



Research Article

Siak Green Policy and Land Exploitation Conflicts: Analysis of Green Ideology in Siak Regency

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Abstract

Agrarian and environmental conflicts in peatland regions of Indonesia reveal complex interactions between resource governance, economic development, and ecological sustainability. This study examines the land exploitation conflict in Siak Regency, Riau Province, focusing on the dispute between local communities and an industrial forest plantation company. The research aims to analyze the ideological orientation of regional environmental policy and to understand how power relations shape environmental governance in peatland ecosystems. The study employs a qualitative case study approach based on document analysis of regional regulations, policy reports, civil society publications, and academic literature on environmental politics, political ecology, and green political theory. The analytical framework combines green ideology with social ecology to examine the ideological assumptions underlying environmental governance, particularly the distinction between environmentalism and ecologism. The findings indicate that the “Siak Hijau” policy framework largely reflects a managerial environmentalism that attempts to mitigate environmental impacts without challenging the structural drivers of ecological degradation. Regional environmental governance continues to operate within the paradigm of modernist ecology, which assumes that economic growth and environmental protection can be reconciled through technological and administrative solutions. In practice, this approach reinforces anthropocentric resource management in which peatland ecosystems are treated as economic assets rather than ecological systems with intrinsic value. Licensing practices for industrial forest plantations and large-scale monoculture plantations have intensified socio-ecological tensions by marginalizing local communities and undermining peatland stability. From the perspective of social ecology, these dynamics reflect hierarchical power relations between state institutions, corporate actors, and rural communities, where environmental risks and social costs are disproportionately borne by marginalized populations. The study concludes that resolving agrarian conflicts in peatland regions requires a shift from technocratic environmental management toward a more transformative ecological governance framework. Strengthening community participation, recognizing ecological limits, and addressing structural inequalities in resource control are essential steps toward achieving socially just and ecologically sustainable development.

Keywords

Green Ideology, Political Ecology, Agrarian Conflict, Peatland Governance, Environmental Policy, Ecological Justice, Siak Regency

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1. Introduction

The persistence of agrarian and environmental conflicts in Siak Regency, Riau Province, reflects a deeper crisis within the governance of natural resources in Indonesia. In recent years, disputes between local communities and large plantation or forestry corporations have intensified, particularly in peatland areas that are ecologically fragile yet economically valuable. [1] One of the most recent conflicts involved the communities of Tumang and Merempun Hulu villages and PT Seraya Sumber Lestari (SSL), a supplier affiliated with the APRIL Group. Reports indicate that the company destroyed oil palm crops belonging to local residents, which eventually triggered social unrest and culminated in the burning of the company's facilities in June 2025. [2, 3] Beyond a localized dispute, this incident illustrates a broader socio-ecological crisis in which the expansion of industrial land use intersects with community livelihoods and fragile ecosystems. [4]

Existing studies show that environmental conflicts in Riau cannot be fully explained through legal or administrative frameworks alone. Indra et al. (2023), in their study on the political law of land governance in Riau, emphasize that environmental management policies frequently become trapped within administrative procedures while enforcement remains weak. Overlapping regulations often create opportunities for political and economic elites to secure access to land resources. [5, 6] As a result, environmental degradation, forest fires, and land disputes persist as structural phenomena rather than isolated incidents. These findings indicate that conventional policy approaches, which focus primarily on technical regulation and legal compliance, fail to address the deeper paradigms that shape the exploitation of natural resources.

The limitations of conventional approaches raise an important analytical question: what ideological framework underlies environmental governance in regions such as Siak? Addressing this question requires an analytical perspective capable of examining the normative assumptions embedded in policy frameworks. Green political theory provides such a perspective. Andrew Dobson (2001) distinguishes between environmentalism and ecologism as two different ideological orientations toward environmental issues. Environmentalism refers to a managerial approach that seeks to mitigate environmental damage without fundamentally challenging the political and economic structures that generate it. Ecologism, by contrast, calls for a transformative rethinking of the relationship between humans and nature, rejecting anthropocentric assumptions that reduce nature to a mere instrument for economic growth. [7]

Within the context of Siak Regency, environmental governance appears to reflect what Andrew Heywood (2017) describes as modernist ecology. This perspective acknowledges the existence of environmental problems but maintains that economic growth can continue alongside environmental protection through technological innovation, efficient management, and

regulatory frameworks. [8] In practice, this approach often results in what is known as weak sustainability, where environmental damage is considered acceptable as long as it can be compensated through economic gains or technological solutions. [9] Such assumptions raise concerns about whether current policies genuinely aim to transform exploitative land-use practices or merely seek to manage their consequences.

