

Saving forests to maintain biodiversity

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Forestry Minister Zulkifli Hasan said his office would restore 300,000 hectares of damaged forest per year to maintain biodiversity, which has come under serious threat from deforestation and development.

Minister Zulkifli has issued permits to restore 200,000 hectares of damaged forest in Sumatra and East Kalimantan this year.

“We will also focus on enforcing the law on the illegal trade of species or illicit forest conversion in protected and conservation areas,” he told reporters at celebrations of the International Year of Biodiversity in Jakarta on Monday.

“We hope the huge restoration program can revitalize the previous function of the forest and preserve its biodiversity,” he said.

He said the ministry would prioritize increasing the population of endangered species over the next four years.

“We admit the threats of biodiversity loss are still very high due to among others, economic development, deforestation and forest degradation,” he said.

He said the restoration in Sumatra could protect falling numbers of Sumatran tigers, elephants, orangutans and rhinoceroses.

The three-day celebration of the International Biodiversity Year was jointly organized by the Forestry Ministry and a German-based organization, GTZ.

The minister also launched a national action plan for protected areas, which will be used as a basis for conservation management to promote sustainable development in the country.

The document was drafted by the government and a group of NGOs including WWF Indonesia, Burung Indonesia, Flora Fauna Indonesia, the Nature Conservancy and Conservation International.

The action plan is also aimed at meeting the government’s commitment under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to allocate protected areas both in terrestrial and maritime areas.

The government plans to establish some 10 million hectares of protected marine area in 2010 and 20 million hectares in 2020.

The action plan highlights that Indonesia has 500 protected areas with a total 36 million hectares, in both terrestrial and marine areas.

The document outlines actions needed to protect biodiversity, including monitoring systems, capacity building and the management of conservation areas.

Indonesia has 12 percent (515 species) of the world’s mammals, the second-highest level after Brazil, and 17 percent (1,531 species) of the total species of birds, the fifth-highest number in the world.

The country is also home to 15 percent (270 species) of amphibians and reptiles, 31,746 species of vascular plants and 37 percent of the world’s species of fish.

The director general of forest protection and nature conservation Darori, said the financial value of biodiversity could be higher than the price of wood products.

He said the government would promote breeding systems to increase populations of species that could be traded under international agreements.

“A number of countries such as China and Taiwan plan to import up to 1 million geckos per year, but we can only provide 100,000. So the demand is still high,” he said.

A scientist at the Nature Conservancy, Wahjudi Wardoyo, said the government needed to apply “development by design” to protect biodiversity.

“Economic development should continue but it must be designed with biodiversity in mind,” said Wahjudi, a former director general of forest protection and nature conservation.