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**DEGRADED PEATLANDS IN SUMATRA, INDONESIA: HOW LAND RIGHTS  
INFLUENCE THE ABANDONMENT AND BURNING OF LAND**

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Peatlands in Sumatra, Indonesia are one of Southeast Asia's last resource frontiers and they are currently being exploited on a large scale, leading to massive fires and carbon emissions. Despite the global implications of this problem, few studies have investigated the social aspects of peatland degradation, limiting our understanding of potential sustainable management regimes for peatland resources. This study focuses on the factors causing land abandonment and fire, key precursors to peatland degradation. Detailed household questionnaires in a village in Riau province investigated village formation and land history, paying particular attention to how land is acquired and the land titling process. Seventy one (71) households that owned 823.3 ha land were surveyed in detail. Of this land, 646.7 ha were peatlands. The reasons for land abandonment were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. The village surveyed used to be covered by peat swamp forest and started to be occupied by the present Malay inhabitants or their parents in the 1930s. The village landscape has changed drastically since the 1990s when industrial tree plantations started operation in the surveyed area. Currently there are many degraded peatlands in the surveyed village that have been burned and abandoned. However the lands acquired prior to 1984 have not been abandoned, although many of them have experienced fire. The research found that lands with customary land rights such as inheritance and clearing, and also land certified with customary land rights documents have not been abandoned. However, peatland forests that were logged and distributed among villagers, especially after 1995, have since been seriously burned and abandoned. Those lands tend to belong to state forest areas and therefore people tend not to have any documents certifying land rights.

**Keywords:** *peatland, peatland degradation, land rights, Sumatra, government designated state forests*