

Pelestarian Harimau Sumatera Kerinci-Seblat

Kerinci Seblat Sumatran Tiger Protection & Conservation

**Report on activities conducted with the
support of 21st Century Tiger and
Dreamworld Conservation
January-June 2014**

by

Fauna & Flora International



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Summary

The programme's six Tiger Protection & Conservation Units conducted a total of 58 forest patrols in and adjoining Kerinci Seblat National Park during this six months reporting period and recorded the presence of not fewer than 62 Sumatran tigers over a total walking distance of just under 830Km (516 miles).

Direct threat to tiger from organised poaching gangs remained extremely high with a total of 41 active tiger snares recorded and destroyed by TPCUs in the course of 16 forest patrols.

Poaching threat to tigers, as reported by patrols, was highly localised with the majority of tiger snares destroyed in the course of 12 patrols in three adjoining sub-districts of Jambi province in the east of the national park. The reasons for this concentration of threat are known and the majority of individuals responsible, identified.

Active poaching threat to tiger recorded by TPCU patrols in the south-west of the national park in Bengkulu province was higher than the historic program norm but reduced sharply compared with the first six months of 2013 with active tiger snares recorded on 'only' four patrols. This is likely to be a consequence of successful tiger law enforcement actions conducted in the second quarter of 2013 and in early 2014.

Investigations were conducted in eight park-edge districts of the four provinces which overlay Kerinci Seblat National Park to secure information on illegal hunting and trade and the trade routes and methods used by the organised illegal wildlife trade syndicates which are now the over-riding source of threat to tigers in this area of Sumatra.

Additionally the programme continued to place a strong emphasis on securing information on suspected active poaching threat to tigers for a patrol response and more than 80% of active tiger snares destroyed were found on intelligence-driven patrols.

Team investigators continued to meet significant difficulties in securing evidence for a law enforcement response to suspected tiger crime due to the highly organised and 'closed' nature of poaching and trade syndicates.

Consequently only one pre-planned tiger law enforcement action was conducted during this reporting period resulting in the arrest and prosecution of an individual who had been under active investigation since early 2013 although 'known' to the programme for much longer.

Plans to facilitate a technical MoU between the National Park Authority and five central Sumatra police authorities to strengthen actions to address trans-border illegal wildlife trade moved ahead smoothly under the direct leadership of the director of the national park authority and, to date, three provincial police chiefs have approved this planning in principal. It is hoped that agreement will be reached shortly with the remaining two provincial police agencies.

Activities supported by another program donor to pilot practical implementation of the Forestry Ministry's P48 multi-stakeholder Human-Tiger Conflict Mitigation Protocol resulted in an Edict by the Bengkulu provincial governor instructing formation of a multi-stakeholder conflict mitigation Task Force in Bengkulu province and local and provincial government partners are now preparing Budget submissions to central government for conflict mitigation activities in 2015.

Activities and Results

▪ Investigations and information collection

Investigations were conducted in eight park-edge districts of the four provinces bordering Kerinci Seblat National Park and in one provincial capital during this reporting period.

However team investigators continued to be hampered by the intense caution now demonstrated by suspected tiger traders and the poachers they are commissioning and investigations secured first-hand evidence of tiger crime on only two occasions.

Law enforcement was successfully launched in one of these cases; in the second, a decision was taken against law enforcement action as it would have compromised an ongoing investigation through compromising the investigator's identity.

Key team members continued a range of actions intended to identify 'key' members of the organized poaching and trade syndicates now active across the Kerinci Seblat tiger landscape and trade routes and methods used to ship tiger body parts and other illegally traded wildlife to illegal wildlife trade centres.

Four organized tiger poaching and trade syndicates have now been identified through investigations conducted since 2013, three of which are known to be trading tigers and Malay pangolin to 'a city' in east central Sumatra.

In two of these syndicates, there is a strong and clear linkage to the collection of and trade in the fragrant heartwood of *Aquilaria sp* trees, known in Indonesia and Malaysia as *Gaharu* or, in English, Agar wood.

The team is continuing actions to map the components of a fourth syndicate operating in the north-east of the Kerinci tiger landscape which was only finally identified in June 2014 following a post patrol investigation and which is also likely to be trading poached tigers and helmeted hornbills to 'a city in east central Sumatra' albeit via local trade entrepot.

