



# THE LOSS OF OUR FOREST AND PEATLAND

An investigation into forest and peatland  
conversion and illegal logging  
in Sebangau National Park

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Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA)

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# SUMMARY

Sebangau National Park, in Indonesia's Central Kalimantan Province, plays a critical role in the protection of peatlands. Out of the province's 2.7 million hectares of peatland, 17.4 per cent is located inside the park's boundaries (462,718.25 hectares), covering 81 per cent of the park's area.

However, instead of the peat being protected and conserved to maintain the region's hydrological cycle and act as a carbon sink, monitoring by the Indonesian Independent Forest Monitoring Network (Jaringan Pemantau Independen Kehutanan, or JPIK) shows systematic and extensive encroachment as well as illegal logging. These illegal activities reach far into the park's rehabilitation zone (zona rehabilitasi) and wilderness zone (zona rimba).

JPIK conducted several monitoring missions from late 2016 to early 2018 and found forests had been cleared and burnt to make way for the planting of oil palm plantations in Tangkiling and Marang, Bukit Batu sub-district in Palangkaraya municipality, one of the management units of Sebangau National Park. JPIK also found that illegal logging was happening in the national park, the timber allegedly used to supply local timber industries.

During the visit to Marang, JPIK found a farmers' group named Saluang Welum occupying more than 1,000 ha of land, some of which is located inside Sebangau National Park. According to information gathered from the community and the group's plantation plot map, Saluang Welum farmers' group is well-known to Palangkaraya's Municipal Government's circle; Palangkaraya's mayor, deputy mayor and other legislative staff are allegedly among its members. An access road cutting right through the national park has been built by Palangkaraya's Municipal Public Works and Spatial Planning Agency to facilitate this farmers' group.

Despite a report submitted by JPIK and several news articles about this case, the Government has still not acted, leading to serious concerns about the fate of the national park.

## Sebangau National Park at a Glance

Sebangau's forest and peatland was gazetted as a national park through Minister of Forestry Decree No. 423/Menhut/II/2004 dated 19 October 2004 covering 568,700 ha.

Sebangau National Park is situated in three districts/municipalities in Central Kalimantan Province: Katingan (52 per cent), Pulang Pisau (38 per cent) and Palangkaraya City (10 per cent). The area contains unique floral biodiversity: ramin (*Gonystylus bancanus*), jelutung (*Dyera costulata*), bintangur (*Calophyllum*

*sclerophyllum*), meranti (*Shorea spp.*) and nyatoh (*Palaquium spp.*).<sup>1</sup> It is also home to one of the largest populations of the critically endangered Bornean orangutan (*Pongo pygmaeus wurmbii*), with 5,826 individuals<sup>2</sup>, and also the endangered Bornean agile gibbon (*Hylobates agilis albibarbis*).<sup>3</sup>

Sebangau National Park plays an important role in wetland conservation. The Sebangau peatland ecosystem covers 462,718.25 ha<sup>4</sup> or 81 per cent of the total national park area. Out of the total peatland area in Central Kalimantan – the

largest in Kalimantan – 17.4 per cent is located inside Sebangau National Park.<sup>5</sup> Central Kalimantan is also the province with the largest amount of peatland in need of restoration.<sup>6</sup>

With its unique ecosystem, the park supports the region's hydrological functions and acts as a carbon sink. Conversion for plantations impacts climate change and the already-vulnerable Central Kalimantan Province, with its forest fires and high forest conversion rates.<sup>7</sup>

