



This waterfall is located at Gunung Nuang. There is a plan to build hiking trails in the area. — Filepic



Taman Eko-Rimba Sungai Tua in Hulu Yam is in the Royal Selangor Heritage Forest. — Photos: MUHAMAD SHAHRIL ROSLI/The Star



A black leopard (*Panthera pardus*) in Royal Belum State Park, Perak, which is home to one of the world's oldest rainforests. — Filepic

# Showcasing Selangor's rich forest heritage

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WHAT does the creation of Royal Selangor Heritage Forest herald for the preservation of green areas in the state, is a question many are asking.

Stakeholders hope the announcement by Sultan of Selangor Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah will lead to greater protection of the country's newest royal heritage forest, spanning 108,000ha.

The brainchild of Sultan Sharafuddin, it encompasses 26 forest reserves and was formerly known as Selangor State Park.

Selangor Forestry Department director Azhar Ahmad said the heritage forest idea was brought up during his audience with Sultan Sharafuddin in March 2023.

"Sultan Sharafuddin had expressed the wish to my predecessor that a suitable area be designated as a heritage forest.

"The aim is to showcase that Selangor has plenty to offer when it comes to nature and biodiversity.

"Sultan Sharafuddin also stressed that the welfare of the Orang Asli communities living in the heritage forest must not be neglected," he told *StarMetro*.

Azhar said a study was done by the Forestry and Environment Faculty at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), of which Sultan Sharafuddin is chancellor.

"As a result of the study, we came up with a masterplan which contains proposed development inside the forest."

## Forestry Dept: Masterplan to strike balance between social, economic and environmental concerns



Azhar says the heritage forest can still be degazetted if the state government deems it necessary.

The masterplan among others, focuses on striking a balance between social and economic needs as well as environmental concerns.

On Nov 28, the masterplan was launched by Sultan Sharafuddin. Also present was Raja Muda of Selangor Tengku Amir Shah.

### Safe from degazettement?

However, a heritage forest would not be exempt from potential degazettement, said Azhar, adding that the usual procedure would still apply.

This includes holding public hearing sessions to gather stakeholders' input and identifying a replacement forest to be gazetted if needed.

"The heritage forest is a



Damien hopes heritage status will be granted to peat and mangrove swamps too.

rebranding exercise which combines 26 forest reserves, which include Taman Eko-Rimba Komanwel and Taman Eko-Rimba Sungai Tua, to form one continuous area.

"It can be degazetted if the state government deems there is a necessity for certain areas to be developed.

"Examples would include building public utilities such as dams, power lines and roads," he said.

Selangor currently has 79 forest reserves, covering 251,000ha, roughly one-third of the state's land mass.

However, many of these reserves are scattered throughout the state and are therefore not included in the heritage forest.



Faizal wants the masterplan made available to stakeholders to allow for input.

But efforts are ongoing to identify more forest reserves to be given heritage status, said Azhar.

To obtain the status, the forest must be classified either as low-land dipterocarp, hill dipterocarp or montane forest, he noted.

### Input from stakeholders

Global Environment Centre (GEC) director Faizal Parish called on the authorities to make public the heritage forest masterplan to allow for input from stakeholders.

He also hopes the moratorium on logging activities in reserve forests, which includes the heritage forest, will be extended.

In 2010, Selangor government implemented a 25-year moratorium on logging activities in all





(From second left) Sultan Sharafuddin, Amirudin and Azhar with Tengku Amir Shah (far left), at the declaration of Royal Selangor Heritage Forest on Nov 28 in Shah Alam. — Filepic

#### Location of Royal Selangor Heritage Forest



Jamaliah (centre) and Azhar (left) releasing fish seeds into Sungai Chiling, which is also in the heritage forest. — Filepic



Meena says there should be greater participation by indigenous communities in forest conservation.

forest reserves in the state.

"There have been calls for the moratorium to be lifted," said Faizal, adding that a bigger budget should be allocated towards the management of the royal heritage forest.

