

Hikers seek permission

Group wants to continue using Ayer Hitam Forest Reserve trail

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RESIDENTS in Taman Wawasan, Puchong, want to continue using the Ayer Hitam Forest Reserve for hiking and morning exercise.

The 1,176ha forest is under the jurisdiction of the Selangor Forestry Department and now run by Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Forestry Faculty for education, research and extension in forestry.

Wawasan Hikers representative Kelvin Loo said all they wanted was a place to hike.

"We have voluntarily formed a group to make sure the trail is kept clean and we are willing to work with the relevant authorities as long as we get to use the forest," Loo said during a meeting at the entrance to the forest in Jalan Wawasan 5/1.

Hikers were recently denied entry into the forest by security guards stationed at the entrance.

Kinrara assemblyman Teresa Kok, Puchong MP Gobind Singh Deo, Selangor Forestry director Yusoff Muda, UPM Forestry dean Datin Dr Faridah Hanum Ibrahim and several faculty members of the department attended the meeting moderated by Subang Jaya municipal councillor Chang Kim Loong.

Dr Faridah said the forest was being used as an external laboratory for forestry students undergoing degree and post-graduate courses at the university.

"We do have tree-planting activities and Love Our River programmes. The public can join us in our programmes.

"We have found rubbish scattered in the forest and even empty beer cans. There were also some people who took their motorbikes into the forest and trees have also been cut

down at several locations.

"There has also been pollution in the river after people started using the waterfall," she said.

Yusoff said under the current laws, only Selangor Forestry officers, UPM employees and UPM students were allowed into the forest.

He said there was a diverse species of flora and fauna in the forest reserve that needed to be preserved and the public might not realise the long-term effects if a large number of people were allowed into the forest.

Loo said hikers had been careful not to destroy the plants in the forest and Wawasan Hikers group members had even set up concrete blocks in front of the entrance when they realised that there were people driving their four-wheel-drive vehicles up the trail.

Kok said the hikers made known to the UPM and Selangor Forestry Department the exact trail that they

would like to use so that the authorities could look into the feasibility of setting a perimeter and markers.

UPM senior lecturer and researcher Dr Manohar Mariapan said they would bring the matter to the university board for further discussion.

"We would have to set up focus groups with the stakeholders, including the Forestry Department, before coming to a decision," he said.

Meanwhile, the public has been advised to stay out of the forest until a decision has been made.

"Most of us do not even go to the waterfall after the trail was closed. We know that it is out-of-bounds. We would like to set up a Rangers unit and work with the UPM to help look after the forest.

"Before this, we wanted to report several incidents in the forest but did not know how to go through the proper channels. We want to use the trail only for hiking," he said.