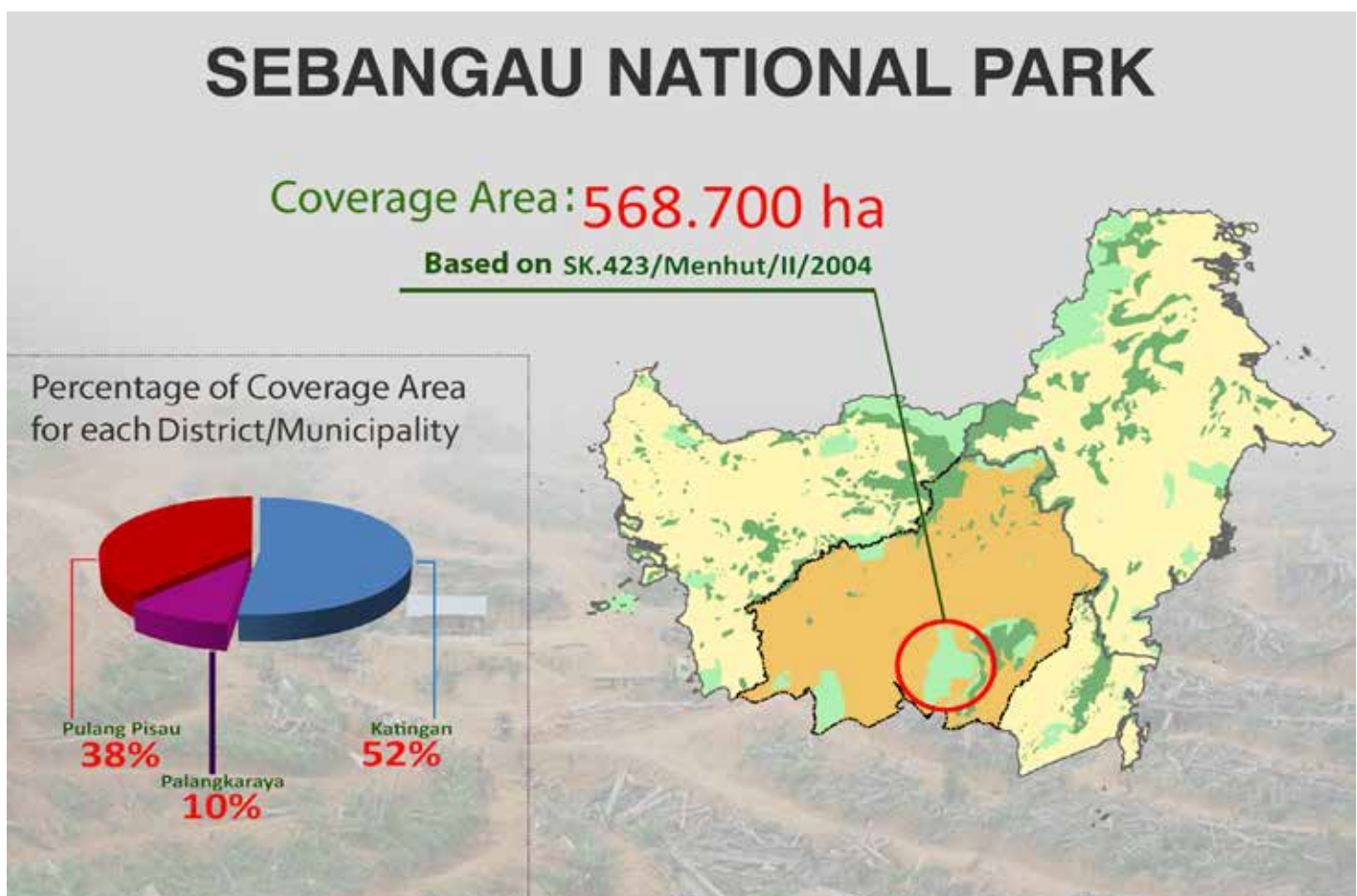


Figure 1 Administrative regions of Sebangau National Park

## The Irony of the Loss of Sebangau's Peatland Ecosystem

JPIK's monitoring focuses on Tangkiling and Marang, in Palangkaraya City, one of the three Sebangau National Park Management Units.

It is quite a paradox. The national park management unit closest to the centre of provincial government in Palangkaraya – which, in theory, should be able to protect its integrity – is in reality allowing

encroachment, leading to the destruction of tropical peat swamp forest.

It is ironic because the Government declared Sebangau National Park a pilot site for peat restoration, including it in Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) demonstration activities;<sup>8</sup> however, massive encroachment continues.

In 2015, peat fires in Sebangau National Park spread over 18,794.3 ha with 31 per cent of the fires burning over peat domes (Table 1). Satellite image analysis by JPIK (Figure 2) shows 1,558 hotspots in 2015 in Sebangau National Park, a three-fold increase from the previous year's 486 hotspots (Table 2). Over half of all hotspots in national parks in Indonesia in 2015 were in

**Table 1 Sebangau National Park Fires Area in 2015**

Fires on peat domes (Ha)	5,814.98
Fires on non-peat domes (Ha)	12,979.32
Total (Ha)	18,794.3

Source: Satellite image analysis by JPIK 2016

**Table 2 Hotspots for Period 2010 – 2015 in Sebangau National Park**

Year	Hotspots
2010	1
2011	75
2012	35
2013	43
2014	486
2015	1558

Source: Satellite image analysis by JPIK 2016

Sebangau National Park.<sup>9</sup> The cause is believed to be land clearing for oil palm plantations and farmland.

Forest fires in 2015 made Indonesia the sixth largest carbon emitter in the world,<sup>10</sup> which drove the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF) to issue Ministerial Regulation No. P.32/MenLHK/Setjen/Kum.1/3/2016 on Forest Fire Management and to establish the Peat Restoration Agency (Badan Restorasi Gambut – BRG).<sup>11</sup>

JPIK’s satellite image analysis of Sebangau National Park’s forest cover from 2013-15 shows 18,920.9 ha of deforestation occurred inside the park, inclusive of 5,120.5 ha within Palangkaraya City Management Unit (Table 3), correlating with the area affected by fires. JPIK’s follow-up monitoring from late 2016 to 2017 confirmed that forest and peatland have been cleared and burnt in Tangkiling and Marang, along and within the national park

(Figures 3 and 4), ultimately for oil palm plantations.

