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Perak may lose more forest reserves

IPOH : After the Bikam forest reserve near Bidor was cleared recently, talk is rife that several other forest reserves in Perak will also be degazetted for the cultivation of oil palm.

They include the Chikus and Parit forest reserves near here. It is learnt that applications have been made by several parties to the state government to convert the land usage status from forest reserve to oil palm plantations.

When contacted yesterday, Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) field officer Meor Razak Meor Abdul Rahman said the state government needed to make a detailed study before approving the applications to avoid repeating the costly mistake that occurred following the degazetting of the Bikam permanent forest reserve.

The "critically endangered" *Dipterocarpus coriaceus* tree species, known locally as keruing paya, is now believed to be extinct in the peninsula after more than 400ha of the Bikam permanent forest reserve were degazetted to make way for an oil palm plantation.

Meor Razak said any decision to degazette the remaining 933.7ha of the Parit forest reserve would affect another "critically endangered" tree species, the *Dipterocarpus semivestitus*, locally known as keruing padi, found only in Perak.

This species is among several which may face extinction if the Parit forest reserve is converted for agricultural use.

"Wildlife such as panthers, burung kuang raya (argus pheasant) and siamang (*Symphalangus syndactylus*) can be found in Parit, based on studies conducted by the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (Perhilitan) in the 1990s," Meor Razak said.

Previously, part of the forest reserve was cleared for the development of Universiti Teknologi Petronas and Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) campuses.

"At present, about 50 keruing padi trees can be found in the freshwater swamp forest inside the UiTM campus in Seri Iskandar," said Meor Razak.

UiTM and the Forest Research Institute Malaysia had signed a memorandum of understanding to look after these trees.