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Interviews: Available with upon request.

High resolution images available here: <https://zslondon.sharefile.com/d-s9115b9367554d4f9>

Governor of South Sumatra launches major partnership to save precious peatlands

In the wake of Southeast Asia's worst summer haze crisis on record, a pioneering five-year conservation project designed to achieve sustainable, landscape-level protection for South Sumatra's globally important peatland and coastal lowland habitats was today unveiled at the Global Landscapes Forum (GLF) in Paris.

Speaking at a GLF Launchpad panel event, running alongside the United Nations COP21 climate summit, His Excellency Governor Alex Noerdin announced plans to establish the South Sumatra Eco-Region Alliance, which will be supported by an integrated landscape project overseen by international conservation charity the Zoological Society of London (ZSL).

The partnership will focus on issues of deforestation, peatland degradation, wildfires and associated climate change impacts in the Sembilang-Dangku landscape of South Sumatra – the peat swamp forests of which provide vital habitat for approximately 15 per cent of Indonesia's surviving Sumatran tigers (*Panthera tigris sumatrae*). Harnessing tools including ZSL's Sustainable Palm Oil Transparency Toolkit (SPOTT), this partnership aims to ensure the collaborative management of a complex forestry, peatland and agricultural system, ultimately connecting the entire landscape to safeguard these iconic and Critically Endangered animals.

Speaking at the event, Governor Alex Noerdin commented: "I am proud to announce the formal launch of the South Sumatra Partnership for Landscape Management Support Project. Given the global significance of our province's peatland and coastal forest landscapes, both in terms of biodiversity and climate change, it is essential that we act now to ensure their protection for future generations.

"By convening this group of world-class partners, spearheaded by conservation experts from ZSL in partnership with national government, civil society and industry, we hope to devise and implement solutions at a landscape level that represent a new benchmark in Indonesia's commitment to environmental stewardship."

This year's Southeast Asian haze crisis was largely attributed to the burning of peat swamp forest in countries including Indonesia for oil palm cultivation and timber extraction. As well as generating globally-significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, these damaging practices also severely impact on remaining habitat for vulnerable species including the Sumatran tiger.

Part-financed by the British and Norwegian governments, with additional seed funding from The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the South Sumatra Eco-Region Alliance will adopt a 'public-private-people' model that stresses collaboration between government, private sector and local populations, to implement sustainable solutions to pressing environmental issues including deforestation, peatland degradation, wildfires and biodiversity loss. Other key stakeholders include IDH - The Sustainable Trade Initiative, Deltares, SNV

Netherlands Development Organisation, Forest Peoples Programme (FPP) and Daemeter Consulting, alongside multi-industrial Asia Pulp and Paper (APP).

Jonathan Baillie, Director of Conservation Programmes for ZSL said: “The forests of Indonesia have hit global headlines for all the wrong reasons in recent months, with wide-ranging wildfires and the resulting haze across much of Southeast Asia arguably representing the defining environmental crisis of 2015. Finding solutions to the many ecological challenges facing Indonesia should be viewed as a global conservation priority.”

“We’re delighted to be working in close collaboration with the Governor of South Sumatra Province and partner organisations including IDH, SNV, FPP and APP to ensure protection for these critical landscapes as well as vulnerable species like the Sumatran tiger, creating innovative new blueprints for their long-term protection,” he adds.

The collaboration will initially focus on six key project strands, including collection of scientific data to underpin the development of province-wide policies and landscape management mechanisms. The outcomes from this pilot project will, it is hoped, help form a blueprint for future initiatives at both national and regional levels.

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Editors’ Notes

Media Information

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Zoological Society of London (ZSL)

Founded in 1826, the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) is an international scientific, conservation and educational charity whose mission is to promote and achieve the worldwide conservation of animals and their habitats. Our mission is realised through our ground-breaking science, our active conservation projects in more than 50 countries and our two Zoos, ZSL London Zoo and ZSL Whipsnade Zoo. For more information visit www.zsl.org

ZSL SPOTT

For more information on ZSL’s Sustainable Palm Oil Transparency Toolkit (SPOTT), developed to help investors and buyers make more informed decisions around this tropical commodity, please visit: <http://www.sustainablepalmoil.org/>