In all of these cases, traders are using the 'poach to order' method to secure tigers and other endangered wildlife and 'ordering' animals from a small number of highly focused poaching gangs. In two, and possibly three of these networks, key traders are also reported to be supplying illegal firearms and snare cable to hunters and, in all cases, demanding poachers pledge to maintain absolute secrecy regarding who is commissioning their activities.

Investigations also confirmed that traders have widely adopted remarkably complex methods to transport tiger body parts and other protected species to the final (domestic) trade destination using methodologies, we are advised, most normally used by narcotics syndicates.

Formerly successful investigation techniques used to secure evidence of crime and so support launching of law enforcement are very unlikely to be successful against these highly organized networks.

Once a planned technical MoU between the national park authority and five regional police agencies has been secured and signed off, it is hoped that some work may be conducted in the city now identified as the primary source of threat to tigers, pangolin and helmeted hornbill in this area of Sumatra.

Meanwhile the team continued to maintain a strong emphasis to securing information on active threat to tigers in and adjoining Kerinci Seblat National Park for a patrol response and 85% of all active tiger snares recorded and destroyed, park-wide, during this six months period were found on patrols launched on the basis of information secured.

Forest Patrols

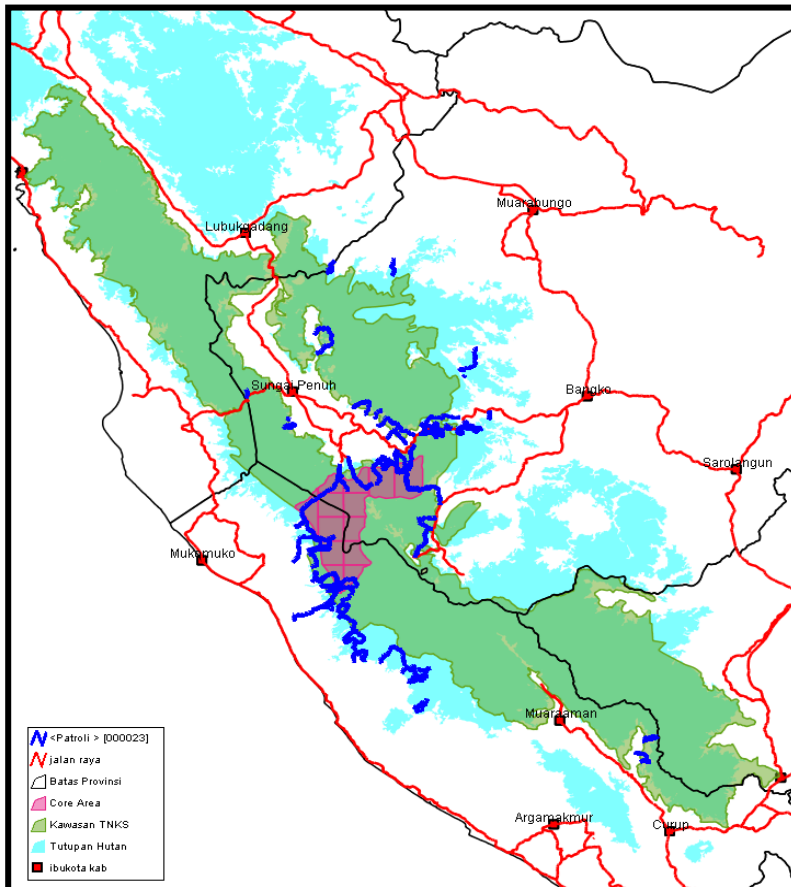
A total of 58 forest patrols were conducted by Tiger Protection and Conservation Units over this six months period in six districts of two of the four provinces overlaying the national park but with highest patrol intensity in national park forests in four districts in the central area of the national park that are key to conservation of wild tigers.

Patrols covered a total walking distance of just under 830Km (516 miles) by GPS waypoint with a total of 62 Sumatran tiger records made and 67% of field patrols

conducted recorded one or more tigers present on the patrol route.