These findings are corroborated by a statement from Sutopo Purwo Nugroho, Head of Data Information and Public Relations for the National Agency for Disaster Management, who stated that oil palm plantations were found in burnt areas at a site in Palangkaraya City.<sup>12</sup>

Monitoring into early 2018 found that the burnt areas are continuing to be converted into oil palm plantations, confirming it as the driver of forest and peatland clearance (Figures 5 and 6).

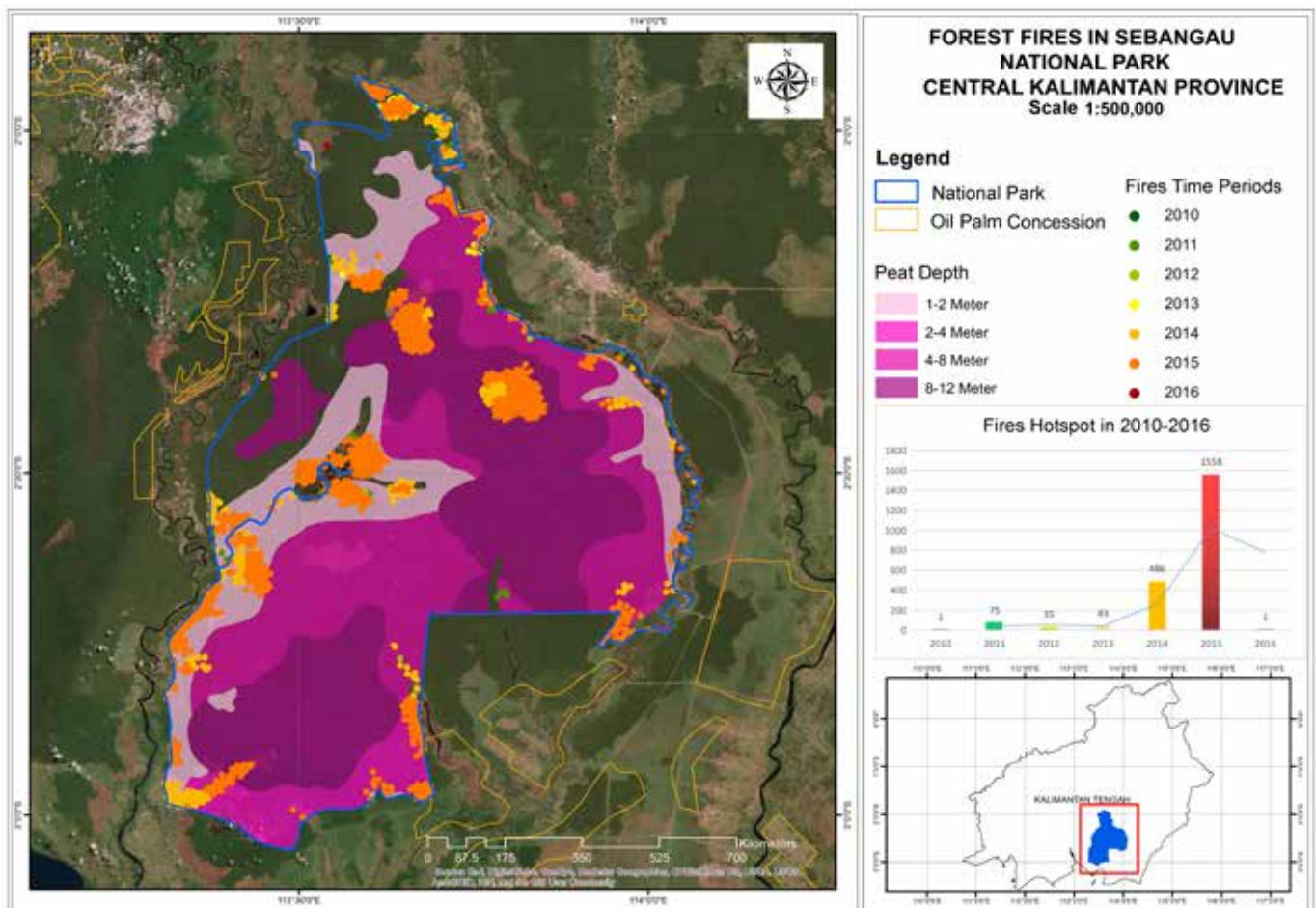


Figure 2 Forest fires in Sebangau National Park



Figure 3 Forest encroachment in Marang – border of Sebangau National Park (-2.106707, 113.731865) (December 2016)

