

*(a loose translation from the original version in Indonesian)*

About 1,000 km out of 3,200 km of the passage of the Sumatran elephant in Aceh has been affected by the conversion of forest areas to other functions such as settlements, rice fields, plantations and mines. This has triggered human-elephant conflicts at the borders of forest areas.

Amon Zamora, Head of the Aceh Natural Resources Conversation Agency (BKSDA), said on 17 October that the problematic elephant corridor is spread out in 16 districts and cities in Aceh. He added that at present human-elephant conflicts are found in all forest areas in Aceh.

As an example, he said that the week before a herd of nine elephants entered a traditional gold mining area in Geumpang. This mining activity was located in a corridor in an elephant habitat area. In East Aceh, a number of elephants were found to have been poisoned to death in an oil palm plantation area. The plantation area is a natural passage for elephants. "There are many more cases of elephants causing damage to plantations owned by residents. Some of the residents caught the elephant in a snare causing its death, which happened in Sampoinet, Aceh Jaya district," Amon said.

Three of the four human-wildlife conflicts handled by the Aceh BKSDA in 2103 were human-elephant conflicts. "A breakthrough is needed to put an end to the conflicts. "The elephant population will continue to be threatened by this condition, while more and more people's land are destroyed by elephants," he added.

The Aceh BKSDA is currently working on a proposal for the construction of an elephant passage (corridor) in Aceh. This corridor will have a minimum width of 100 meters and will be planted with the favorite plants of elephants.

"This requires a significant budget. As the national government budget only will not be enough, the local government must also be involved. Although this requires a huge budget, the impact will be very positive. At least, the elephant population will be protected and the land owned by the residents will be kept safe from elephant attacks," he said.

The Aceh WALHI (Indonesian Forum for the Environment) noted, around 400 elephants are left in forest areas in Aceh. These elephants are scattered in the forests of Ulu Masen and the Leuser Ecosystem. In fact, there were approximately 800 elephants in Aceh in 2003-2004.

According to TM Zulfikar, Aceh WALHI Director, the decline in the elephant population is related to the increase in deforestation and conversion of forest areas. At the same time, as spatial planning for forest areas has not been prepared, many forest areas, that must actually be conserved, have instead been converted to production forests or plantations.

Human-wildlife conflicts also occur in West Java, namely between the Javan leopard and the communities around forest areas. According to Joko Prihatno, Head of the West Java BKSDA, every year there is an average of 5-6 conflicts between humans and the Javan leopard in West Java. Several Javan leopards have been killed by local residents.

(HAN/CHE/KOMPAS CETAK)

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