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Media Release

For immediate release

New hope for Sumatran rhino in Borneo

Jakarta, Indonesia – WWF researchers are celebrating the first live sighting of a Sumatran rhino in Kalimantan, the Indonesia part of Borneo, since it was thought to be extinct there. This is also the first physical contact with the species in the area for over 40 years and is a major milestone for rhino conservation in Indonesia.

The female Sumatran rhino, which is estimated to be between four and five years old, was safely captured in a pit trap in Kutai Barat in East Kalimantan on 12 March.

“This is an exciting discovery and a major conservation success,” said Dr Efransjah, CEO of WWF-Indonesia. “We now have proof that a species once thought extinct in Kalimantan still roams the forests, and we will now strengthen our efforts to protect this extraordinary species.”

In 2013, a WWF survey team first found evidence that the species was not extinct in Kalimantan by identifying footprints and capturing an image of a rhino on a camera trap in the same forest. Since then, 15 Sumatran rhinos have been identified in three populations in Kutai Barat.

The Sumatran rhino is one of two rhino species that exist in Indonesia. It is estimated that less than 100 Sumatran rhinos remain in the wild, mainly on the island of Sumatra. The rhinos face serious threats from poaching, and habitat loss due to mining, plantations and logging. The wild population of Sumatran rhinos in the Malaysian part of Borneo was declared extinct last year.

The captured female rhino is being held in a temporary enclosure before being translocated by helicopter to a new home – a protected forest about 150 km from the capture site. The rhino's new home is envisioned as the second Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary in Indonesia.

“This is a race against time for rhino conservation. Providing a safe home is the only hope for the the survival of the Sumatran rhino for many generations to come,” said Dr Efransjah. “WWF will work continuously with the Sumatran rhino conservation team for the protection of the Sumatran rhino population in Kalimantan.”

Working as part of the Sumatran Rhino Conservation Team established by the Indonesia Ministry of Environment and Forestry, WWF and other team members are working to translocate at least three rhinos from their current habitat to the sanctuary, where they will be safer and can establish a breeding population.

“This unprecedented discovery and unparalleled operation boosts our hope to save one of the most endangered species and an iconic symbol of the majestic Asian rainforests. This is an exciting moment in our efforts to save the world's amazing biodiversity,” said Marco Lambertini, Director General of WWF International.



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“The entire WWF network commends the Indonesian Government, WWF-Indonesia and all partners involved for their commitment and for this ground-breaking operation,” added Lambertini.

In more good news, Indonesia also recently announced an increase in the population of the critically endangered Javan rhino, which only survives in Ujung Kulon National Park. Three new calves brought the number of Javan rhinos up to 63, from the 60 announced in September 2015.

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About WWF:

WWF is one of the world’s largest and most respected independent conservation organizations, with over five million supporters and a global network active in more than 100 countries. WWF’s mission is to stop the degradation of the earth’s natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world’s biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.