Table 3 Deforestation in Sebangau National Park 2013-2015

Overall deforestation in Sebangau National Park (ha)	18,920.9
Deforestation in the Palangkaraya management unit (Ha) in Sebangau National Park (ha)	5,120.53

Source: Satellite image analysis by JPIK 2016



Figure 4 Forest clearing in Marang – inside Sebangau National Park (-2.111274, 113.723001) (September 2017)



Figure 5 Oil palm plantation in Tangkiling – inside Sebangau National Park (-1.956586, 113.639625) (January 2018)



Figure 6 Oil palm planted in Marang – on the border of Sebangau National Park (-2.10688, 113.729974) (January 2018)

## Conditions Leading to Oil Palm Being Found Inside Sebangau National Park

Findings from JPIK's monitoring in late 2016 to September 2017 in Tangkiling and Marang found oil palms being planted along the park's

border and even inside the park area (**Figure 7 and 8**).

In both Tangkiling and Marang, JPIK took 13 GPS

coordinates to confirm the presence of these oil palm plantations inside the national park. Nine GPS coordinates in Tangkiling and two GPS

coordinates in Marang are located inside the park (**Figure 9**). An overlay with the zoning map published by Directorate of Inventory and Information on Nature Conservation of MoEF revealed that these plantations are located in the park's rehabilitation and wilderness zones (**Figure 10**).

The conversion of what was once forest landscape into oil palm monoculture plantations negatively impacts the environment, as well as leading to habitat loss for endangered orangutans living in the park. In Tangkiling, forest loss forces orangutans to move and build nests in oil palm plantations (**Figure 11**). According to information JPIK obtained from a worker in an oil palm plantation in Tangkiling, the site is often visited by orangutans who have lost their habitat due to continuous land clearing.

Oil palm plantations surrounded by canals can be seen throughout the area (**Figures 12, 13**). This has led to drainage of the peatland in the area and makes it susceptible to fire, further degrading the environment.<sup>13</sup>



Figure 7 Plantation block already planted in Tangkiling – inside Sebangau National Park (-1.964872, 113.637914) (December 2016)



Figure 8 Oil palm planted in Tangkiling – inside Sebangau National Park (-1.952362, 113.64104) (December 2016)