In response to environmental challenges, the regional government introduced the policy initiative known as “Siak Hijau” (Green Siak), formally institutionalized through Regional Regulation No. 22 of 2018 and later strengthened through Regional Regulation No. 4 of 2022. The program aims to integrate environmental conservation with economic development by promoting sustainable natural resource management, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, protecting peatland ecosystems, and improving community welfare. [10, 11] At the conceptual level, this policy framework represents an ambitious attempt to reconcile development and environmental protection within a single governance model.

However, several empirical studies indicate that the implementation of Siak Hijau remains constrained by structural limitations. Subhan et al. (2022) demonstrate that approximately 57.44 percent of Siak's territory consists of peatlands, ecosystems that are highly sensitive to disturbance and crucial for hydrological regulation. The ecological vulnerability of peatlands means that large-scale plantation expansion—particularly for acacia and oil palm—can significantly increase the risks of forest fires, carbon emissions, and hydrological instability. [12] Despite these ecological realities, peatland areas continue to be allocated for industrial forestry and plantation concessions. Reports by civil society organizations further indicate that dozens of industrial plantation forest permits and plantation concessions collectively occupy a substantial proportion of the regency's land area. [13]

Previous academic and policy analyses have attempted to address these challenges through various perspectives, including environmental governance, political ecology, and sustainable development. Studies such as Hidayat and Fajri (2026) examine the role of public policy in supporting sustainable development within Indonesia's palm oil industry, emphasizing the importance of regulatory frameworks and institutional coordination. Similarly, Ichlas (2020) analyzes the politics of peatland restoration in Indonesia, highlighting the tensions between environmental conservation and neoliberal economic policies. While these studies contribute valuable insights, they often focus on policy mechanisms or institutional arrangements rather than the ideological foundations that shape environmental governance.

This research therefore seeks to contribute to the existing literature by examining the ideological orientation of environmental policy in Siak through the framework of green ideology. Although the Siak Hijau initiative presents itself as a sustainability-oriented policy, there remains a significant gap in

understanding whether the policy embodies the principles of ecologism or merely reflects environmentalism in a managerial sense. Previous studies have rarely analyzed local environmental policy through the lens of green political thought, particularly in relation to agrarian conflict and peatland governance. This gap is significant because ideological assumptions influence how environmental problems are defined, which actors are prioritized, and what forms of solutions are considered legitimate.

Based on this analytical gap, the present study aims to analyze land exploitation conflicts in Siak Regency using the theoretical framework of green ideology. The research specifically examines the ideological orientation embedded in the Siak Hijau policy and its implications for the governance of peatland ecosystems and agrarian conflicts. The novelty of this study lies in integrating green political theory with empirical analysis of local environmental policy, thereby revealing how ideological assumptions shape environmental governance outcomes. The central hypothesis is that the Siak Hijau policy reflects the characteristics of environmentalism or modernist ecology rather than ecologism, resulting in a managerial approach that fails to address structural inequalities in land control. The scope of the research is limited to analyzing policy documents, academic literature, and civil society reports related to environmental governance and agrarian conflicts in Siak Regency, with a particular focus on the conflict involving PT Seraya Sumber Lestari and local communities.

2. Literature Review

This literature review examines the theoretical and empirical scholarship relevant to land-use conflict, environmental governance, and green political thought. The purpose of this section is to situate the study within the broader field of environmental politics and to clarify the conceptual framework used to analyze the agrarian conflict in Siak Regency. The discussion focuses on three main strands of literature: green political ideology, social ecology and ecological justice, and political ecology perspectives on resource conflicts. By synthesizing these bodies of scholarship, this section highlights the theoretical relationships between environmental ideology, structures of power, and ecological degradation, while also identifying the research gap addressed by this study.

