



## **IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group's Section on Great Apes calls for a moratorium on development in the Tapanuli orangutan's range**

The IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group's Section on Great Apes (SGA) is deeply concerned about existing and emerging threats to the Critically Endangered Tapanuli orangutan (*Pongo tapanuliensis*) in Sumatra, Indonesia. We are particularly concerned by the threat of a hydro-electric project development in core orangutan habitat that is currently unprotected.

This threatened core area is crucial for maintaining connectivity between the three forest blocks needed to ensure the species' survival, but is designated as APL (Areal Penggunaan Lain: lit. land for other uses). Our concern regarding the fate of this core area and the orangutans is in line with a [statement](#) from the Director General of Nature Resources and Ecosystem Conservation, Mr. Wiratno, who said recently that "...as the authorized ministry, we guarantee that Sumatran, Tapanuli and Bornean orangutans will not go extinct. One of the elements underlying this guarantee is that core parts of their habitats are covered in the permanent primary forest and peatland moratorium map."

In line with this statement, the IUCN SGA calls for a complete halt to all encroachment and development in this APL area. International guidelines published by the International Finance Corporation and for all the Equator Banks now require the following under Performance Standard 6 Guidance Note 6: "*Special consideration should be given to great apes (gorillas, orangutans, chimpanzees and bonobos) due to their anthropological significance. Where great apes may potentially occur, the IUCN/Species Survival Commission (SSC) Primate Specialist Group (PSG) Section on Great Apes (SGA) must be consulted as early as possible to assist in the determination of the occurrence of great apes in the project's area of influence. Any area where there are great apes is likely to be treated as critical habitat. Projects in such areas will be acceptable only in exceptional circumstances, and individuals from the IUCN/SSC PSG SGA must be involved in the development of any mitigation strategy.*"

The IUCN SGA further proposes that its Executive Committee leads an independent study to determine the implications for the Tapanuli orangutan of the various threats to orangutans occurring in the APL area, and whether or not those threats can be mitigated. The wide breadth of expertise in the IUCN SGA, which includes scientists from both range (e.g., Indonesia) and non-range state great ape countries, makes this group particularly well suited to lead such a study. The IUCN SGA therefore urges the Indonesian Government to engage in a dialogue to initiate such a study as a collaboration between the IUCN SGA, relevant Indonesian government agencies, and other relevant parties. Further activities in the APL area should only be considered once the results of study have been fully reviewed.

The IUCN SGA also appeals to the North Sumatra Hydro Energy company (PT NSHE), the company responsible for developing the hydro-electric project in Batang Toru, to immediately halt this development to enable the careful assessment by the IUCN SGA of the impacts of the project, together with appropriate recommendations. It is necessary to suspend this development because the study may recommend changes to the project design that would reduce negative impacts on the orangutans or may even suggest a relocation of the energy plant to another site or to a different energy source if the impacts cannot be mitigated. Timelines for this work can be developed by agreement between the IUCN SGA, the Government of Indonesia, PT NSHE, and other relevant parties.

The Tapanuli orangutan is the first new great ape species to be described since the 1920s. Wholly confined to the Batang Toru Ecosystem – a mountainous tract of rainforest in the province of North Sumatra – it occupies an area of about 1,420 square kilometres. With an estimated population of fewer than 800 individuals, the Tapanuli orangutan is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. It has the lowest number of individuals of any great ape species. The relatively small population size makes the species especially vulnerable to extinction, as any further loss of habitat, disturbance, or killing of orangutans could make the population too small and/or fragmented to remain viable. Any loss of the population as low as a few percent per year would drive the species to extinction.

Next year's Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) meeting in China will include a major new effort entitled, "the New Deal for Nature and People," which requires among other things, a commitment by signatories to "prevent extinctions, and reverse the decline of species populations." Considering that Indonesia is a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and needs to comply with Indonesian laws and regulations, all harm to protected wildlife needs to be avoided.

The IUCN SGA stands ready to support Indonesia's government agencies, NGOs, and financial institutions committed to prevent the extinction of the Tapanuli orangutan.

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