Pertubuhan Pelindung Khazanah Alam president Damien Thanam Divean said a lack of additional safeguards against degazettement for the heritage forest was disappointing.

He, however, lauded the rebranding of the Selangor State Park into the Royal Selangor Heritage Forest, expressing hope this would deter future development inside the area.

"We hope Sultan Sharafuddin would consider granting heritage status to peat and mangrove

swamps too.

"These areas are vital habitats for pollinators, such as birds and insects, which play an important role during the flowering season. "They help spread the seeds of fruits eaten by other animals, which is essential in sustaining the natural ecosystem," he added.

Sahabat Alam Malaysia president Meena Raman hopes that the heritage status will enhance awareness about the need to protect the area against development.

"Although it does not give more legal protection, it creates a perception that the forest is part of our common heritage.

"The state is expected to exercise good judgement and accountability to ensure its continuous preservation."

#### Low-impact development

Azhar said several projects were being planned inside the heritage forest, but the implementation date had not been determined.

These include building hiking trails in Gunung Nuang, a recreational area in Sungai Pertak, and a venue for outdoor activities in Kemensah.

There are also efforts to turn Sungai Chiling into a biodiversity sanctuary to encourage the repopulation of local fish species.

"All of these are at the



Taman Eko-Rimba Komanwel in Rawang is one of the parks included in the heritage forest.

planning stage.

"The plans will be presented to the state executive council for review," he said.

On Sept 22, state public health and environment committee chairman Jamaliah Jamahuddin announced a RM100,000 allocation for the Sungai Chiling biodiversity study.

The study reportedly would involve 50 researchers from tertiary education institutions and state agencies.

During the masterplan's launch, Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Amirudin Shari reportedly said there were plans to create a 120km-long nature trail from Hulu Selangor to Hulu Langat.

"However, the number of visitors will be limited to ensure minimal impact on the forest," he was quoted as saying.

Faizal cautioned the authorities against allowing commercial projects under the guise of eco-tourism.

"This has happened in Thailand and Cambodia, where hotels and resorts were built inside national parks," he said.

He stressed that there must be a limit on the areas and density allowed for any project to minimise impact on the

natural surroundings.

Faizal also urged the authorities to engage with Orang Asli communities to protect and manage the heritage forest.

He said GEC, along with the Perak government, had roped in the Orang Asli to manage forest trails in Gunung Korbu.

"This allows us to tap into the skills of the Orang Asli, who in turn can generate an income.

"Their communities can also keep watch on wildlife as well as logging activities and encroachment," he added.

Meena said there should be greater participation of indigenous communities in forest conservation.

"Fishing communities must be given a role in protecting mangrove forests, which are crucial for their livelihood."

#### Emulating other states

Selangor Royal Heritage Forest is not the only one in Malaysia to attempt to showcase an area's nature and biodiversity.

In Perak, Belum Forest Reserve was renamed Royal Belum State Park in 2007 and is part of the larger Belum-Temengor forest complex.

Spanning 128,000ha, it is one

of the world's oldest rainforests, with over 300 birds and 139 mammal species.

It is also known for its lowland and hill dipterocarp forests as well as hundreds of streams and tributaries which feed into Lake Temenggor in the Hulu Perak district.

In Pahang, Taman Negara was initially known as Gunung Tahan Game Reserve in 1925 but was later renamed King George V National Park.

After the country achieved independence in 1957, the park was renamed Taman Negara.

Taman Negara, which measures some 435,000ha, also spans parts of Terengganu and Kelantan.

In 1984, it was declared an Asean Heritage Park, and is home to Gunung Tahan, the highest peak in the peninsula at 2,187m.

The Endau-Rompin National Park straddles Segamat and Mersing districts in Johor, as well as Rompin in Pahang.

It spans 49,000ha, making it the largest protected forest in the southern peninsula. It was made a national park in 1992 and opened to the public in 2003.

In 2022, it too received Asean Heritage Park status.