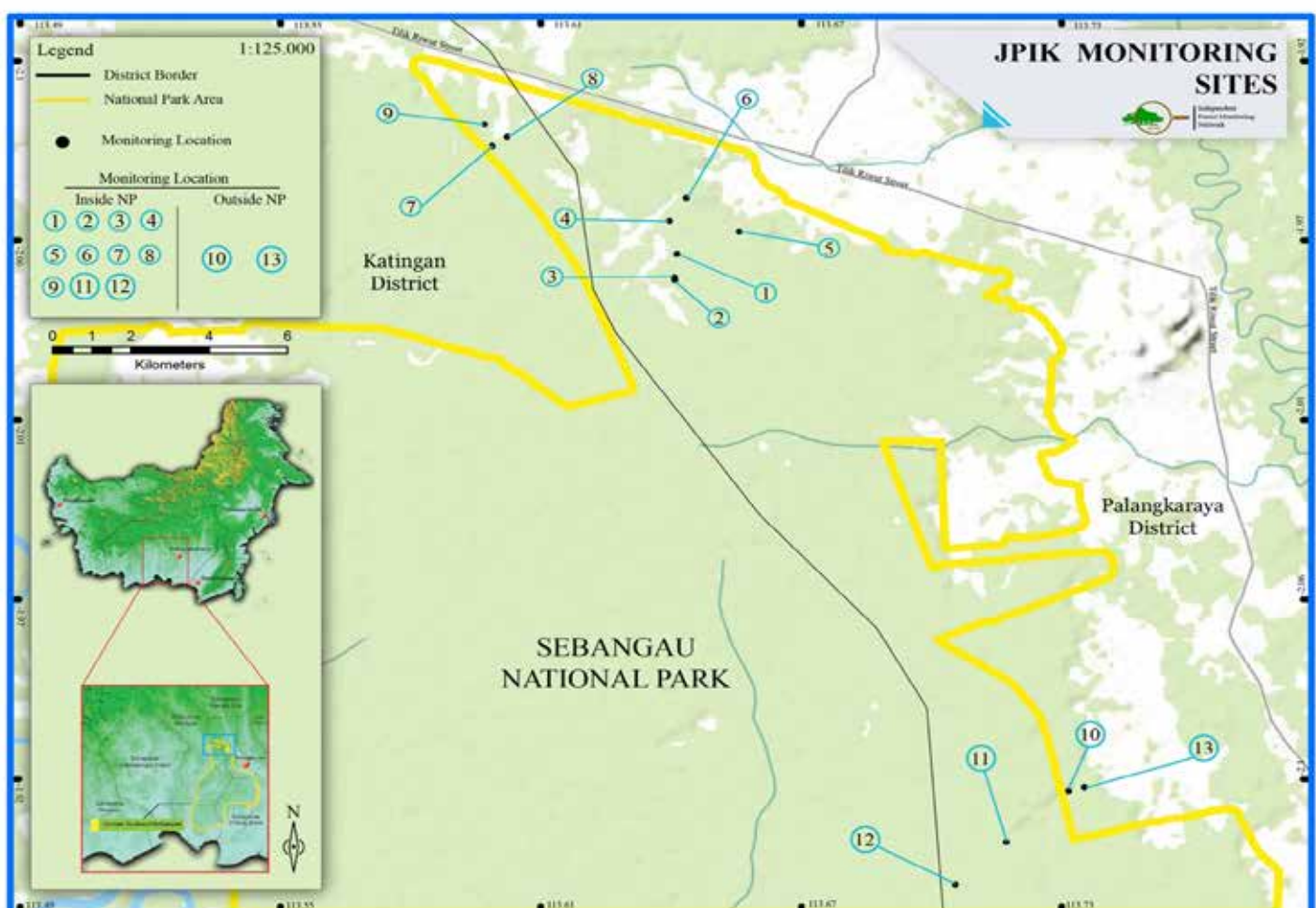


Figure 9 JPIK's monitoring sites

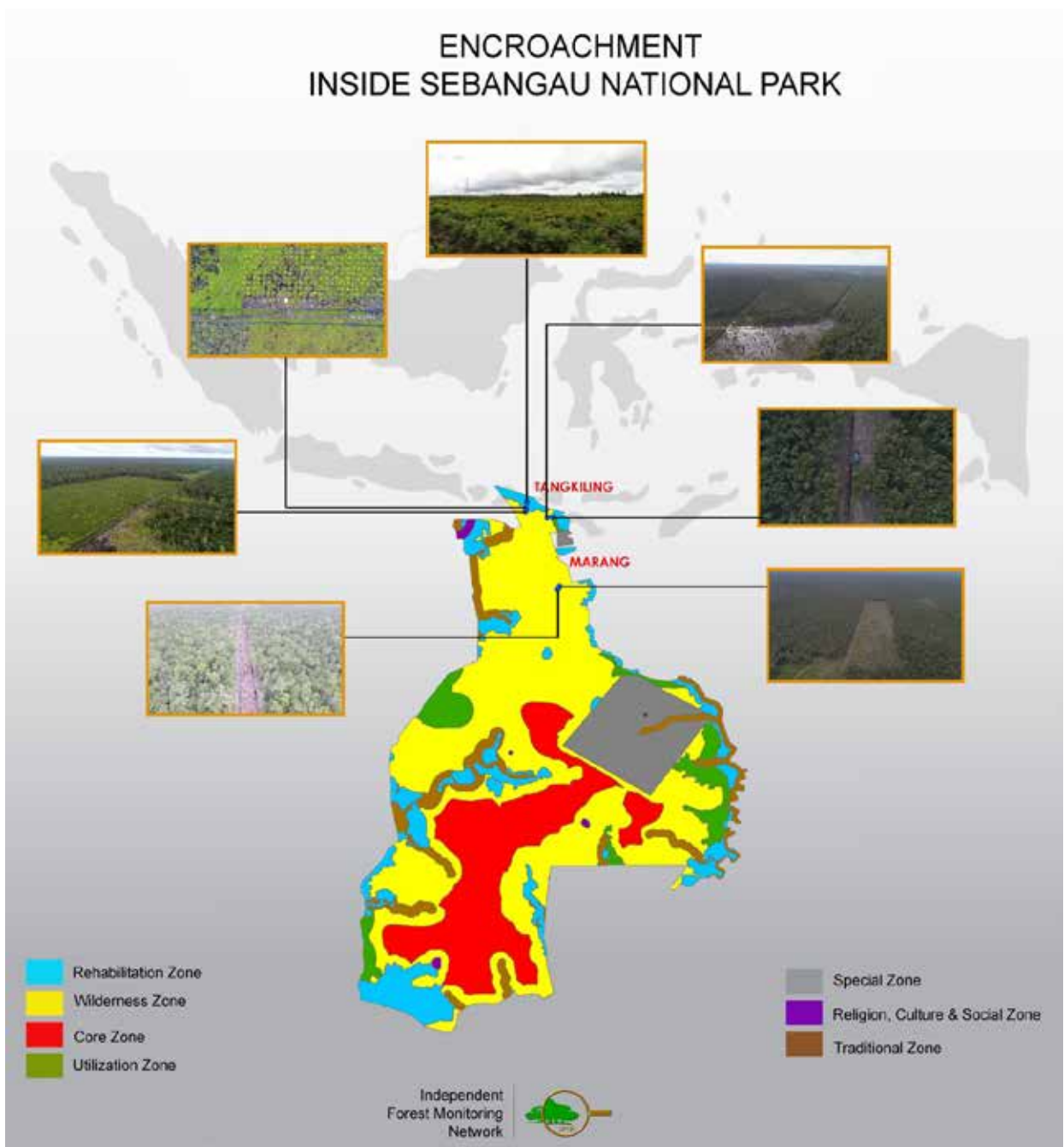


Figure 10 Encroachment inside the national park



Figure 11 Orangutan nest in an oil palm plantation in Tangkiling – inside Sebangau National Park (-1.959416, 113.6394) (December 2016)



Figure 12 Oil palm plantation on peatland in Tangkiling – inside Sebangau National Park (December 2016)



Figure 13 Oil palm plantation in Tangkiling – inside Sebangau National Park (-1.964957, 113.638055) (December 2016)

## Sebangau National Park Surrounded by Oil Palm Plantations

From 2000-13, Central Kalimantan lost 2.6 million ha of forest through conversion to oil palm plantation, mining and other non-forest land uses.<sup>14</sup> The demand for land, especially for oil palm plantations, is causing high rates of forest conversion in the province<sup>15</sup> and some land is converted through illegal means with disregard for applicable laws and regulations.<sup>16</sup>

Sebangau National Park is one of the parks facing grave threats from illegal forest conversion driven by the ongoing expansion of oil palm plantations in the two districts and one municipality in which the park is situated.

Data from Central Kalimantan Province Statistics Agency in 2015 and JPIK's satellite image analysis shows there are at least six oil palm plantations

surrounding Sebangau National Park covering an area of 125,000 ha (**Table 4**), with one concession located right along the park boundary (**Figure 14**).

Table 4 Oil Palm Plantations Around Sebangau National Park

District/ Municipality	Oil palm plantations around Sebangau National Park (based on HGU data)	Oil palm plantation area around Sebangau National Park (ha)
Katingan	1	19,264.1
Pulang Pisau	4	104,958.1
Palangkaraya	1	758.2

Source: Data compiled from Central Kalimantan Statistics Agency 2015 and satellite image analysis by JPIK 2016



