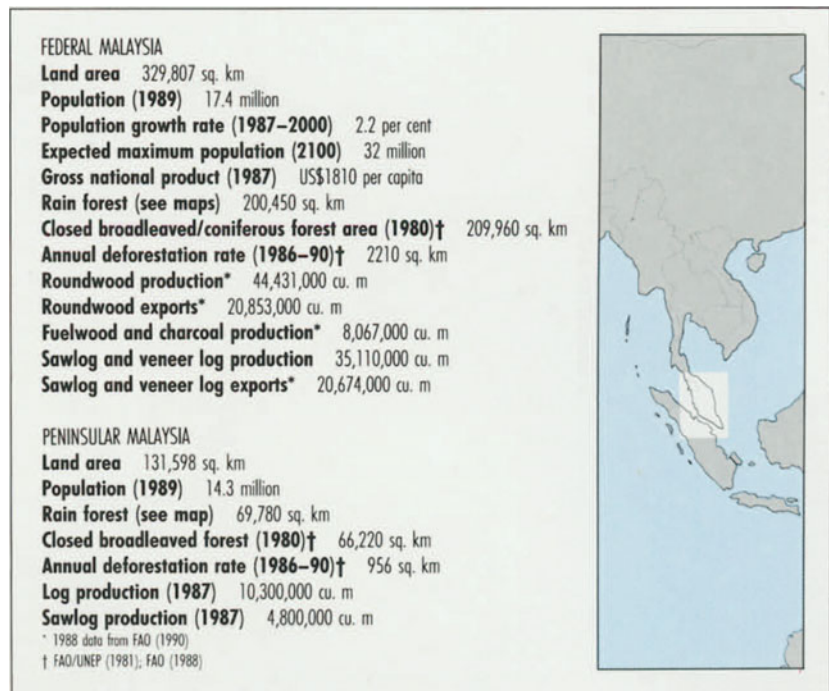


22 Peninsular Malaysia



Peninsular Malaysia has a long history of careful forest management, and conservation of its extremely rich biological reserves is well developed. Rapid development of the land has occurred over recent decades, but this has now begun to stabilise. Under the 5th Malaysia Plan an area of only 1286 sq. km has been scheduled for deforestation, much less than in previous plans. However, it is envisaged that all stateland forests (approximately 8700 sq. km) not included either in the Permanent Forest Estate (currently 47,500 sq. km) or in the protected area network (c. 5700 sq. km) will eventually be deforested and converted to other land uses.

At the moment there is a good network of representative areas for the conservation of ecosystems, biological diversity and ecological services, but the time is ripe to examine their adequacy, and to set aside further conservation areas before later development diminishes the opportunity to do so. When considering the management of production forest within the Permanent Forest Estate, it is essential to balance conservation needs with timber production. It is vital to protect and maintain pristine areas of natural forest in order to recolonise the degraded forests' stock of flora and fauna. This is especially important now, because most of the production forests are located in hilly terrain, where environmental damage caused by logging is considerable.

The rationale for conservation of natural forests needs to be clearly communicated to all levels of Malaysian society. The essential ecological benefits that can accrue from having adequate cover of a matrix of both undisturbed and production forests needs to be emphasised in order that conservation matters can be viewed clearly. Ultimately it will be the Malaysian public that rallies political and economic forces in support of conservation of the Malaysian environment.

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a federation of 13 states, 11 in the Malay peninsula (West or Peninsular Malaysia), and Sarawak and Sabah¹ in Borneo (East Malaysia). Peninsular Malaysia accounts for 40 per cent of the land area and over three-quarters of the population. The principal highlands, set inland from the coastal plains, consist of several roughly parallel ranges that run down the centre of the country from the Thai border to the south of Negeri Sembilan. Peaks range up to c. 2000 m in height and divide the western states from Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang to the east. There is a more dispersed mass of mountains to the east of the main ranges with an east-west watershed separating the northward flowing rivers of Kelantan and north Terengganu from the south flowing catchment of the Pahang river, on which lies Gunung Tahan (2189 m), the highest mountain. There are other lower mountains further south around the Pahang–Johor border.

¹ See Chapter 24 for Sarawak and Sabah

The population of Malaysia is racially mixed, with about 54 per cent Bumiputras (Malays and other indigenous races), 35 per cent Chinese and 10 per cent Indians. In the Peninsula the religion of the majority (Malays) is Muslim, and Islam is the official religion. In 1984 the Government announced a policy of encouraging population growth from the present 17 million to 70 million people. Tax incentives to encourage this were passed by Parliament in 1985.

The Forests

Lowland evergreen tropical rain forest is the principal forest formation on dry land at low altitudes in Peninsular Malaysia, as Map 22.1 shows. In the extreme north-west this is replaced by the semi-evergreen formation. The rain forest is rich in Dipterocarpaceae, notably *Anisoptera*, *Dipterocarpus*, *Dryobalanops*, *Hopea* and *Shorea*. It is subdivided into lowland (below 300 m) and hill (300–1300 m) forest, on floristic composition. Along the east coast there remain a

