



EoF calls on APRIL to give up on its plan to clear-cut community's natural forest in Rimbang Baling landscape, Riau, Sumatra



An EoF brief report published on 7 October 2020

Eyes on the Forest (EoF) merupakan koalisi LSM di Riau, Sumatera, terdiri dari: WALHI Riau, Jikalauhari "Jaringan Kerja Penyelamat Hutan Riau" dan WWF-Indonesia

EoF juga membentuk jaringan kelompok anggota di Sumatera (KKI Warsi) dan Kalimantan : Environmental Law Clinic, Lembaga Gemawan, JARI Indonesia Borneo Barat, Kontak Rakyat Borneo, POINT, Swandiri Institute, Yayasan Titian, Green of Borneo dan WWF-Indonesia Program Kalimantan

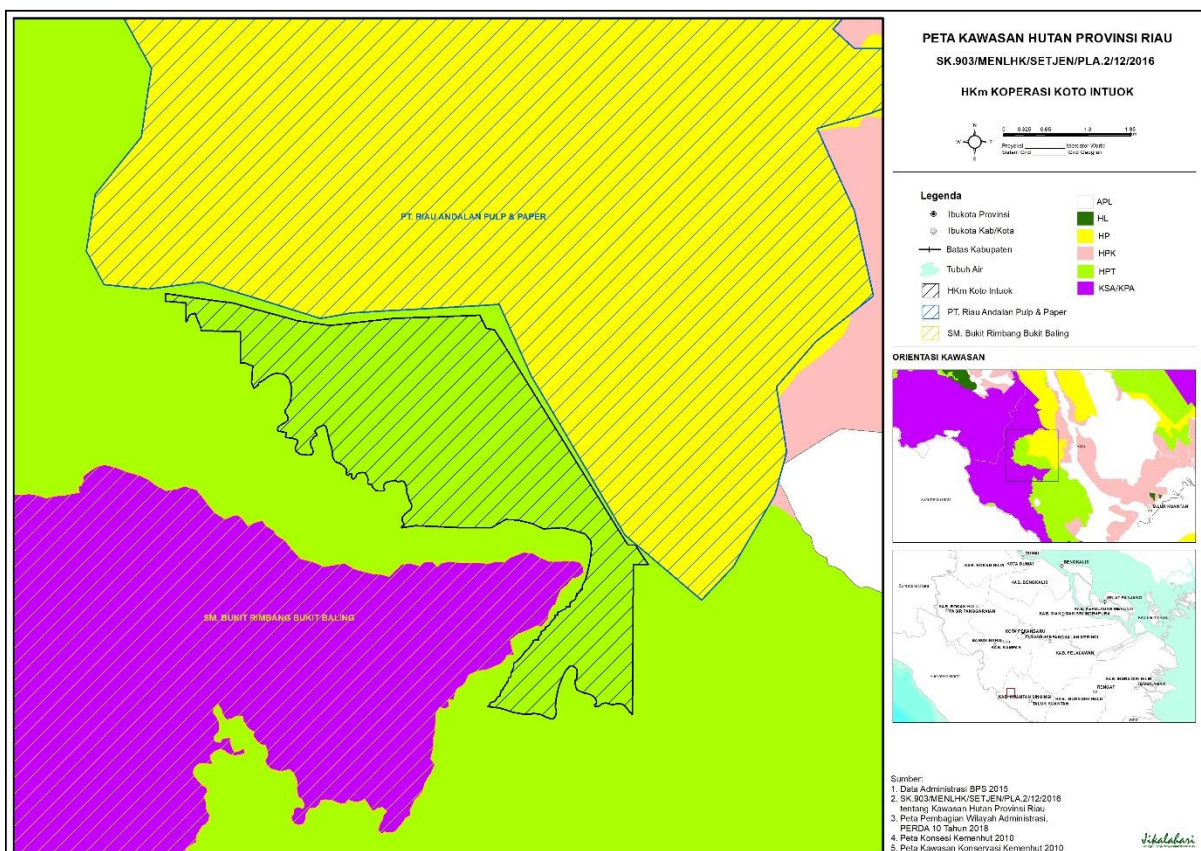
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Photo 1. 1,565 hectares natural forest near Rimbang Baling landscape that APRIL plans to clear-cut in a controversial move with local cooperative against a stern resistance by a local village. Location: S 0° 22' 52.18", E 101° 16' 31.37" on 15 September 2020.

