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## PROTECTION AND RESTORATION OF PEAT AREAS FOR ORANGUTANS

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Large areas of peat swamps in Southeast Asia have been converted through agro-industrial development to palm or pulp plantations over the last 25 years, and today only about 34% of the original peatlands remain under natural forest cover. Lowland humid tropical peat swamp forests are important habitat for Orangutan – which are found only on the islands of Borneo and Sumatra - and other endangered species. Recently, vast forest areas have been affected by fires and the Great Apes Survival Partnership (GRASP) estimates that 28.4% of those fires in Borneo occurred within Orangutan habitat. As critical habitat for Orangutan, the peat forests in Indonesia and Malaysia represent biodiversity hotspots of global importance. Over 80% of the Orangutan's remaining habitat in Borneo could be lost by the year 2080 if the island's current land use policies remain intact, according to the report, *The Future of the Bornean Orangutan: Impacts of Change in Land Cover and Climate* (UNEP-GRASP, 2015), leaving fragmented forests and isolated Orangutan populations that could effectively render the species extinct. GRASP also partnered with UN-Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) and the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology to create an on-line tool that overlays maps containing information on carbon stocks with information on great ape distribution. Special emphasis was given to potential corridor areas that a) could link fragmented and endangered great ape populations and b) have the potential for reforestation. The maps are valuable resources that help decision-makers in great ape range states, the "climate community" and conservation NGOs access data and link the carbon and great ape layers with other context data. The rapid expansion of the palm oil industry is a major driver of deforestation and peatlands destruction, but industry leaders recognize that that business model is short-sighted and ultimately doomed. GRASP is working closely with the Roundtable on Sustainable Oil Palm (RSPO) to drive market demand for sustainably produced palm oil, and is also taking lessons learned and best practices from Asia to Africa, as the Congo Basin contains huge and largely undisturbed peat swamps. Production pressure on forests is increasing in the region, threatening Africa's great apes, but GRASP is committed to understanding and avoiding policies that increase forest destruction, exploring options for fines and incentive payments for sustainable practices, and generating consumer demand for certified sustainable products in order to avoid the environmental crises currently plaguing Southeast Asia.

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