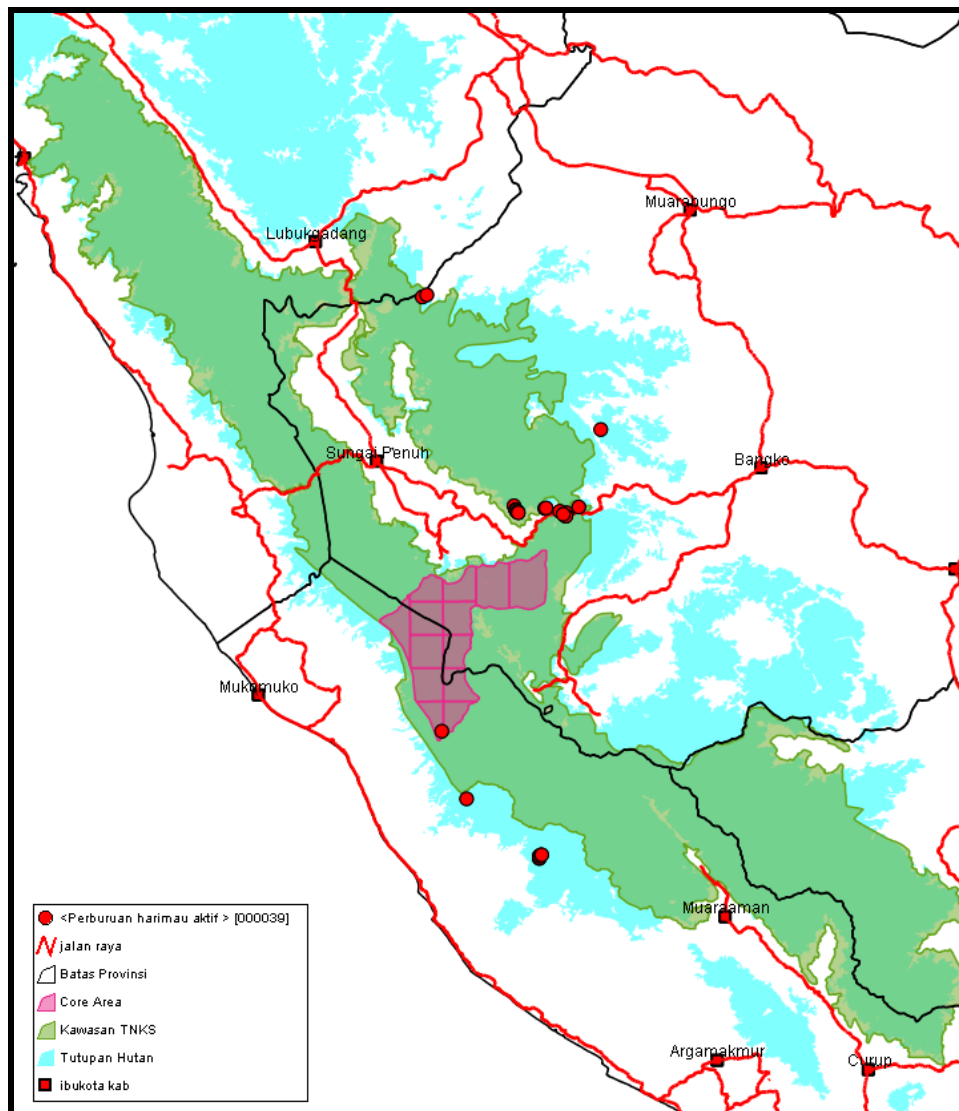
However threat to tiger from a small number of highly-focused professional poaching gangs remained at a near historic high with a total of 41 active tiger snares destroyed during this six months period.

This is however a reduction on the 51 active tiger snares disarmed in the same six months period of 2013.



Map: SMART Map of the southern area of Kerinci Seblat National Park showing TPCU patrols January-June 2014

Poaching threat detected was highest in the east of the national park in Jambi province where TPCU patrols recorded 32 of the 41 active snares destroyed during this reporting period. (See Map, below)



Detected poaching threat was mainly concentrated in national park forests in the far south of the Kerinci valley and adjoining forests in Merangin district of Jambi in forests to north and south of the district highway connecting the two districts.

In total, just over 90% of these active snares were found on patrols launched on the basis of information received. However the need to respond immediately to such information meant that a greater intensity of patrol effort than ideal was devoted to a relatively small area of the national park.

Meanwhile active threat to tigers recorded by patrol units working in the south-west of the national park in Bengkulu province more than halved with 'only' nine active tiger snares detected and destroyed in the course of four patrols compared with 20 snares in the same period of 2013.

