

By ANDREW SIA

WOULD you like to cycle, or run, for a good cause? If you live in Penang, Kedah or Perlis, this will be especially relevant to you.

Kedah Cycle for Water 2017 is set to take place on Nov 11 at the Keriang Hill Resort. The cycling (and running) event is the first to be organised by WWF-Malaysia to support freshwater conservation efforts in the large forests of Ulu Muda in the more hilly areas of eastern Kedah.

The awareness event calls for the public to cycle 40km along the padi fields in Alor Setar, against the scenic backdrop of Gunung Keriang.

To make the event more accessible to the public, a 7km fun run will be held concurrently for those who prefer not to cycle.

The "Kedah Cycle for Water 2017" event was launched last month to conserve the source of freshwater for the three states.

Her Royal Highness Tunku Temenggong Kedah Tan Sri Tunku Puteri Intan Safinaz launched the event recently.

The 163,000-hectare forests in Kedah house the headwaters of the rivers that provide as much as 96.5% of Kedah's and 80% of Penang's treated water supply for domestic and industrial use.

The forests function as a water catchment area for the Muda, Pedu and Ahning reservoirs. They supply water to irrigate Kedah's vast rice fields, which produce 37% of the country's rice supply.

Water for life and commerce

Ulu Muda's forests are the most significant water sources for irrigating the granary areas not only in Kedah (which is known as the "rice bowl" of Malaysia), but also in Perlis, through the three reservoirs.

They collectively contribute 32% of the irrigation water needs for rice production, meaning close to one third of the rice produced in the nation is dependent on Ulu Muda's forests.

As the main water resource for the Muda Irrigation Scheme, Ulu Muda is critical to ensuring the livelihood of close to 55,000 farming families in Kedah and Perlis.

In other words, Ulu Muda's forests help drive the region's growth in many ways via invaluable environmental services to northern

Cycle for water and forests

Have fun exercising while helping to protect our drinking water in Penang and Kedah.



'Kedah Cycle for Water 2017' was launched by Tunku Temenggong Kedah Tan Sri Tunku Puteri Intan Safinaz (in blue). The event is to help conserve the Ulu Muda forests. — CARELL CHONG/WWF-Malaysia

Peninsular Malaysia.

Despite its importance, the forest remains unprotected. As the northern region grows across the agriculture, manufacturing, tourism and service sectors, the demand for water will continue to increase. In order to attract, sustain and retain long-term investments for the state, water security is vital.

"As one of the major contributors to the nation's economic growth and well-being of Malaysians, there is an urgent need to protect Ulu Muda. 'Kedah Cycle for Water 2017' is an initiative to create greater awareness of Ulu Muda's importance in providing environmental services," said Dr Sundari Ramakrishna, Conservation Director of WWF-

Malaysia.

The cycling event in November – targeting 1,000 participants – aims to serve as a platform of awareness and education on the significance of Ulu Muda as a major water resource.

It is also hoped that this platform will help drive Malaysians to play a more active role in the protection of Ulu Muda and the country's freshwater resources.

Organic cotton t-shirt

"Water is one of the most critical life sources on the planet. Today, close to 663 million people do not have access to safe water – that is roughly one in three people," said Tunku Puteri Intan Safinaz in her

opening address at the launch event.

"If we continue to take this precious resource for granted, we may find ourselves in a difficult situation in the near future."

The Princess also added that the state is proud to be hosting Kedah Cycle for Water 2017, and urged Malaysians to support freshwater conservation.

All participants will receive a 100% organic cotton t-shirt and medal made from recycled remnant wood for a minimal registration fee of RM45.

All proceeds will be channelled to WWF-Malaysia's continuous freshwater conservation efforts in Ulu Muda, which includes advocating

the gazettement of the whole Ulu Muda Forest Complex as a protected area, and developing a "Payment for Ecosystem Services" scheme (where the full value of the forests are recognised, not just their value as logs).

"We strongly believe that these efforts will play a significant role in protecting our crucial natural capital in the long term," added Dr Sundari.

Kedah Cycle for Water 2017 is a collaborative effort by LM Bikers, Yayasan Sultanah Bahiyah and the Alor Setar Jogging Club, supported by Tunku Puteri Intan Safinaz.

Registration for 'Kedah Cycle for Water 2017' is now open at: pandashop.my/kedahcycleforwater

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