APRIL plans to violate Presidential Instruction 5/2019 and its own policy

On 26 August 2020, Jikalauhari reported¹ that PT Nusa Prima Manunggal (PT NPM), a wood supplier of Asia Pacific Resources International Holdings Ltd (APRIL), plans to clear-cut natural forest in a 1,565 hectares Communal Forest area of Koto Intuok Cooperative in Pulau Padang Village, Singingi District, Kuantan Singingi Regency, Riau.

This area is conveniently located next to PT. RAPP Petai Sector, but overlaps with Bukit Rimbang-Bukit Baling Wildlife Reserve and is fully inside Limited Production Forest where forest conversion is not allowed (Map 1). The area also includes some dense natural forests and signs of Sumatran tigers and other wildlife as reported by Jikalauhari². Pulau Padang village has been rejecting this Communal Forest certificate because the Cooperative members are dominated by people from outside the village. **This plan not only contradicts Presidential Instruction 5 of 2019 to terminate new permits to clear primary natural forest and peat lands, but also APRIL's own Sustainable Forest Management Policy of 2015, which writes: "APRIL enforced a moratorium on natural forest clearance pending the outcome of High Conservation Values (HCV) and High Carbon Stock (HCS) assessments by 15 May 2015. This moratorium also applies to all third-party wood suppliers to APRIL"³**



Map 1. Location of the Communal Forest area (black hatchet) in relation to the Bukit Rimbang-Bukit Baling Wildlife Reserve (purple), PT. RAPP concession (yellow) and Limited Production Forest (green). Map by Jikalahari for Eyes on the Forest, 2020.

The certificate of Hutan Kemasyarakatan (HKm, Communal Forest) was granted by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry in 2018 (SK. 4433/MENLHK-PSKL/PKPS/PSL.O/6/2018) to Koto Intuok Cooperative that was founded in Muara Lembu village, Singingi Subdistrict of Kuantan Singingi District. HKm scheme zones state forest to designate local community to empower themselves to maintain and sustainability use forest and environment.

Koto Intuok Cooperative with 52 members received the certificate of HKm on 21 February 2020 in Siak during a ceremony of distributing social forestry certificates granted to 41 cooperatives/groups by Presiden Joko Widodo.⁴ Screenshot taken from Jikalahari's brief report in August 2020

In the August 2020 report, Jikalahari revealed that PT NPM persuaded the Cooperative to use *tebang habis permudaan buatan* / THPB (clear-cutting and manmade regeneration) scheme to clear forest and plant eucalyptus.

Jikalahari recommended the Ministry of Environment and Forestry to revoke the certificate and protected the forest as stipulated by the Presidential indicative moratorium scheme. As excavators were sneaking into the natural forest, the Village Head of Pulau Padang asked the Cooperative to take them out of the area and not start the forest clearance.

APRIL is behind the forest conversion and community conflict

Mid-September 2020, four media outlets along with EoF visited the area to seek confirmation from conflicting and neutral parties regarding the role of PT NPM and APRIL in influencing this Community Forestry scheme triggering horizontal conflict involving two villages.

During this media visit, a pro-active involvement by PT NPM to use the HKm scheme as a way to source mixed tropical hardwood (MTH) for pulp's raw material has become obvious.

"They asked us to fulfil any administrative requirements, then we handed it over to them [NPM]. Until the HKm license is released," said Jon Herman, the chairman of the Cooperative, explained that the Cooperative was fully supported by NPM to propose the forest to the Ministry. The transportation to the Ministry (in Jakarta) was also supported by PT NPM.

Herman has recently filed a legal action against Village Head of Pulau Padang village, Arrindo, who persistently leads the village to fight against the Cooperative and NPM's plan to clear the forest.

PT NPM representative contacted by the journalists denied the accusation. He said that the HKm scheme was granted by the Ministry but declined to elaborate on NPM's involvement as revealed by the cooperatives' chairman.

The local government forestry authority (Kesatuan Pemangku Hutan, KPH) said that at the beginning of HKm application process, the forest was designated for eco-tourism and forestry use, but they have recently heard that the activity was stalled due to conflict.

