

Fresh logging at Ulu Muda water catchment area

Don: Gazette the area at once for the good of everyone, especially villagers

SUNGAI PETANI: Almost a year after rampant logging near the Ulu Muda reserve that affected the water catchment area and dam there was exposed, a new trail for timber lorries has been found.

The new trail at the catchment area in the forest reserve near Sik, is believed to have been used by loggers since early this year.

The 5m wide trail is more than 15km long and it runs uphill along the Ulu Muda lake.

A check by *The Star* on Wednesday revealed hundreds of logs stacked at the base site. There was also heavy machinery parked there.

A signboard at the base site showed that a permit has been issued by the Kedah Tengah District forestry officer in Sungai Petani to a licence holder to carry out logging at secondary roads 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 118 and 177.

The name of the contractor is also stated in the board. The permit is valid until May 1. It came into effect on Nov 2 last year.

There is another signboard which states that the licence holder is Perbadanan Menteri Besar Kedah. The area is listed as 200ha with the permit valid from July 3 to Oct 4, last year.

The Ulu Muda forest reserve stretches from the Malaysian border with Thailand at Yala to Baling in the north of Perak and is about twice the size of Singapore. It is said to be a paradise for nature and wildlife lovers.

Although logging there seems to be legal, the question really is: Why is logging allowed at the crucial water catchment area?

Universiti Sains Malaysia water resources, hydrology and flood hazard management and climatology expert Prof Dr Chan Ngai Weng said the Kedah government should gazette the place as a water catchment area.

"Once that is done, there can be no logging there. We are very concerned about the impact of logging at the catchment area.

"Rain water does not go into the ground. The water runs off into the river and then, into the sea."

"Logging will expose the land. Rain splash erosion and surface erosion will wash sediments into the rivers, causing water pollution

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Prof Dr Chan Ngai Weng

and the shallowing of river beds.

"Consequently, rivers' drainage capacities will be significantly reduced," Chan said, adding that the quality of the water supplied to the people in surrounding areas would also be affected.

He called on the state and Federal governments to take measures at the Ulu Muda reserve forests so that soil erosion, soil sediments and silt are stopped from getting into the water and river systems.

Meanwhile, Malaysia Nature Society Penang branch adviser D. Kanda Kumar said Kedah had been logging the forest for a long time.

He said water from the Sungai Muda river was used for agriculture and as supply for Kedah and Penang. "Water from the Muda Dam is pumped to the Pedu Dam and it is primarily used for the Muda irrigation scheme of about 97,000ha of padi.

"Intense logging there will determine how much top soil on the hills is washed into the river," he said.

Last May, a check by *The Star* showed that at least five logging depots, with thousands of high-quality logs such as Meranti, Cengal and Merbau, were waiting to be transported out to their processing destinations.

The logging depots were about the size of 30 football fields and it is believed that there were more such depots deeper inside the forest.



Environmental disaster: Clockwise from above: An aerial view from a drone reveals the surrounding hills which line Muda Lake. Also visible is part of the 15km trail on the hill at the southern side of the lake; A logging truck with fuel tank parked at a logging base at the hill near Kampung Landai, and a view of the muddy river near a logging trail at Kampung Kota Aur.



Watch the video
thestartv.com





Ulu Muda forest reserve under threat

What is Ulu Muda forest reserve:

- A 105,060ha area within Ulu Muda Forest in Baling, Kedah
- A water catchment area

Why is Ulu Muda forest reserve important:

- Responsible for 80% of Penang's water supply
- Responsible for 96% of Kedah's water supply
- Supplies 32% of water for irrigation activities in Kedah
- Responsible for economies of Kedah and Penang (e.g. Kulim High-Tech Park, Bayan Lepas Free Industrial Zone)
- High biodiversity value, especially for conservation of large mammals

How deforestation is threatening Ulu Muda forest:

- Quality and volume of water output are affected
- Ulu Muda's rivers become murky, making raw water more expensive to treat
- Disrupt forest's ability to absorb and retain rainwater, leading to more floods



Source: WWF-Malaysia



Stop issuing new logging licences, says exco man

ALOR SETAR: The state government should stop issuing new logging licences immediately, says Kedah Environment Committee chairman Datuk Dr Leong Yong Kong.

Dr Leong said enough clearing had been done and any more of such activities would harm the environment.

"My duty is to protect the environment. Enough of what has been cleared. We have huge backlog of approved licences and we can't go on approving more.

"The state will have to pay a hefty price in the future for this," he said yesterday.

Dr Leong added that it was a reality that the state was facing water scarcity and logging activities near the water catchment areas should be stopped.

He added that if there was a real need, the whole Ulu Muda forest reserve would be gazetted as a water catchment area to ensure that there would be no more encroachment.

"Water resources will be destroyed. Dirty

water becomes the norm, be it for domestic use or irrigation. We must put a stop to it," he said, adding that a meeting would be held soon with the respective agencies, including the Kedah Forestry Department.

Meanwhile, Muda Agricultural Development Authority (Mada) general manager Datuk Fouzi Ali said that areas near the important Muda and Pedu dams should not be touched with no logging activity carried out there.

"It is important for water catchment areas to be protected. As for irrigation, the water capacity in Pedu dam is insufficient.

"This situation worsens during a drought. We normally rely on the dam's water for the first season of padi cultivation and for the second season, we rely on rainfall.

"However, early this year the dam's water was insufficient and we almost resorted to dry seeding. But we were lucky enough to get enough rain," he added.