

THE LAST PLACE ON EARTH

Exposing the Threats to the Leuser Ecosystem:

A Global Biodiversity Hotspot Deserving Protection



THE LEUSER ECOSYSTEM is a vast, teeming, ancient landscape on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia that covers over 6.5 million acres including lowland and mountainous rainforests and over 460,000 acres of carbon-rich peatlands. It is among the most biodiverse places ever documented.

It is like nowhere else on Earth—it contains some of the world's highest known levels of plant and animal diversity including at least 105 mammal species, 382 bird species, and 95 reptile and amphibian species. It is also home to the largest extent of intact forest landscapes remaining in Sumatra. Scientists and conservationists consider the Leuser Ecosystem to be among the most important forests left in Southeast Asia, particularly because it is the last place in the region of sufficient size and quality to support viable populations of rare species like Sumatran tigers, orangutans, rhinos, elephants, clouded leopards and sun bears. The Leuser Ecosystem is in fact the last place on Earth where all these species can still be found together.

The region also plays a critical role in regulating the global climate by storing massive amounts of carbon in its peatlands and standing lowland forests. The forests provide a steady, clean water supply to millions of people living in Aceh, a province home to a diverse range of rural communities—many of whom have lived in the region for generations and depend on the ecosystem for their food and their livelihoods.

OPEN FOR BUSINESS: IMMINENT INDUSTRIAL THREATS

Today, the Leuser Ecosystem exists at a tenuous crossroads. Despite being protected under Indonesian national law, the Leuser Ecosystem is under siege from palm oil plantations and multiple other development plans.

Palm oil is the cheapest vegetable oil on the planet. This commodity can be found in countless processed foods, personal care products and household items such as chips, cookies, instant noodles, ice cream, frozen meals, shampoo, lipstick and pet food. Skyrocketing global demand has driven massive industrial palm oil plantations deep into the heart of rainforests around the globe and the Leuser Ecosystem is no exception.

Sprawling palm oil plantations have fragmented Sumatra's landscape, taking land from villages, destroying critical habitat for wildlife and cutting off wildlife corridors. As the last remaining areas

of intact lowland forests and peatlands are being cleared, drained and burned to make way for palm oil plantations, these iconic species head closer to the brink of extinction. Orangutan experts warn that the Sumatran orangutan may become the first great ape to go extinct in the wild if the lowland forests and peatlands of the Leuser Ecosystem are destroyed – a legacy our generation cannot afford to leave behind.

We must protect and restore the lowland rainforests to save the last Sumatran orangutans, tigers, elephants and rhinos from extinction and maintain the forests' ecological services which are vital for the surrounding communities and for Aceh's economic development. If we lose the lowland rainforests of the Leuser Ecosystem, we've lost everything.

– Mike Griffith
Conservation Expert

But palm oil plantation expansion is not the only threat to this precious ecosystem. Combined with unchecked mining, logging and poaching in the region, as well as pulp plantation expansion, this vital ecosystem is facing a perfect storm of destruction.

Additionally, the newly elected Indonesian president, Joko Widodo, and his cabinet are poised to approve or reject a disastrous new spatial plan that has been proposed for the region. This new spatial plan would remove protections from large regions of forest within the Leuser Ecosystem and open up critical landscapes to continued large-scale industrial development.

CORPORATE DRIVERS OF DEMAND

Musim Mas Holdings Pte Ltd (Musim Mas Group), Wilmar International Ltd and Golden Agri-Resources Ltd (GAR) are three big buyers and traders of palm oil. They represent over half of the global palm oil trade and drive the global demand for this commodity. Musim Mas Group, Wilmar and GAR all operate refineries and export facilities at the seaports closest to the Leuser Ecosystem, putting all three companies at high risk of sourcing Conflict Palm Oil produced inside the Leuser Ecosystem. Wilmar and GAR have adopted leading responsible palm oil policies and are working to eliminate Conflict Palm Oil from their global supply chains. It's time that Musim Mas Group does the same.

The Last Place on Earth report exposes Musim Mas Group's links to the destruction of the Leuser Ecosystem. Field evidence links its refinery to a mill that processes palm oil fruit grown inside the Leuser Ecosystem. Musim Mas Group must immediately break its links to the destruction of the Leuser Ecosystem.

Consumer goods manufacturing companies that purchase palm oil from these traders are also at risk of sourcing Conflict Palm Oil from the Leuser Ecosystem. This is especially the case for the Snack Food 20 companies that manufacture hundreds of brand name products and gross more than USD 432 billion in combined sales each year. Snack Food giants, including PepsiCo, Kraft Foods Group, The H.J. Heinz Company, The Campbell Soup Company, Hillshire Brands, Grupo Bimbo, Nissin Foods and Toyo Suisan Kaisha Ltd, are especially exposed to the risk of sourcing Conflict Palm Oil from the Leuser Ecosystem as they have not adopted and begun implementing responsible palm oil procurement policies.



THE SOLUTION

Palm oil growers, processors, traders, financiers, consumer goods manufacturers, the Indonesian and Aceh government and communities all have important roles to play in protecting the Leuser Ecosystem as the decisions they make will determine if this area is protected for future generations or opened up to new and destructive developments.

President Joko Widodo must uphold Indonesian national law and ensure that protections remain in place for this global treasure. But the Indonesian government cannot secure the fate of this critical ecosystem alone. The fact is that in order to protect the Leuser Ecosystem—and our precious remaining rainforests across the globe—we must fundamentally transform the way that palm oil is produced.

This will be a large and complex undertaking. However, it is absolutely crucial that all stakeholders who touch palm oil supply chains—including the palm oil growers, processors, traders and financiers, as well as governments and consumer goods manufacturers—each do their part to end their complicity with Conflict Palm Oil and drive a transformation towards truly responsible land use and palm oil production.

In the past 12 months a growing number of governments and private sector actors, including a number of leading Snack Food 20 companies, have committed to work together to halt the destruction of forests and peatlands and the violation of the rights of Indigenous Peoples, communities and workers for commodities. The fate of the Leuser Ecosystem, the world's endangered rainforests and our climate now rests on laggards in the Snack Food 20 and the palm oil industry adopting similar commitments and rapidly putting them into action.



In the extensive forests of the Leuser Ecosystem there still exists an opportunity to save a special place of global importance. The choice between these futures is being made now.

Will you stand with us as we protect the Leuser Ecosystem from Conflict Palm Oil?

Visit www.ran.org/lastplaceonearth to download the full report and take action.

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