Since no such reduction in recorded threat was recorded in eastern area of the national park, it is likely the lower number of snares recorded in Bengkulu and a continuing high frequency of encounter with tiger demonstrates the deterrent value of law enforcement actions led by the programme in 2013 and early 2014.

However even with this intense protection focus, patrol records strongly indicate five tigers were killed in snares in and adjoining the national park in forests in the east of the national park in Jambi province and three in the south west of the park in Bengkulu

province. All these incidents were recorded on patrols launched on the basis of information received and on one of these patrols a tiger (see *Wildlife emergencies*) was found newly-snared but alive and subsequently released.

A total of only 58 deer snares were reported by TPCU patrols during this six months period compared with 203 active deer snares reported in 2013 (the majority of which were found in a new patrol focus area in the south west of the national park) and only one long deer snare line (19 traps) was recorded.

Threat to tiger habitat both through illegal encroachment by small-holder farmers, some operating in highly organized consortia to clear protection forests for coffee or oil palm and from illegal logging was reported on more than 25% of all patrols conducted. Full law enforcement was conducted in two cases of illegal logging within the national park with the illegal loggers formally arrested and evacuated for the legal process to commence while chainsaws were confiscated in a third case.

Extensive new encroachment for coffee plantations was recorded on a patrol in national park forests in the Renah Pemetik area of eastern Kerinci district shortly before the legislative elections in April 2014 and 12 formal warning letters and Notices to Quit were issued. Serious threats were subsequently made by individuals involved in the encroachment against a community member of the patrol team who lives in Kerinci district and was identified by the encroachers.

The serious situation in this area was reported to the national park with strong advice that a combined law enforcement operation should be conducted to bring this situation under control. Unfortunately, there has been no response to date.

Human-tiger conflict mitigation and responses to wildlife emergencies:-

A lower than usual number of human-tiger conflict reports were recorded by the programme during this reporting period while the high degree of active threat recorded in the field meant that protection patrols were prioritized over 'low grade' or 'stray' tiger incidents.

The most serious incident occurred in Merangin district to the east of the national park in Jambi province, where a man illegally logging in a 'Village Forest' was taken to Bangko general hospital suffering from lower leg injuries which, he claimed, had been inflicted by a tiger chasing him up a tree.

Medical examination of the victim advised that the injury had been caused not by a tiger clawing or biting the man but by collisions with undergrowth when he saw a tiger, panicked and ran away through thick vegetation. This particular incident was responded to by officers of KSDA (Unit for Conservation of Natural Resources) Jambi because all available TPCUs were in the field on patrol.

This community is very supportive of species and habitat conservation and its traditional forest area, once threatened with conversion to an industrial timber plantation, was recently recognised by the Ministry of Forestry as a protected forest under village management. However a long-serving TPCU ranger who lives in a nearby village was assigned to covertly monitor the aftermath of this incident and reported that two unknown individuals, reportedly armed and not from this village, may have entered the area shortly after this incident.

Just over 10 days later, urgent requests for help were received from another village approximately 10km to the north-west of the first site. The village chief, who also has a long

record of working cooperatively with the national park and with FFI and local NGO partners reported that a young tiger had been seen moving in village rubber gardens a day earlier and had tried to break into a farmhouse. The farmer had responded by hitting the tiger – described as “small” - over the head with a *parang* (machete) before barricading himself into the house with his family until he felt it was safe to evacuate to the village and report to his village headman.

The village then learned the animal had also been seen close to two nearby farm huts at village forest-edge the previous day and a search party was organised which finally found the body of a young tiger, estimated as a maximum of six months old, in undergrowth in village rubber gardens close to where the incident occurred the previous day.

The cub’s body was evacuated by programme personnel to the team’s base camp in Bangko and passed to KSDA Jambi for a formal post mortem however initial examination advised it had died from a very deep cut to the head which had penetrated the eye and into the brain. The animal appeared to be very thin.

No action was taken against the farmer who repeatedly explained he had only wanted to frighten the animal off and not to seriously injure, let alone kill, the animal. No firm evidence to link this incident with the alleged treeing of a man by a tiger two weeks earlier was secured but there is a strong likelihood these two incidents were connected.

In late May, a TPCU patrol was launched in park-edge forests in Bungo district in the east of the national park after a report by a local NGO partner advising that it was possible tiger snares were active in the area.

