

## **Green corridors help to combat extinction**

**“When large forest areas are broken up, the animals can no longer roam freely. As this could lead to inbreeding and extinction, it is vital that there exist natural trails or ‘ecological corridors’ that join together the various pockets of forest,” says Panudet Kerd mali, Secretary General of the Seub Nakasathien Foundation in Thailand.**

The area between Bangkok and the Burmese east coast was once covered in dense rainforest. Today only small pockets remain with the likelihood of even more disappearing. The town of Dawei in southeast Myanmar (Burma) is the nearest population centre and lies diagonally due west from Thailand’s capital Bangkok (along the same coast as Phuket). In Dawei, work is underway building a deep-water port that has the potential to become a major commercial port for Thai companies.

To connect Dawei and Bangkok a road is being planned between the two cities that will run through the Dawna Tenassarim region, one of the major rainforest areas in Southeast Asia. The forest is home to tigers, elephants, sambar deer, sun bears and many other endangered species. The region is also undergoing rapid social and economic change. Job opportunities, education, healthcare and many other things are in short supply. The forest is under immense pressure from illegal felling, hunting, plantation clearance and the construction of roads and dams. The right balance has to be found between exploitation and protection, but it is no easy task. Environmental protection is also in the interest of the local population.

The Seub Nakasathien Foundation in Thailand works to protect and preserve the forest in the Kanchanburi province on the Thailand side of the border.

“Seub is the major environmental organisation in the area. Collaboration with them enables us to reach out to the people who play a key role in environmental protection,” explains Wandee Krichanan at WWF in Thailand.

WWF has supported the Seub Nakasathien Foundation in its work studying the nature trails known as ecological corridors and how they help to protect the environment. Seub is now working towards making the corridors part of the official plan for the region. For Panudet Kerd mali, Secretary General of Seub, the key thing is to give ordinary people the opportunity to have a say in the preservation of the forest while safeguarding their livelihoods. By bringing together residents and drawing up a common land use plan for the region, Seub is looking to establish a dialogue with the authorities. This will bring together people in the region to discuss developments more in-depth and will give everybody the opportunity to air their views to those who govern. Seub also has a global network of environmental experts at their disposal who will help local people see developments from a larger global perspective.

“The ecological corridor report we’ve compiled is not only a strategic tool in our dealings with the authorities, it also raises awareness among the villagers of the importance of environmental conservation,” continues Panudet Kerd mali.

Several ethnic groups live in the border area of Myanmar and Thailand. Many own small farm holdings where they grow sugar cane, rice, maize, cassava and other produce. The Thailand side also has a fair amount of tourism. Seub hopes to carry on the work now underway in Thailand in Myanmar as well. One objective is to bring together local organisations in both countries.

“It’s like a puzzle where we begin by laying a few pieces here in Thailand, then hopefully continue piecing it together on the other side of the border. If we succeed it

will be a significant step forward for our environmental work,” concludes Panudet Kerd mali.