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Protecting the Forest, Protecting the Breath of the Nation

King Juli Antoni - detikNews

Sunday, May 04, 2025 13:27 WIB



Photo: Minister of Forestry Raja Juli Antoni. (Doc. ist)

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Jakarta -I still remember clearly how, a few years ago, the skies of Sumatra and Kalimantan turned gray with thick smoke from forest and land fires. The air became stuffy. Children were forced to study from home because the air was at a dangerous level.

The thick haze also paralyzed airport operations, disrupted economic activities, and the impact was not only felt in Indonesia, but also neighboring countries. This was a heavy blow to us, the forest that should have kept our breath has instead become a source of shortness of breath.

But now, we see a very proud change. In the last two years, Indonesia has recorded a significant decrease in the area of burned land. Forest and land fires in 2024 showed a significant decrease. The accumulated area of forest and land fires in the period of 2024 was recorded to have decreased by ±784,387.86 ha (68%) compared to 2023. Even more impressive, compared to 2019, the area of forest and land fires in 2024 decreased by ±1,272,452.52 ha (77%). In fact, at that time the world was facing the El Nino phenomenon, which historically has always caused a spike in forest and land fires in the country. This means that even though El Nino occurred again, we managed to control its impact significantly.

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Is this just luck? Of course not. This is the fruit of hard work, collaborative work, and reform in our forest governance. The trend of forest and land fires continues to decline as a result of long work and collaboration of many parties. However, we need to say this firmly: do not be complacent. 2025 could be a big test of our consistency and a big test of our forest governance.

Three Pillars of Forest and Land Fire Management

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The success in reducing the trend of forest fires is the result of comprehensive improvements in forest governance. This concept emphasizes the importance of the role of all elements of the nation, including formal and informal institutions, indigenous peoples, companies, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders, to negotiate, engage, play a role, and enforce binding rules in the management, use, and conservation of forest resources. Effective forest governance requires multi-stakeholder involvement. In other words, forests cannot be managed centrally, partially, and sectorally. We need the involvement of all elements of the nation to work together to protect forests as the lungs of the world.

The success in reducing the number of forest and land fires in the last two years is a reflection of hard work together, not the result of overnight work. This is the fruit of a long process of comprehensive improvement in the way we manage and protect forests. We are not only trying to extinguish visible fires, but also breaking the chain of causes. It is not enough to just act when the smoke is already high, but we are present early, prepared, prevented, empowered, and ensure that every inch of the forest is well maintained. Therefore, we realize this effort through three strategies.

First, guided collaboration. In accordance with the mandate of Presidential Instruction Number 3 of 2020 concerning Forest and Land Fire Management, the President instructed the active involvement of more than 28 ministries and state institutions, including the Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs, Minister of Home Affairs, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Finance, Minister of Education and Culture, Minister of Health, Minister of Social Affairs, Minister of Public Works and Public Housing, Minister of Transportation, Minister of Communication and Information, Minister of Agriculture, Minister of Environment, Minister of Forestry, Minister of Villages and Development of Disadvantaged Regions, Minister of Transmigration, Minister of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning/Head of the National Land Agency, Minister of National Development Planning/Head of the National Development Planning Agency, Minister of State-Owned Enterprises, Cabinet Secretary, Attorney General, Commander of the Indonesian National Armed Forces, Chief of the Indonesian National Police, Head of the National Disaster Management Agency, Head of the Meteorology, Climatology, and Geophysics Agency, Head of the Geospatial Information Agency, Head of the National Aeronautics and Space Agency, Head of the National Search and Rescue Agency, Head of the Technology Assessment and Application Agency, Governors and Regents/Mayors.

This Presidential Instruction aims to strengthen prevention and law enforcement in efforts to overcome forest and land fires throughout Indonesia. This instruction covers prevention activities, extinguishing, post-fire handling, and law enforcement against perpetrators of forest and land fires. All move in one integrated command line with one goal, namely to reduce the number of forest and land fires to zero karhutla.

Second, prevention and law enforcement. We strengthen the early detection system, expand monitoring points, and improve the readiness of field officers. Forest and land fire control continues to be carried out through prevention, extinguishing, handling and recovery efforts.

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Forest and land fire prevention activities are carried out through forest and land fire prevention patrols, Weather Modification Operations (OMC), socialization, and campaigns in provinces prone to forest and land fires. However, when the fire has already ignited due to negligence or worse, due to deliberate action, the law must be enforced. Without discrimination. Both individuals and corporations, if proven guilty, must be held responsible. Because the forest does not belong to a handful of people. The forest belongs to all the children of the nation.