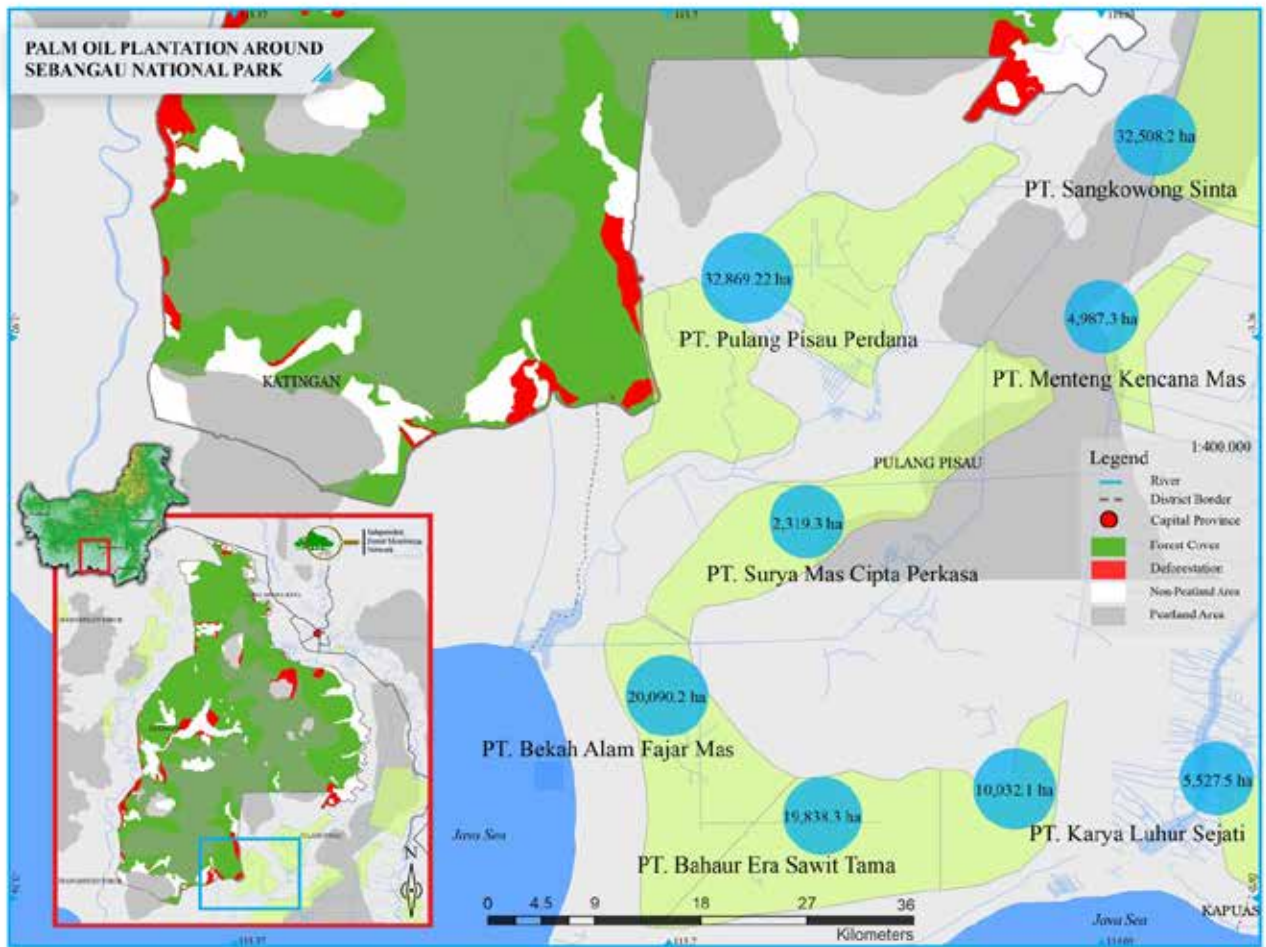


Figure 14 Oil palm plantation around Sebangau National Park

## Saluang Welum Farmers' Group

During JPIK's 2016 visit, heavy machinery was in evidence being used for road compaction work to create access to oil palm plantations in Marang (Figure 15). This 12km road was constructed by clearing thousands of hectares into Sebangau National Park<sup>17</sup> and was done by the Palangkaraya Municipal Public Works and Spatial Planning Agency to facilitate Saluang Welum farmers' group based in Bukit Batu Sub-district.<sup>18</sup> The group is estimated to have converted more than 1,000 ha of peatlands into oil palm plantations,<sup>19</sup> some of which are located inside Sebangau National Park.

JPIK received information from local sources naming several high-ranking Palangkaraya municipal government officials as having lands around Palangkaraya Management Unit of Sebangau National Park. The officials' names are found on the plan of the Saluang Welum farmers'



Figure 15 Road compaction work in Marang by Palangkaraya Municipal Public Works and Spatial Planning Agency using heavy machinery (December 2016)

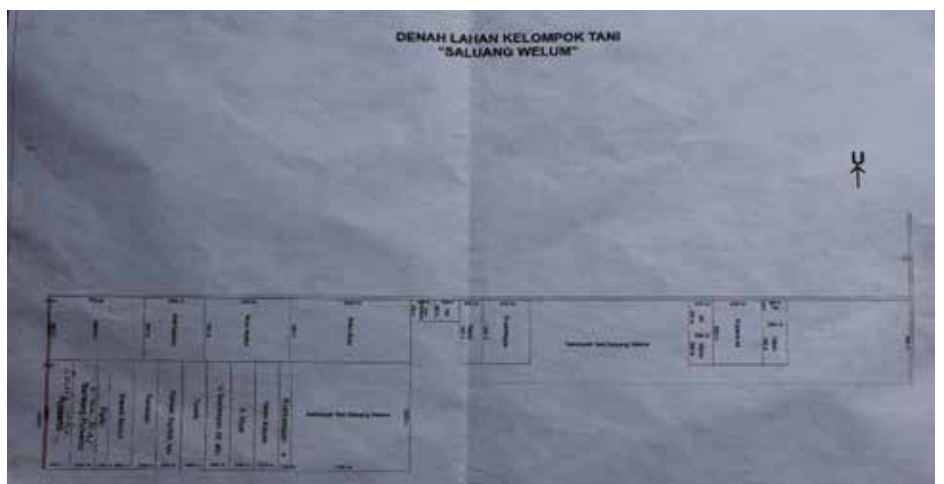


Figure 16 Map of Saluang Welum farmers' group's plantation area

group plantation area, which has been divided into 26 plots based on respective owners (Figure 16). Field monitoring also found indications that the named officials are some of the landowners who used fire to clear the land.

Following the monitoring conducted in 2016, JPIK found in September 2017 that

these cleared areas have been marked by signboards showing each plot's owner and area. In the field, it was difficult to obtain more information on Saluang Welum farmers' group since most of the workers approached refused to discuss it.

