

Indonesia moves towards approving deforestation plan

April 19 2013



A Greenpeace photo shows an area after logging and virgin rainforest in the province of Riau in Sumatra, August 5, 2010. The Indonesian government has said it aims to approve within a month a plan that would free up vast swathes of protected virgin rainforest on Sumatra island for commercial exploitation.

The Indonesian government has said it aims to approve within a month a plan that would free up vast swathes of protected virgin rainforest on Sumatra island for commercial exploitation.

Rights groups reacted with outrage at the news that the plan, which also needs to be passed by the Aceh provincial parliament, was making progress, saying it would only benefit huge foreign companies and not the area's people.

But Canadian mining company East Asia Minerals, which conducts gold exploration in Aceh, hailed the progress as "positive news for [mineral extraction](#) in the area".

The [government](#) aimed to approve the plan "in up to a month", senior forestry ministry official Hadi Daryanto said late Thursday. Rights groups say it will free up around 1.2 million hectares (three million acres) to be cleared.

The head of the Aceh parliamentary committee overseeing the project, Tengku Anwar, said it had a lot of support in the legislature. "We hope it will go through as soon as possible," he said.



A Greenpeace photo of Sumatra island shows an area of rainforest after logging and a protected area, October 16, 2010. The Aceh government banned the granting of new logging permits six years ago to protect the forest, but a new administration that came in last year is in favour of allowing logging again.

Approval of the plan would open up the forest, on the northern tip of Sumatra province and home to critically endangered [orangutans](#), rhinos, and elephants, for mining, paper and [palm oil plantations](#).

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East Asia Minerals' chief executive Edward Rochette said the company was "very pleased" at the progress because if the plan was approved, it

would help the group's gold exploration activities.

"These new developments are good progress and positive news for mineral extraction in the area," Rochette said in a statement.

The company said it was working with government officials, and company representatives on the ground in Aceh province were pushing for the forest to be reclassified from "protected forest" to "production forest".

But Friends of the Earth Indonesia campaigner Dedi Ratih said the plan must be "immediately rejected".



A Greenpeace photo shows a tugboat pulling a barge loaded with logs on a river in South Sumatra province on October 16, 2010.

The plan "is being developed via a highly unhealthy process, in which foreign corporations are intervening and driving local policy", he said.

Ian Singleton, who works in Aceh for the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme, said the East Asia Minerals' statement was "amazing" and that it was "shooting itself in the foot".

"The Aceh government has repeatedly claimed this plan is to benefit the people of Aceh, but this shows that's clearly not the case," he said.

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