

## Giving Back to Nature

### Orang utan gets helping hand

**W**ork is in full swing on the Ulu Segama-Malua Sustainable Forest Management project in Sabah, Malaysia, home to the one of the largest populations of the *orang utan*.

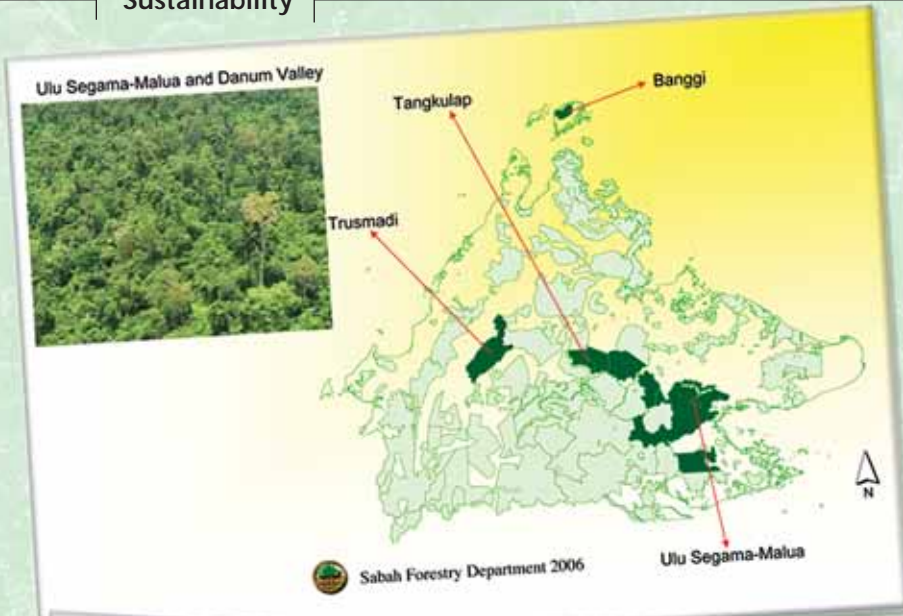
Restoration of the forests and management of the site have been boosted by the full phasing-out of logging, completed at the end of last year.

On March 15, 2006, the Sabah Cabinet had endowed nearly 250,000ha of lowland forests in Lahad Datu for conservation, focusing on the need to protect the habitat of the *orang utan*.