JPIK instead received information on how a land title

is obtained. A Letter of Land Ownership (*Surat Keterangan Tanah, or SKT*) is issued by a village head to someone wishing to buy a piece of land for varying prices, starting from IDR 1 million per hectare. This practice could potentially be driving and legalising illegal encroachment into protected areas such as Sebangau National Park.

## Illegal Logging in Sebangau National Park

In late 2016, JPIK also documented illegal logging taking place in Tangkiling, in Sebangau National Park. Timber was randomly logged from various locations, depending on areas of potential timber (Figure 17). One of the most sought-after species is *Shorea* spp. which is processed into sawn timbers at a logging site and transported via canals (Figure 18).

Based on information gathered from workers, timber is usually shipped twice a week on the orders of

middlemen. The illegal timber is transported and distributed to several local processing industries in Central Kalimantan.

In May 2018, Central Kalimantan Provincial Police's Special Crimes Division seized hundreds of cubic metres of

illegal timber originating from Sebangau National Park in Palangkaraya,<sup>20</sup> indicating that illegal logging has continued unabated.



Figure 17 Illegally logged timber in Tangkiling – inside Sebangau National Park (-1.961817, 113.635617) (December 2016)



Figure 18 Illegal timber rafting in Tangkiling – inside Sebangau National Park (-1.957662, 113.63954) (December 2016)

## Testing Enforcement of Forest Protection Law

Based on the findings and evidence from monitoring activities in Sebangau National Park, JPIK reported the encroachment and illegal logging to the Directorate General (DG) of Law Enforcement, MoEF by letter<sup>21</sup> on 30 January 2017. Other agencies copied into the letter include the Indonesian Police, the Head of the Commission on Corruption Eradication, the Indonesian Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Center, the Head of Central Kalimantan High Prosecutor Office and the Head of Sebangau National Park.

Despite a promising response from MoEF to

follow up, there has been no concrete action. In February 2017, the Head of Sebangau National Park, Mr Anggodo, confirmed to the media that encroachment is happening in the national park for oil palm plantations. However, his team did not find the perpetrators nor the use of heavy machinery.<sup>22</sup> Again, there was no further investigation. Meanwhile, JPIK found forest clearance and illegal logging still taking place in the park as of September 2017.

At the time of publication, there has not been any follow through or law enforcement measures taken against the illegal activities in Sebangau

National Park. This is despite the fact that the Government of Indonesia has issued Law No.18<sup>23</sup> concerning Prevention and Eradication of Forest Destruction in 2013 which mandates the Government to tackle and address forest crimes such as those happening in Sebangau National Park. This clearly shows that both central and local authorities have completely failed to enforce the law and protect the vulnerable peatland ecosystem that it also one of the last remaining habitats of the critically endangered Bornean orangutan.

## Recommendations

The management of Sebangau National Park requires special attention from the Government and JPIK urges the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Agrarian and the Spatial Planning/National Land Agency to immediately:

1. Conduct a thorough investigation of the forest and peatland conversion cases documented in this report and illegal logging taking place in Sebangau National Park
2. Take enforcement action and hand down serious sentences for any parties proven guilty
3. Reforest the land inside national park cleared by palm oil and forest encroachment
4. Evaluate all oil palm concession licenses around Sebangau National Park
5. Review and maintain Sebangau National Park boundaries through the engagement of relevant stakeholders
6. Monitor issuance of Letters of Land Ownership by village heads
7. Monitor and oversee all case handling processes.

## Endnotes

- 1 Rewetting of Tropical Peat Swamp Forest in Sebangau National Park <http://www.vcsprojectdatabase.org/#/ccb-all-project-details/CCB1639>
- 2 <https://www.wwf.or.id/?67723/Survei-Orangutan-Kalimantan-di-Kawasan-Hutan-Koridor-TN-Sebangau-TN-Bukit-Baka-Bukit-Raya>; Purwadi. 2010. Karakteristik Habitat Preferensial Orangutan *Pongo pygmaeus wurmbii* di Taman Nasional Sebangau. Bogor: IPB
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- 17 <https://kompas.id/baca/nusantara/2017/09/22/proyek-jalan-rambah-tn-sebangau/>
- 18 <http://www.mongabay.co.id/2017/09/25/benarkah-pembukaan-lahan-terjadi-di-dalam-kawasan-tn-sebangau/>
- 19 Based on calculations of Saluang Welum famers group map
- 20 <http://banjarmasin.tribunnews.com/2018/05/12/137-kubik-kayu-illegal-dari-taman-nasional-sebangau-bos-jadi-tempat-jarahan-pembalak>
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- 22 <http://www.mongabay.co.id/2017/02/25/balai-tn-sebangau-selidiki-hutan-gambut-terbabat-jadi-kanal/>
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