

SOME 30 IN HEART OF BORNEO EXPEDITION TO UPPER BALEH

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(from left) Sandum, Dr Gabriel, Aisah, and Lip launch the event.



SIBU: Thirty people comprising mainly of experts and field staff from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas), Forest Department, WWF-Malaysia and Sarawak Energy started their Heart of Borneo (HOB) Scientific Expedition Baleh 2015 yesterday.

According to Forest Department director Sapuan Ahmad, the expedition would be from Nov 19–29.

“This expedition is important as it forms part of a scientific mission to gazette part of an area in Ulu Baleh into a national park,” he said at the soft launching of the expedition at Tanahmas Hotel on Thursday.

His text-of-speech was read out by assistant regional forest officer Sandum Hitam.

Sapuan said all parties contributed their technical expertise and funds to the expedition in view of the expedition's potential contribution towards the development of a planned catchment management plan for the Upper Baleh catchment.

“The outcome from the expedition will provide much needed data on the flora and fauna of the area, which is within the Heart of Borneo (HOB) Sarawak.”

He said the expedition was aimed at gathering baseline data to document the diversity of the flora and fauna of Upper Baleh and to support the gazetting of the proposed Baleh National Park and the conservation and development of a catchment management plan.

The second objective of the expedition was to explore and generate new scientific information on the biodiversity and gather baseline data to develop an understanding of montane terrestrial, freshwater biodiversity and ecosystems to support and complement identification of other representative priority conservation areas within the wider Baleh watershed.

He said commercial logging and shifting cultivation had altered the wildlife habitat in Upper Baleh.

With plans to convert part of the forest at Upper Baleh into a protected area, Sapuan said both the hydropower development planned for the area and the national park needed more comprehensive data on the flora and fauna composition, and the overall catchment ecosystem, in general.

The expedition area, he said, had an important ecological role to play. The headwaters for the Baleh River, which is a main tributary of the Rajang River, originate from the Nieuwenhuis Range.

He said those headwaters needed to be protected, as the forests are connected to the Betung Kerihun National Park in Kalimantan, Indonesia, while at the same time ensure that clean water supply at the source was sustained.

Also present at the event were professor Dr Gabriel Tonga Noweg from Unimas, Sarawak Energy executive vice president for Corporate Services Aisah Eden, and WWF-Malaysia Advocacy for Sustainable Hydropower manager Belinda Lip.