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About Us**Lampung reserve to evict squatters****Oyos Saroso H.N.**, The Jakarta Post, Bandarlampung

Up to 15,600 squatter families living in semi-permanent homes and cultivating crops inside the Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park (TNBBS) will soon be removed from the forest. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of squatter homes are set to be demolished by TNBBS forest rangers assisted by police from West Lampung and Tanggamus regencies.

The management of the park says it has no option but to remove the squatters due to the increasing level of forest destruction in the area. The squatters have not only felled mature trees *meranti*, *tenam* and mahogany trees, but have also cleared land for the cultivation of coffee, pepper, cacao, cassava and rice.

The director of the park's conservation body, Tamen Sitorus, disclosed that the park was now in a worrying state due to the increasing number of squatter families. He said that there were 15,177 houses in the park as of August 2004, but that the figure had now reached 15,600 houses occupied by the same number of families.

The park management would attempt to remove the squatters by offering financial and social inducements. "We will find other places for them and improve their living conditions," said Tamen.

The 350,000-hectare park stretches from West Lampung and Tanggamus regencies in Lampung province to Kaur regency in Bengkulu.

The worst affected areas are in Sekincau, Suoh and Rantaagung, bordering on Bengkulu province. According to park data, the damaged area extended to 52,000 hectares.

However, data given by the Lampung chapter of the Indonesian Forum for the Environment (Walhi) states that around 50 percent of the park has been damaged, while data from the Lampung Forest Conservation Consortium (KKHL) says that 60 percent of the park has been damaged.

KKHL director Watoni Nurdin said that forest destruction in the park was the result of the government's earlier policy of issuing community use permits (HKM).

According to Watoni, the HKM program had been used as an excuse by residents to occupy forest buffer zones.

He cited as an example the issuance of forest management rights under the program in Tanggamus.

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After six farm groups in Tanggamus, West Lampung and South Lampung regencies were given rights to manage forest areas within the Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park in March, 2001, some 4,000 families demanded similar rights to over 10,510 hectares of land which they had occupied.

Contrary to the views of the non-governmental organization (NGO) activists, Tamen Sitorus said that illegal logging in West Lampung was due to the issuance of concessions (IPKTM) to private logging firms by the local forestry office.

According to Muhyar, the local forestry office had arbitrarily issued IPKTM permits to residents, whereas in fact most of the residents have no more hardwood trees left on their land. By holding on to their IPKTM permits, they can easily continue to supply timber to sawmills.

"The timber supplied to sawmills is undoubtedly illegal and without doubt comes from protected forests and the national park because nobody has land with hardwood trees on it in West Lampung anymore," said Sitorus.

However, the head of the West Lampung Forestry Office, Warsito, denied that his office had issued the permits arbitrarily. He said that before a permit was issued, his office would conduct a prior survey.

Separately, environmental activist Joko Santoso said that tens of millions of cubic meters of illegal sawn timber were channeled out of Lampung and other provinces in Sumatra to Java through Merak Port in Banten.

The illegal timber was usually transported by large trucks equipped with processed timber and log transportation documents.

Most of the *meranti* timber was derived from illegal logging, considering that Lampung has banned the export of such timber to other areas.

According to Joko, the state was suffering losses of trillions of rupiah per month due to the illegal shipments of *meranti*, bearing in mind that such timber could fetch between Rp 750,000 and Rp 1 million per cubic meter on the open market.

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