefully designed stakeholder engagement programs. Importantly, our engagement and capacity building activities will focus not only on the importance of the forest as habitat for the endangered and endemic proboscis monkey, but also on: i) the benefits that it can provide to human wellbeing and economic growth, and ii) the significance of animals such as the proboscis monkey in contributing to the health of a forest ecosystem.

   Our existing partnership with Environmental Leadership and Training Initiative (ELTI) and our ongoing smallholder engagement program provides a good foundation to build on with the delivery of socialization activities promoting forest conservation and rehabilitation. Additional stakeholders will be sought to support the program, including local champions to help promote the importance of mangrove conservation. The head of a local shrimp farming cooperative in Sepaku who has learnt from experience that mangrove restoration contributes to improved yields has been identified as a potential candidate for such as role.

Presentation by Environmental Leadership and Training Initiative (ELTI) at Goodhope's Training Center in Central Kalimantan.

Smallholder engagement: Field Farmer School Activities in Batu Agung Village, East Kalimantan.

2. **Implementation and evaluation of assessments and surveys to guide conservation planning and measure impacts**
   Social, land-use, habitat, and biodiversity assessments will provide the information needed to identify the areas at greatest risk of degradation, priorities for addressing the main threats, and potential for forest rehabilitation. As well as the research by Toulec *et. al*, publications and advice from Balai Penelitian Teknologi Konservasi Sumber Daya Alam (Balitek KSDA) will aid in conservation planning. Continued monitoring will be necessary to measure impacts, evaluate the contribution of activities and maximize outputs and outcomes by adaptive management.

Discussion on conservation approaches and planning at Balitek KSDA, Samboja, East Kalimantan. 14th January 2020.

Survey along Sepaku River, Balikpapan Bay. 14th January 2020.

3. **Forest rehabilitation**

A key finding of the study by Toulec *et. al* 2020 is that "Instead of the total habitat, the availability and access to key food resources may determine the future development of the population". Monitoring the mangrove HCV areas in PT AIEK concession identifies areas of forest that is disturbed in structure. Improving the quality of the habitat by rehabilitation projects in select areas could have significant beneficial impacts including improving accessibility to key food resources to enhance population stability of proboscis monkeys. Botanical expertise from ELTI will be utilized to provide recommendations and procedures for rehabilitation projects and to lead trainings.

Certain mangrove areas will be selected as sites for forest rehabilitation programs.

4. **Promoting sustainable livelihood opportunities that support conservation efforts**

Our stakeholder engagement activities will incorporate the sharing of information and implementation of trainings to enhance capacity for community livelihood opportunities that support and do not negatively impact conservation efforts. Programs will be developed according to the interests of the local stakeholders and we will utilize our existing collaborations with ELTI and Swaraowa initially to promote opportunities. Following a field training program in Central Kalimantan on the cultivation of stingless bees to strengthen community livelihoods around HCV areas of oil palm plantations, similar programs shall be implemented in East Kalimantan. Such initiatives will provide a good basis for the development and implementation of extended programs.

Field Training Program on the Cultivation of Stingless Bees to Strengthen Community Livelihoods around HCV Areas of Oil Palm Plantations in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia.

As always, we welcome advice, comments and support to assist in the development and implementation of this integrated program.

Citations

Toulec, T., Lhota, S., Soumarová, H., Putera, A. K. S., & Kustiawan, W. (2020). Shrimp farms, fire or palm oil? Changing causes of proboscis monkey habitat loss. *Global Ecology and Conservation*, *21*. doi:10.1016/j.gecco.2019.e00863

Palm oil processors top plantations in destroying proboscis monkey habitat by Hans Nicholas Jong, 8th January 2020

Palm oil processing industry taking over habitat of endangered proboscis monkey by Hans Nicholas Jong, 22nd January 2020