Four active tiger snares were found and disarmed by the TPCU team who then found a fifth snare which had trapped a young female tiger, probably the night before the patrol team reached the location.

A rescue team was organised with the first personnel arriving on site to back up the TPCU patrol team within eight hours of the first report being made and with remaining personnel – including a local vet and full veterinary equipment including anaesthetics and antibiotics - on site by 0600 the following morning.

The tigress was darted, released from the snare and stretchered, under anaesthesia, to a holding cage on a nearby old logging road bordering an adjacent oil palm plantation and



veterinary treatment commenced. Because the local vet was enthusiastic but had no practical experience in dealing with either tigers or snare injuries, the programme organised liaison, by mobile phone, with highly experienced wildlife vets.

Because the tiger had been only recently snared, serious damage to blood circulation to the foot had not yet occurred and so the main treatment given was intravenous antibiotics to stave off infections from compression injuries and anti-inflammatories.

The following day, after discussion with vet colleagues in Jakarta and Bogor who used observations by the on-site vet, a decision was taken to release the tigress immediately on site and not evacuate for further ex-situ treatment, not least due to our experience of the considerable difficulties often encountered in tiger relocations post ex-situ treatment. The release was conducted successfully and the intensive drug therapy provided meant that the animal moved off normally, not favouring the snared foot and appeared very relaxed since she was within her normal home range area.

The snare which had caught this tiger and the other active snares destroyed by the TPCU patrol before meeting this animal had an unusual 'signature' construction method. It is extremely likely that the poacher was the same individual who set a total of 14 snares for tiger in an area some 15km to the north of this site which were found and destroyed on an intelligence driven patrol in July 2013.

This man has been tentatively identified, as has his local facilitator and the go-between's 'Boss' and the team is now developing strategies which, we hope will allow this investigation to move forward to the desired conclusion.

Law enforcement to address wildlife and other forest crime

One tiger law enforcement operation was successfully conducted during this reporting period and was led by the programme in partnership with Mukomuko district police authority in late January 2014.

The law enforcement action was conducted close in a small town near the West Sumatra-Bengkulu borders to the west of the national park and followed an investigation by TPCU investigators launched in early 2013 although the suspect had been known, as a suspected local level illegal wildlife trader, for much longer.



Evidence secured in the arrest composed the pelt of a juvenile Sumatran tiger, believed to have shot by third party in park-edge forests to the north of Lubuk Pinang in West Sumatra province, a pangolin, deer antlers and two taxidermised deer heads.

It was only after this law enforcement action was conducted that the team became aware that this individual was also the subject of investigations by local police into other criminal matters relating to the illegal sale of guns and ammunition.

This case finally went before magistrates in Arga Makmuir, North Bengkulu in May 2014 who subsequently imposed a very light custodial sentence of only five months and an accompanying fine which caused considerable surprise given Indonesia's strong support at the Illegal Wildlife Trade Summit in London some weeks earlier and the previous strong commitment to deterrent sentencing exhibited by Arga Makmuir magistrates in previous cases brought by the programme.

Two men arrested in a law enforcement action in late November 2013 in the south of the Kerinci valley finally appeared in court in Jambi City in March 2014 charged with possession and intent to sell the pelt of a tiger which is believed to have been poached in forests to the west of the national park on the Bengkulu-West Sumatra provincial borders.

Preparation of this legal case was managed by the Jambi division of SPORC in Jambi City as the programme considered it likely that one of the suspects' older brother, a wealthy and well connected former politician, was likely to seek to influence the outcome. It was thought that the subsequent post-law enforcement proceedings and subsequent court case might therefore be better managed and heard in Jambi city and not in Kerinci.

In the event, the two suspects, one known to have links to a poaching syndicate operating in the south of the Kerinci valley and in the west of neighbouring Merangin district, were sentenced to just three months in prison and a nominal fine and, since they had been in Custody since late November, were immediately released. It was unfortunate that the national park and the programme were not advised of the court verdict and that the suspects had been released as it placed the team's investigators at potentially great risk.

The team is reviewing its partnership and site planning for law enforcement cases conducted outside the national park in Jambi in the light of this remarkably light sentence and communications failures however we find it interesting that two other unusually light sentences were also made in regard to tiger law enforcement cases in recent months.

The programme also provided some immediate post-law enforcement support to a national park ranger team led by a former TPCU Leader who arrested three men on helmeted hornbill poaching charges while on a routine patrol at national park edge in Bungo district of Jambi and background data to police investigators.

