Indonesian Peat Prize Announces Winner of $1 million on the World Wetlands Day

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Indonesia

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On the World’s Wetlands Day (February 2, 2018), Indonesia’s Geospatial Information Agency (BIG) announced that the International Peat Mapping Team, which is comprised of scientists from Remote Sensing Solutions GmbH (RSS), the Agency for the Assessment and Application of Technology (BPPT) and Sriwijaya University, is the winner of the USD $1 million Indonesian Peat Prize. The two-year contest to find the best methodology to measure the extent and depth of peat in Indonesia drew 44 teams which included some of the biggest names in peat research and mapping. The Prize’s Scientific Advisory Board (SAB), a group of scientists and experts who reviewed the finalists’ submissions, reached a unanimous decision that the International Peat Mapping team produced the most accurate, timely and cost-effective methodology for mapping peatlands. The Indonesian government will use this new method to protect and manage peatland areas, accelerate peatland restoration and support Indonesia’s development goals.

The International Peat Mapping Team deployed satellite-based technologies and airborne LiDAR, combined with established on-the-ground measurements, making them the lead in mapping peatlands that combine accuracy, speed and affordability. The team deployed a product called WorldDEM that uses satellite imagery to model terrain at a 10-meter resolution, as well as imagery from the Sentinel satellites. The team combined these satellite-based technologies with terrain models derived from airborne LiDAR (a technology that uses laser light to create 3-D terrain maps). The methodology also included well-established on-the-ground measurements in order to create a model that could accurately estimate peat thickness. Finally, the team verified the peat data resulting from the combination of all these technologies with on-the-ground measurements. The team included mapping and peatland experts from Indonesia, Germany and the Netherlands: Prof. Dr. Florian Siegert, Dr. Uwe Ballhorn, Peter
Navratil, Prof. Dr. Hans Joosten, Dr. Muh. Bambang Prayitno, Dr. Bambang Setiadi, Felicitas von Poncet, Suroso and Dr. Solichin Manuri.

The Indonesian Peat Prize was created by BIG in response to the lack of accurate and up-to-date information around peatlands in Indonesia. Peat – dense, wet layers of vegetation and soil built up over thousands of years – can be found in many tropical ecosystems but Indonesia is home to the largest peat swamp forests in the world. Peatlands are rich in carbon and biological diversity, but are often drained for agriculture and plantations, or worse burned.

Peat is a major source of emissions when it burns or decomposes. In 2015, peatlands were responsible for 42% of Indonesia’s total emissions. In the devastating 2015 fire season, forests and peat fires caused 100,000 premature deaths, cost the Indonesian economy $16 billion, and released 1.62 billion metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions, equivalent to the emissions produced by nearly 350,000 cars.

The depth, or thickness, of peat soils is an essential measurement; the deeper the peat is, the more ecological damage, including carbon emissions, results from disturbance. Uncertainty around data and information concerning peatland, particularly the depth of peat, has delayed protection and restoration measures for Indonesia’s peatlands, allowing irresponsible parties to continue business as usual, often resulting in drained peat and fires.

The Indonesian Peat Prize not only represents a breakthrough solution for Indonesia, but is also paving the way for communities around the world to improve peatland governance and conservation. Led by the Indonesian government, the Prize is supported by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, by the peatland and mapping experts within the SAB who serve as judges, and by a technical team that consists of the BIG, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF). WRI Indonesia is the implementing partner for the Prize.

For more information, visit http://www.indonesianpeatprize.net

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