

## **State governments must gazette water catchments**

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Friends of the Earth Malaysia (SAM) urges all state governments to take immediate measures to gazette all Permanent Reserved Forests that have been identified as water catchment areas in the country in line with the decision by the National Land Council.

This call is to avoid damaging activities such as deforestation and other encroachment, upstream of the water catchment areas as it would be detrimental to the forests and water supply to reservoirs.

The National Land Council had set a policy that all Permanent Reserved Forests identified as water catchments are not compromised by activities that may damage the forest ecosystem and main source of water in the country.

The National Forestry Council's 22nd meeting that took place in 2009, had discussed and agreed that state governments adopt the Water Catchment Forest Rules to coordinate the management and control of water catchment forests within the Permanent Reserved Forests.

SAM is of the view that it is time for all states to implement what was agreed upon. States must adopt the rules and gazette all water catchment areas to confront issues related to development in the Permanent Reserved Forests as executed by Perak.

Issues relating to inconsistency in zoning the water catchments must be resolved soon.

The State Government should play an important role to gazette areas that have been identified as water catchments to avoid conflicting zoning by the various state departments such as the Department of Forestry, Department of Water Supply, Water Regulatory bodies and the Town and Country Planning Department.

According to the 2008 Auditor General's Report, there are many states that have yet to gazette water catchment areas that have been identified.

These states are Kedah, Johor, Pahang, Sabah and Sarawak. The areas identified as water catchments are now vulnerable to encroachment and illegal logging due to the inaction of these states.

The recent encroachment at Sembrong Dam and Bekok Dam in Februari 2012 in Johor should serve as a lesson. The relevant authorities should pay serious attention to the water catchment areas.

Periodic and frequent monitoring is needed to ensure this kind of encroachment does not happen again. Stern action must be taken against the trespassers based on provisions set.

Although the policies outlined may be good but it is an utter loss if not accompanied with proactive measures. In addition, good management practices should also be emphasized to reduce risk and increase the capacity of a water catchment in terms of quality and the area covered.

This involves land use planning, preventing pollution, protecting and conserving biological diversity and ensuring ecosystem balance.

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