Post-arrest Interviews with the Suspects confirmed they were members of a hornbill hunting syndicate funded by an individual in a district of West Sumatra close to the Riau provincial borders and that the eight or more individual gangs within the syndicate were active in three or more provinces of central Sumatra. The suspects were also able to identify individuals photographed on tiger monitoring camera traps over the past 12 months.

Police investigators were given permission to travel to the home town of the man identified as the syndicate leader in the neighbouring province of West Sumatra to 'invite' him to attend a formal interview at Bungo district police headquarters. However this permission took several days to secure by which time the financier had made himself absent. This incident further demonstrates the importance of securing a trans-jurisdiction agreement between provincial police authorities and the national park to permit swift follow-on responses to detected cases of organized trans-border wildlife crime.

Two law enforcement actions for illegal logging were conducted by patrol units in Bengkulu and these cases are proceeding through the legal system at date of this report. Meanwhile numerous formal legal warnings were issued for a range of offences including encroachment, wild bird trapping and non commercial-illegal logging with offenders ordered to quit the area.

Capacity raising

SMART patrol reporting and database collection was finally formally introduced in January 2014 when working software was secured and training supplied to develop a SMART patrol database by a former National Park officer presently on secondment to the ZSL Jambi Tiger Project.

The program has employing a patrol reporting method very similar to the SMART patrol reporting format for many years and so the move to the 'SMART' system has caused no issues at field level however the database entry component has caused some problems due to workload issues. These will be addressed once a planned SMART database position is fully activated.

We had anticipated, on the advice of the national park authority, that up to nine long-serving programme personnel would be formally absorbed into the national park service as full rather than honorary rangers early in 2014 and that this would restore law enforcement capacity to TPCUs, two of which are presently without a national park ranger leader.

Unfortunately, only one of the nine long-serving PHS personnel who sat the national civil service tests in November 2013 passed the exam, primarily due to lack of experience with the computer-aided model used for the tests. The national park authority has now formally recommended to the department of forestry that the unsuccessful PHS TPCU personnel should be invited to sit upcoming 'open' civil service tests which are likely to be scheduled for the third quarter of 2014 and the program has agreed to organise coaching by officers from forestry department headquarters.

Coordination and liaison with other agencies and organisations

The program maintained a cordial working relationship with other tiger conservation teams in Sumatra, not least through the Harimaukita Sumatran Tiger Conservation Forum and with key local NGO partners working around the national park.

The relationship with local NGOs, in particular the AKAR Network of park-edge NGOs which we helped form in 2006, was particularly important in the febrile political atmosphere in the weeks before April's national and local legislative elections when two separate proposals for construction of inter-district and inter-provincial roads through Kerinci Seblat National Park were made.

The first proposal was made by the Governor of Bengkulu province for a trans-provincial road from Lebong district in Bengkulu through core zone forests of the park to Merangin district in Jambi.

A second multi-road proposal was made by a candidate standing (unsuccessfully) for the Jambi provincial assembly which revised previously proposed and rejected 'disaster evacuation' highways through the Sipurak ecosystem of the national park from Kerinci to Merangin district, from Kerinci to Bungo district in the east of the national park and from Kerinci to Mukomuko district. This proposal received apparently strong public support from the Governor of Jambi province who is standing for re-election in 2015 and from the Speaker of the national House of Representatives who subsequently lost his seat in the April elections.

Because it would not have been helpful if an international conservation NGO was seen openly campaigning against these infrastructure proposals, the programme provided technical support and advice to local NGO partners and to the Jambi provincial chapter of national NGO WALHI.

We also discussed the possible impacts with a local NGO partner and member of the AKAR Network of local NGOs in Merangin district who then coordinated with village partners and subsequently secured letters from more than 30 village leaders in western Merangin district rejecting any new roads through the national park whether from Bengkulu province to the west of Kerinci to the north.

As a consequence, the district leader or Bupati of Merangin district was then able to formally reject the roads building proposals, both the proposed Sipurak 'disaster evacuation' route and the proposed new road from Bengkulu to Jambi citing existing serious problems with illegal forest conversion – primarily by settlers from Bengkulu province - and widespread local hostility to the proposal.

DJM

Sungaipenuh Kerinci

July 2014