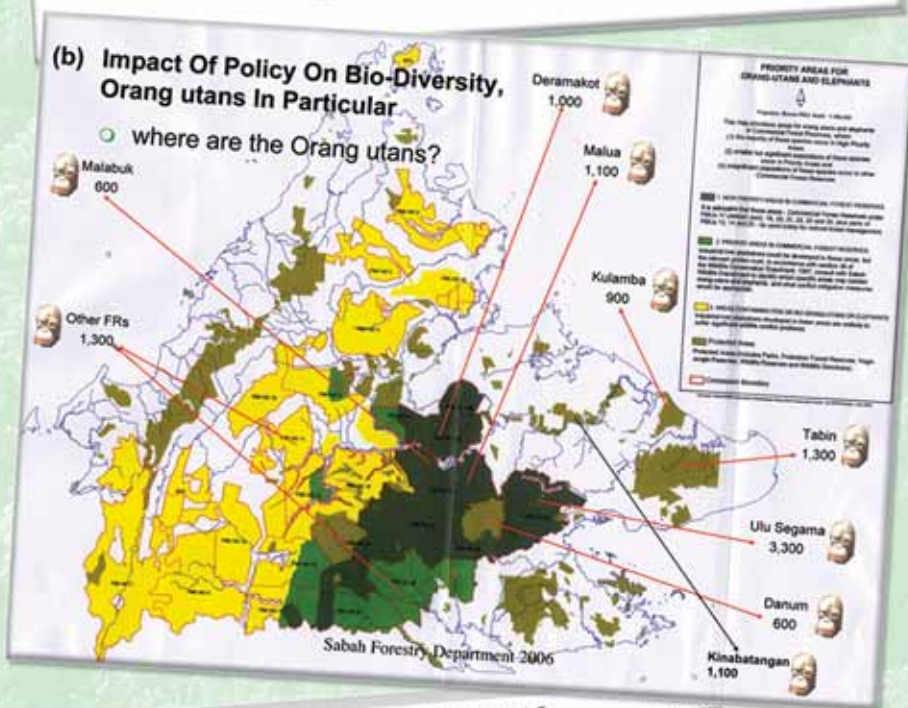


The State Government has since pumped more than RM200 million ringgit into the project. Additional contributions have been received from the Sabah Foundation, Worldwide Fund for Nature, Arcus Foundation, NewForests, Alexander Abraham Foundation and the US-based NGO, Land Empowerment Animals People, among others.

On Dec 4, 2008, Sime Darby Plantation Sdn Bhd became the latest donor with RM25 million – the single biggest endowment from outside of government – for conservation efforts.



This is specifically to restore *orang utan* habitats in northern Ulu Segama, an area of about 5,400ha which has been degraded by logging, multiple forest fires and encroachments. The money will be used to plant indigenous tree species over the next six to seven years.



Also present at the ceremony were the Hon. Chief Minister YAB Datuk Seri Panglima Musa Aman, members of the State Cabinet, Ambassador of The Netherlands H.E Lody Embrechts and Consul-General of Japan H.E Masashi Kono.

Sabah Forestry Department Director Datuk Sam Mannan, in his speech, said he rates the Ulu Segama project as the world's best in the quest to conserve Great Apes.

"Even *National Geographic* magazine [in its November 2008 issue] has acknowledged our efforts in Ulu Segama [...] we are very proud of this," he said.



"At the same time, setting aside to posterity lands with virgin soils of high productivity comes with a big sacrifice, especially for a developing economy – the loss of direct state revenue and export incomes is an example. This decision to conserve, given other opportunities, can only be political courage of the highest order."

Despite its poor forest condition, northern Ulu Segama is rich in *orang utan*. One reason is because it is the last forest refuge north of the Segama River, with the surroundings now largely developed.

"Another reason – apart from the river barrier and the fact that the *orang utan* cannot swim – is perhaps because of the behaviour of *orang utan* themselves. Experts say they are 'attached' to their homes and do not like to migrate," Datuk Mannan explained.

He acknowledged Sime Darby's contribution as historic in good forest governance in the state, commending the company for its social responsibility and "ability to make a difference for the greater good and for the greatest number, in the long run".

Love alone, he noted, will not do much for the environment or for bio-diversity. For good to happen, resources – the most important of which is funding – are needed because preservation and conservation come with a price tag.

### **Pursuing pragmatism**

He further touched on the danger of "fixed and fixated ideas", contrasting this to Sabah's pursuit of socio-economic development and conservation efforts fronted by a range of "pragmatic" ideas, policies and strategies.

"Conservation alone will not be sustainable without socio-economic development. Poverty is the greatest threat to the rainforests of Borneo, not fires or logging or oil palm cultivation," he pointed out.

"Sabah's approach, which focuses on eliminating abject poverty, has shown measurable success and is therefore its most important strategy in safeguarding rainforests."

Its diversification programme targets agriculture development, agro-based value addition, and resource-based industrialisation and tourism. These have a high impact on poverty eradication, while helping the cause of *orang utan*.

"Do not fret over responsible oil palm development in Sabah. It has had the highest impact on poverty eradication. Besides, most of this [donation of] RM25 million is oil palm money finding its way back to the rainforests, just as rainforest income had earlier supported agriculture."

In his speech, Sime Darby Bhd President and Group Chief Executive Dato' Seri Ahmad Zubir Murshid said the company recognises the need for sustainable development in order to secure and enhance the future for young Malaysians.

Unrestrained development without thought to best practice, both for the environment and the people, is no longer acceptable, he said. Governments, corporations, communities and even school children are learning about the importance of protecting and conserving the environment.

"The Sabah Government has taken a crucial leadership position [...] to restore Ulu Segama to nature [and] to re-create its wonders so that animal species such as the *orang utan* can thrive once again," he said.

"I am proud that Sime Darby has been given this opportunity to participate in such a noble endeavour. We have also agreed to jointly develop educational programmes for promotion of environmental conservation awareness."