

Rejuvenating oil palm landscape

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Signing the agreement are Roslin Azmy (seated second from left), Prof Taufiq (seated second from right), witnessed by Mohd Faris (seated left) and Vina Zahriani (seated right). Looking on are (standing from second left) Rashyid Redza and Masidi.

SIME Darby Plantation Bhd (SDP) and Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) are collaborating on a research programme for a secondary forest located within the Sapong Estate in Sabah.

A memorandum of agreement (MOA) was signed between SDP's Upstream Malaysia chief executive officer Roslin Azmy Hassan and UMS vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Taufiq Yap Yun Hin.

It was witnessed by SDP regional chief executive officer (Sabah) Mohd Faris Adli Shukery and UMS registrar Vina Zahriani Yusof.

The exchange of documents was made in the presence of UMS board of directors chairman Datuk Seri Masidi Manjun and SDP head of group sustainability, Rashyid Redza Anwarudin.

The five-year agreement will see both organisations teaming up to study the restoration of biodiversity, carbon sequestration and enhancement of the ecosystem within the 282.21ha secondary forest.

The team will document the flora and fauna that will help track long-term changes in diversity, assess the above-ground carbon stock as well as monitor water quality and riparian management on site.

The results from the collaboration will be used to develop rehabilitation and restoration strategies to help turn the project area into SDP's first high conservation value (HCV) forest model.

HCV is defined as areas containing significant biodiversity values, which provide erosion control as well as possess rare, threatened and endangered ecosystems, and are able to meet the basic needs of local communities while being critical to their traditions and cultural identity.

SDP has committed to increasing forest carbon stock and protecting HCV areas identified within its estates globally as part of its pledge to uphold the no-deforestation, no-peat and no-exploitation policy.

This strategic partnership will help guide SDP in its endeavour to achieve a deforestation-free palm oil supply chain that also protects the ecosystem surrounding its plantations.

"Sime Darby Plantation shares the world's concerns over the destruction of forests.

"We are determined to do our part in ensuring that the forests in and around our operation sites remain protected and enhanced so that we can help conserve and further improve the biodiversity.

"We are delighted to have forged a partnership with UMS," said Roslin Azmy.

In addition to studying and enhancing the ecosystem of the forest, the collaboration will also help build the capabilities of participating undergraduate and postgraduate students from UMS.

"To UMS, this agreement is proof of a commitment to translate locally bred knowledge into actions on the ground while addressing Sabah's environmental concerns at the same time," said Prof Taufiq.

The project has already begun with several ongoing initiatives, including the installation of 12 camera traps to identify possible rare, threatened and endangered wildlife species.

The team has identified three approaches, including enrichment planting, assisted natural regeneration and establishing a controlled area.

These approaches will help in assessing the efficiency of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil's best management practices to manage and rehabilitate riparian reserves.

A total of 2,000 seedlings will be planted by the parties as part of the forest area restoration initiative.

The new trees will soon join the ranks of the over 1.4 million trees SDP has planted since 2008 through its plant-a-tree project globally.