

'Vital to gazette Ulu Muda'

Experts: Law will ensure protection of forest reserve

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ALOR SETAR: The Ulu Muda forest reserve must be gazetted as a water catchment area to ensure the place is untouched, say environmentalists and conservationists.

"As Kedah, Perlis and Penang have a history of major droughts and the area is already considered to be in 'water deficit', it is crucial that water catchments be protected," said Prof Dr Chan Ngai Weng of the School of Humanities at Universiti Sains Malaysia.

Dr Chan, who is dubbed Malaysia's "Waterman", said without the natural function of forests as water catchments, the function of catching and storing water would be lost.

"Destruction of water catchments will definitely occur due to logging and, at the very least, severely degrade them," he said.

Deforestation due to logging would result in exposed land surfaces such as skid roads and logging camps, which would lead to runoff



Natural resource: Logs being transported out of the Ulu Muda forest reserve. — GARY CHEN / The Star

loaded with sediments, ultimately entering the river system and polluting the water.

"There have been many cases where water treatment plants had to be closed as they could not cope with high concentrations of sediments in the water. This will further threaten water security," said Dr Chan.

He added more than 60,000 padi farmers depended on water from the dams and the impact on their families would be severe.

"The entire Ulu Muda forest needs to be gazetted either as a water catchment, a state park or a national park. Only with the pass-

ing of such laws will the area be totally protected and untouched.

"Even with the current forest reserve status, the forest is not well protected as it can be de-gazetted for logging and development.

"It is the only way as Kedah needs the income from logging. Kedah will always eye this rich forest as long as it is 'loggable'.

"There's no point in gazettement half of it and exposing the other half. Look at Royal Belum (State Park) and Temenggong Forest Complex. The negative effects of Temenggong can be clearly seen," Dr Chan said.

Earth Lodge director and chief

executive officer Hymeir Kamarudin said the Ulu Muda forest might lose its sponge effect if logging continued to be carried out.

"Now the concern is that the logging activities might be carried out in the virgin forest on the east side bordering Thailand.

"The Ulu Muda reserve is a very important catchment area and it has to be protected.

"The Federal Government should also be involved in its protection and give compensation to states that protect nationally important sites so that they do not have to rely on it for income," he said.