KPH was also informed by PT NPM on the plan of HKm in Muara Lembu and Pulau Padang villages, but without any RKT (yearly work plan) nor RKU (five-year work plan) shown to the authority. KPH said that they cannot facilitate the HKm scheme due to ongoing disagreements between Muara Lembu village-based Cooperative and Pulau Padang village residents, on top of traditional conflict/rivalry at level of customary law of Piliang Atas, Piliang Bawah and Piabadar tribes. The natural forest in question is customary communal lands for all of them and its use must be fully agreed by all sides.

Pulau Padang village residents expressed their resistance to Koto Intuok Cooperative's HKm scheme through a joint declaration signed at a convention a couple months ago.

RGE's expansion without sustainable wood supply

RGE may suffer bigger raw material shortage for its pulp production. The mill started viscose production at the end of 2019, using APRIL wood pulp. Continuing reliance by RGE/APRIL on wood from natural forest and peat conversion in violation of their own sustainability commitments, combined with this new Hkm case, seems to confirm that the group does not have enough sustainable wood supply and are desperate to fill the supply gap, even in violation of its own sustainability policy and the Presidential Instruction.

EoF recommendations

Based on increasing evidence on APRIL's involvement in this Hkm area management EoF recommends that:

1. APRIL, PT NPM, Koto Intuok Cooperative, two villages and three tribes conduct a joint field survey to clarify the situation and discuss solutions.
2. APRIL and PT NPM stop intervention and allow an independent decision making by Pulau Padang and Muara Lembu villages in determining the use of remaining 1,565 hectares of natural forests that are customary communal land (*ulayat*) of Piliang Atas, Piliang Bawah, and Piabadar tribes.
3. APRIL and PT NPM stop influencing Koto Intuok Cooperative to clear natural forest and providing financial support which could tie them to reciprocate.
4. CSO support Pulau Padang Village head and residents to avoid any harms (legal, safety) due to the conflict.
5. APRIL comply with its sustainable commitment not to source timber from natural forest.
6. CSO conduct a field survey to verify the status of natural forest of Piliang and Piabadar in the buffer zone of Bukit Rimbang Bukit Baling Wildlife Reserve and see ways to protect the area while providing benefits for them.

Bukit Rimbang Bukit Baling Wildlife Reserve represents has been recognized as a long-term priority Tiger Conservation Landscape.⁵ Spanning 140,000 acres in central Sumatra, the forests of Rimbang Baling landscape are home to some of the world's rarest plant and animal species. As part of the UNESCO-recognised Tropical Rainforest Heritage of Sumatra, Rimbang Baling forms an integral part of the last stand for the critically endangered Sumatran tiger, along with 170 species of birds and 50 species of mammals such as tapirs, sun bears, lemurs and clouded leopards.⁶

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¹ Jikalauhari.or.id (26 Agustus 2020) APRIL Group Merusak Gambut dan Berencana Tebang Hutan Alam Di Tengah Covid-19. <https://jikalauhari.or.id/kabar/rilis/april-grup-merusak-gambut-dan-berencana-tebang-hutan-alam-di-tengah-covid-19/>

² Jikalauhari (26 Agustus 2020) APRIL Grup hendak tebang hutan alam dan merusak gambut bekas terbakar. <http://jikalauhari.or.id/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2608-Brief-PT-RAPP-Hendak-Tebang-Hutan-Alam.pdf>

³ APRIL (3 June 2015) APRIL Group's Sustainable Forest Management Policy 2.0. <https://www.aprilasia.com/en/sustainability/sustainability-policy>

⁴ Detak Indonesia, 21 Februari 2020, Presiden Serahkan 41 SK Perhutanan Sosial di Riau <https://detakindonesia.co.id/read/cetak/4602/>

⁵ Jurnal Ilmu Kehutanan UGM, *Vol 11, No 2 (2017), Tigers and Their Prey in Bukit Rimbang Bukit Baling: Abundance Baseline for Effective Wildlife Reserve Management*, <https://jurnal.ugm.ac.id/jikfkt/article/view/28275>

⁶ Panda.org, *In Rimbang Baling Tiger Protectors Are Guarding a World Heritage*, https://tigers.panda.org/news_and_stories/stories/in_rimbang_baling_tiger_protectors_are_guarding_a_world_heritage_site/