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Press Release

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Forest Fires in Plantations Threaten Riau once again

Jakarta - WWF-Indonesia once again recorded high frequency hotspots distribution in Riau this year, where the majority is located in major plantation's area. Fogs threaten both the community's health and the biodiversity. Meanwhile the local government's advice to use face masks do not really address the issue. Without firm action, this nature destruction will continue to attack Riau yearly.

Fogs in Riau are getting thicker, according to the Modis¹ satellite 2812 hotspots were identified, which are distributed among several districts in Riau including Riau Islands. Bengkalis District recorded the highest number of hotspots: 1324. These hotspots are distributed among several industrial forests concessions located in Riau, among others APP and partners (21 hotspots), and APRIL and partners (10 hotspots). Furthermore, hotspots are also located in several concessions of companies that were named to have started the fires in 2003 by the Riau Province's Government. (*List of companies attached*)

Modis' satellite observation showed that since early this year hotspots have been emerging, started by the identification of 143 hotspots in the third week of January, which plummeted to almost 3000 hotspots towards the end of February. Pekanbaru has been covered with fog during this last week. "The air pollution indicator in Pekanbaru has reached 400 this week," explained Nazir Foead, Species Program Director, WWF-Indonesia. This indicates that the air is extremely not healthy; data from Riau's Health Service reported that more than 1990 people have been experiencing upper respiratory infection. Nazir further explained "Hotspots distribution have also been identified in the remaining high value conservation forests area such as the Giam Siak Kecil area and also again in APRIL's and APP's concession areas."

As been done previously, the government has advised the community to use face masks if the air condition worsen, and even advised schools to stop their learning activities. This may reduce the number of respiratory infections, but it doesn't get to the root of the problem. "The government has to implement a firm action to really teach a lesson for the people responsible for forest and area fires" stated Ian Kosasih, Forest Program Director, WWF-Indonesia, "Without firm law enforcement, Riau will continue to experience forest fires every year."

¹ Modis satellite belongs to NASA, for monitoring hotspots, located at University of Maryland, USA



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Notes for the editor:

- Based on WWF-Indonesia's research in Riau's forests, especially in the Tesso Nilo area which has the highest vascular biodiversity in the world
- List of companies proved to have conducted forest and area burning in 2003 that have been announced by the Riau Province Government:
 1. Indah Kiat Pulp and Paper
 2. PT Hamidah Hamidi
 3. PT Guntung Hasrat Makmur
 4. PT Alam Sari Lestari
 5. PT Sri Buana Dumai
 6. PT Multi Gambut Industri
 7. PT Mapala Rabda (APP Subsidiary)
 8. PT Eka Dura Indonesia
 9. PT Jatim Jaya Perkasa
 10. PT Selaras Abadi Utama