



Community Conservation to Restore and Protect Borneo's Rainforests

Project Summary

Borneo's vast peatland forests are home to the largest orangutan populations in the world, provide economic and social benefits for indigenous communities and are a major global carbon store. They are being destroyed by annual fires resulting from decades of poor management. The Borneo Nature Foundation is implementing grassroots solutions to tackle both the impacts and causes of fire and create long-term fire-prevention strategies. Our reforestation programme empowers communities to grow native tree species to replant burnt peatlands in the critical Sebangau region of Indonesian Borneo, providing economic benefits, reducing fire-risk and protecting biodiversity. Our target is to grow, plant and monitor 1 million trees over 2500 hectares at a cost of €3 per tree, to protect the forest from future fires, and develop the potential for regional upscaling and replication.

Videos: [Reforesting the Sebangau Forest](#)
[Uplink 1t.org Winner Trillion Trees Challenge](#)

The Problem

Naturally waterlogged, Borneo's peatlands have been drained and degraded by decades of poor land management. Fires are commonly used to clear land and these can spread quickly during periods of drought. Indonesia's 2015 fires burnt an estimated 2.2 Mha of peatland in Borneo, a catastrophe on a global scale.

Huge areas of forest and their biodiversity were lost. 69 million people were exposed to a toxic smoke haze, causing serious health impacts and premature deaths. The peak carbon emissions rate exceeded 15 MtCO₂/day, greater than the entire US economy. Major interventions are required from national policy to grassroots actions.

Our approach develops fire-fighting capacity and regional networks to reduce fire impacts, whilst simultaneously reducing fire risk by restoring degraded peatlands and helping rural communities achieve our shared vision of a fire-free future in Borneo.

Reforestation and Community Nurseries

Burnt peatland is prone to burn over and over again, putting more forest at risk. Reforestation prevents this, but doesn't occur naturally when the top peat layers have burnt away. We have researched a successful replanting strategy, selecting four native tree species as pioneers.

In 2018 we developed a novel community nursery project to provide the seedlings to replant large areas. We provide training and resources to community groups to grow native seedlings on their land, and then buy them back when they are ready to plant. Each nursery is run by 5-7 families with capacity to grow 10,000 trees annually, which are planted on burnt, degraded peatland. Long-term we protect and monitor them to ensure success.





Impact

Communities are empowered and involved in all stages of the restoration process. It provides income for rural villages and promotes participation by women, both in running the nurseries and making organic seedling bags. We are helping families develop permaculture projects to gain long-term benefits from their nurseries. Community fire-fighting teams work to protect the newly-planted trees.

We are achieving 90% planting success and 3-year survival rate >80%. Revegetation facilitates natural succession, reduces peat degradation and fire-risk, prevents carbon emissions and protects biodiversity. This is a simple, effective project with clear upscaling potential and co-benefits.

What we need

We currently support 42 families who manage 7 nurseries in two villages. We planted the first 50,000 seedlings from the nurseries in 2020, launching our campaign to plant one million trees over 2500 hectares in the next five years. Each nursery costs €7,000 to establish, with annual costs to grow, plant and monitor 10,000 seedlings of €20,000.

To achieve this we need to access new sources of support and explore new funding models. We are building our own capacity through recruitment, training and partnerships to enhance our success and address the most difficult challenges. We are identifying opportunities and local partners to replicate and scale up this work, as part of a regional effort to overcome Borneo's peat-fire crisis.



To discuss further or get more information, please contact **Simon Husson**, Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Borneo Nature Foundation and Chief Executive of BNF International s.husson@borneonature.org



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