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Borneo peat swamp forest and orangutan conservation in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia

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Abstract

Peatland restoration in Central Kalimantan and orangutan conservation are closely linked, as the destruction of peatlands in the region has had a devastating impact on the orangutan population. Central Kalimantan, located on the island of Borneo in Indonesia, is home to one of the world's largest areas of tropical peatland. Peatlands store vast amounts of carbon and support a unique array of species, including the critically endangered Bornean orangutan. However, over the past few decades, the peatlands have been extensively drained and converted into plantations, causing massive habitat loss, as well as contributing to climate change through the release of greenhouse gases. The Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation (BOSF), the worldwide biggest primate conservation NGO, is actively involved in orangutan conservation and peatland restoration efforts. One of BOS' intervention areas is the Mawas protected forest, located within the ex-Mega Rice Project in Central Kalimantan. Mawas encompasses 309,000 hectares and is the home of 2,550 wild orangutans. Overall, peatland restoration in Central Kalimantan is crucial for the long-term survival of orangutans and other endangered species, as well as for mitigating climate change and promoting sustainable development in the region. This paper presents practical experiences and recommendations from the work of BOSF in cooperation with BOS Germany and local communities in Borneo in restoration of degraded peatlands, including paludiculture activities. Rewetting of degraded peatlands is achieved through canal blocking and reforestation with native species. Up to now BOS Germany has provided support to rewetting around 3.000 hectares of peatland and more than 280 hectares of degraded land have been reforested. All activities are carried out in close cooperation with local and indigenous communities and local authorities. Mawas has 53 villages with 29,000 families, of which a large percentage live below the poverty line. The principle of paludiculture, to restore the peat ecosystem while still paying attention to economic interests, is a sustainable option for these families. Agroforestry schemes with medicinal trees, sago, jelutung and fruit trees are being implemented, as well as beje aquaculture, a traditional and sustainable technique for breeding fish in artificial ponds in peatlands.

Keywords: Biodiversity, orangutan, paludiculture, peatland