



Alliance of Leading Environmental Researchers & Thinkers

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Scientists: Dam Project Would Devastate World's Rarest Ape

Twenty-five of the world's top environmental scientists have slammed plans to construct a hydro-power project in northern Sumatra, Indonesia, because it would imperil the rarest species of great ape in the world.

"The Tapanuli orangutan was described by scientists only last year, and they were shocked to realize there were only 800 of the apes remaining alive," said Onrizal Onrizal, a forestry researcher with the University of Sumatera Utara in North Sumatra, the only Province in Indonesia where the ape still survives.

"The most urgent characteristic of this species is, when roads appear, it vanishes," said William Laurance with James Cook University in Australia, who led a major study of the ape. "It's tiny habitat is being whittled away by illegal forest clearing, logging, and poaching, and all those things cluster around roads."

"The \$1.6 billion hydro project—which is being supported by the Bank of China and Sinohydro, China's hydropower authority—would be right in the middle of the ape's tiny habitat, slicing it in half with new roads, powerlines, and pipelines, and flooding critical habitat too," said Laurance.

The scientists have outlined their concerns in a letter that is being hand-delivered to Indonesian President Joko Widodo, and other Indonesian leaders, today.

"Indonesia has an international responsibility to protect this unique ape," said Jatna Supriatna, a primate specialist at the University of Indonesia in Jakarta. "And saving its habitat would help protect many other rare species as well, such as the endangered Sumatran tiger."

The 25 leading scientists, members of a group called ALERT—the Alliance of Leading Environmental Researchers & Thinkers—have representatives from the Pacific region, North and South America, Europe, and Asia, including Indonesia and China.

The ALERT scientists say the dam project, know as Batang Toru, was refused support by other major funders such as Asian Development Bank and the World Bank's International

Finance Corporation, which judged the ape's habitat far too sensitive environmentally to sustain further development.

“In that context, it's shocking that the Bank of China, Sinohydro, and their Indonesian partners are pushing so hard for this project,” said Laurance. “And they are using misinformation to advance their case.”

“The power generated by the hydropower project would be very modest,” said Onrizal. “And the Tapanuli orangutan is rated as Critically Endangered, the most dire of all endangered species.

“Building the hydroproject would bring global shame to Indonesia and China,” said Onrizal.

“This is one of our closest living relatives—how could we risk sacrificing it for such a small benefit?”

For further information contact:

Distinguished Professor William Laurance

Director, Centre for Tropical Environmental and Sustainability Science

James Cook University, Cairns, Australia

Email: bill.laurance@jcu.edu.au (monitored continuously; Professor Laurance will reply immediately and can communicate via phone, Skype, or email)

The Letter to the Indonesian President is available here: <http://www.alert-conservation.org/tapanuli-orangutan-scientist-letter-english>

Photos, captions and videos are available here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/home/TREE-images%20%26%20video>