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Third, the role of the community as the vanguard. We believe that the best forest guards are not only officers in uniform, but also local communities. Therefore, the Government continues to strengthen the role of fire-aware community groups (MPA), scouts, indigenous communities, and various other elements in efforts to control forest and land fires at the grassroots level. Through fire-aware villages, social forestry, and agroforestry, we encourage communities to prosper without burning. And when they prosper, they will protect the forest more than anyone else.

2025, Alert Year The Meteorology, Climatology, and Geophysics Agency (BMKG) has issued a warning: the dry season will come gradually from April to September, with a peak in June-August. Although most areas are predicted to experience a normal season, 14% will be drier than usual. This drought is a trigger and if we are careless, the fire will spread again.

The symptoms are now starting to appear. Hotspots have appeared in several locations such as Aceh, Riau, Jambi, West Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan. In June, 41.5% of Riau's area is predicted to be in the high-risk category. July-September, the risk extends to South Kalimantan, NTT, South Papua, and even Bangka Belitung.

In facing the threat of forest and land fires, President Prabowo Subianto, through Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs Budi Gunawan, delivered a firm message in the 2025 Forest and Land Fire Preparedness Roll Call, "Continue to maintain the positive achievements that have been achieved. Do not let there be any more large-scale forest and land fires, which can become an international issue". The President's warning is not just a moral appeal. This is a national alarm. Because forests do not belong to a handful of elites. Forests belong to the nation. They are our breath, the guardians of the balance of the world's ecosystem.

Therefore, protecting the forest is not the task of one or two institutions. This is a collective responsibility. All of us, without exception, have an equally important role. We must be prepared, alert, and increase our collective preparedness. And as the saying goes, whoever is alert, is the one who survives. This year's dry season is a critical point. If we are careless, everything that has been built could collapse. But if we are consistent, this could be a stepping stone towards a truly resilient and prosperous forest management system.

Safeguarding the Future of the Forest

According to Timothy J. Fahey (2013) a forest ecologist and professor emeritus at Cornell University, explains that forests are ecological systems. Forests are not only understood as a collection of trees, but as a complex biotic community, where various species depend on each other to maintain the balance of the ecosystem, including humans.

Forests as a life support, ecosystem regulator, source of breath, carbon storage, and home to millions of species. Burning forests not only create smog, but also erase the future of children and our ecological system. Therefore, the occurrence of forest fires is a real threat to humans that contributes greatly to the triple planetary crisis, namely climate change, environmental degradation and pollution, and loss of biodiversity.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2022) report states that between 50 and 75 percent of the global population could be affected by life-threatening extreme climate conditions by 2100 if we fail

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to take serious action. Changing weather patterns, prolonged droughts, heat waves, and forest fires are symptoms of this crisis that we are already experiencing.

Forest fires also cause pollution and environmental damage that can increase the risk of disasters and the order of people's lives as well as the loss of biodiversity. Based on data from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES, 2019), around one million species of plants and animals are now facing the threat of extinction, one of which is caused by forest fires. In fact, biodiversity is the foundation of human health and ecosystem resilience, including those that support agriculture, food, and clean water.

Thus, to face the very complex challenge of forest and land fires, we invite all parties, all elements of the nation, to unite and move with one command to intervene to protect the forest as well as we protect our own families. Reduce the number of forest and land fires to a minimum, even towards zero forest and land fires. Make 2025 a year of alertness, a year of mutual cooperation, a year of saving Indonesia's forests. Because when we protect the forest, we are actually protecting the breath of the nation.

Raja Juli Antoni , *Minister of Forestry of the Republic of Indonesia*

'Also watch Video: Forestry Minister Raja Juli Mentions the Importance of Protecting Forests at COP 29'

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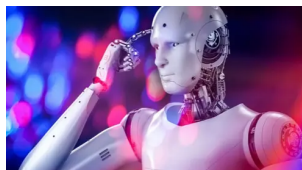
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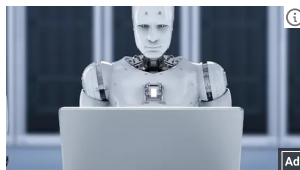
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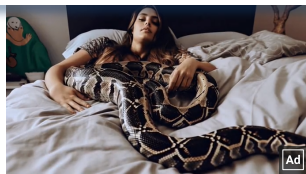
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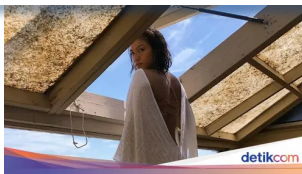


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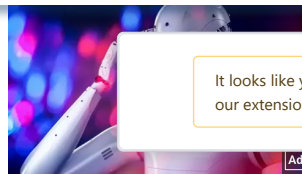
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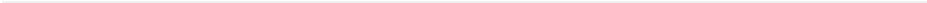
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