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# Go back to being conservators

I READ with great dismay the story of a giant, old chengal tree being transported through Pahang apparently on route from Terengganu to Selangor where it will be cut up in a sawmill.

Comments from the Forestry Department have focused on permits and licenses for cutting and transporting the logs. These legalistic comments completely miss the real issues, which disturbs Malaysians as a civilized people.

In countries where people have a love of history, culture and science, giant trees that are hundreds of years old would be treated as national monuments to be treasured and protected.

For example, one issue of *National Geographic* (December 2012) was devoted to the world's largest trees and featured the giant sequoia of North America.

It is shameful that old chengal trees are not protected in Malaysia. Chengal is the best known of the classic trees of the Malay peninsula. It was used in the construction of Malay palaces as well as boats and bridges.



It was also the favourite wood for traditional wood carvings and other wood crafts.

The species is found only in the Malay peninsula and is the most durable of timbers. It is able to last 100 years in exposed conditions.

Chengal trees are not planted because they are too slow growing and are therefore not of interest to investors. As the remaining trees

are cut, the species will become extinct.

The ability of a tree to grow for hundreds of years on the same spot without succumbing to pests and diseases is a truly amazing feat that even science cannot explain. Science also cannot explain how water can be raised 46m up from the roots to the leaves.

If we cannot explain how a living thing can grow to such enormous size, at least we should respect what we do not understand. It is good that ordinary citizens, shocked by the logs being transported in lorries, took pictures and circulated them on social media. This is something citizens must do and keep doing to shame the politicians, forestry authorities, loggers and saw millers.

I am a former senior officer at the Forestry Department. I retired as deputy-director general of the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) in 1990. Forest officers used to be known as conservators of forests with a genuine love for trees and forests. This seems to be lacking nowadays.

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