Recent international studies have increasingly examined land-use conflicts and green governance within the broader framework of global environmental politics. Research on sustainability transitions highlights that green policy initiatives often coexist with extractive economic structures, particularly in developing regions where natural resources play a central role in economic development (Scoones et al., 2020; Temper et al., 2018). These studies demonstrate that environmental conflicts frequently emerge when state-led development projects intersect with local ecological systems and community land rights. Similarly, studies on environmental justice movements show that conflicts over land and natural resources are

not only ecological issues but also struggles over power, recognition, and participation in governance processes. Integrating these international perspectives helps situate the Siak case within broader global debates on green development and socio-ecological transformation.

2.1. Green Political Ideology and Environmental Thought

Green political ideology emerged as a critical response to the ecological crisis produced by industrial modernity. Rather than treating environmental problems as technical management issues, green theory interprets ecological degradation as the consequence of dominant economic and political systems that prioritize growth and resource extraction. Heywood (2017) explains that green political thought challenges anthropocentric assumptions embedded in modern development and calls for a fundamental transformation in the relationship between humans and nature.

Within the broader spectrum of green political thought, scholars distinguish between environmentalism and ecologism. Environmentalism generally seeks to reform existing political and economic systems so that environmental damage can be mitigated without fundamentally altering patterns of production and consumption. Ecologism, by contrast, proposes a deeper transformation of social structures, emphasizing ecological limits, intrinsic value of nature, and alternative models of development. [7]

The distinction between these two approaches is central to understanding contemporary environmental policies. Environmentalism often manifests in technocratic policy instruments such as sustainability certification, environmental impact assessments, and regulatory reforms. Although such instruments may reduce certain environmental impacts, critics argue that they frequently remain embedded within a growth-oriented economic paradigm. Ecologism, in contrast, questions the structural drivers of environmental degradation, particularly the capitalist imperative of continuous economic expansion.

The concept of “weak sustainability” also emerges in this debate. According to Heywood (2017), weak sustainability assumes that natural capital can be substituted by technological innovation or economic investment. From this perspective, environmental damage is considered manageable as long as economic growth generates resources for environmental restoration. However, many green theorists argue that this assumption underestimates ecological limits and risks legitimizing continued exploitation of natural ecosystems.

2.2. Social Ecology and the Critique of Hierarchical Society

One of the most influential contributions to radical ecological theory is the concept of social ecology developed by Mur-

ray Bookchin. Social ecology rejects the notion that environmental crises arise simply from human interaction with nature. Instead, Bookchin argues that ecological destruction originates from hierarchical social structures that allow some groups to dominate others and control natural resources. [8]

In Bookchin's framework, the domination of nature is inseparable from the domination of human beings. Hierarchies embedded within political, economic, and bureaucratic institutions reproduce patterns of exploitation that ultimately extend to the natural environment. Consequently, ecological crises cannot be resolved solely through technological innovation or environmental regulation. Instead, meaningful solutions require a transformation of social relations, particularly through democratization and decentralization of power.

Social ecology also critiques the economic logic of industrial capitalism. According to this perspective, capitalist systems operate under an imperative of continuous expansion often summarized as the "grow or die" dynamic. Economic actors must constantly expand production and resource extraction to remain competitive within the system. As a result, ecological considerations are subordinated to economic growth, leading to systematic environmental degradation.

Bahro (1982) similarly argues that modern environmental crises cannot be separated from the logic of capitalist accumulation. In his eco-socialist critique, nature becomes commodified and transformed into an economic asset that can be exploited for profit. This process reduces complex ecological systems to marketable resources and obscures the intrinsic value of natural ecosystems. Such commodification processes are particularly visible in the management of forests, peatlands, and agricultural landscapes in resource-rich regions.

2.3. Political Ecology and Resource Conflict

While green political theory provides normative critiques of modern development, the field of political ecology offers analytical tools for understanding environmental conflict in specific socio-political contexts. Political ecology examines how power relations, economic interests, and institutional arrangements shape the distribution of environmental resources and environmental burdens (Robbins, 2012).

Robbins (2012) identifies several recurring dynamics in environmental conflicts, including processes of degradation and marginalization. These processes occur when state policies or corporate expansion restrict community access to natural resources, forcing local populations into increasingly vulnerable socio-economic conditions. As access to land and resources declines, social tensions often intensify, creating conditions for open conflict.

Political ecology research also emphasizes the role of state institutions in mediating resource conflicts. In many developing regions, governments simultaneously function as regulators of environmental resources and facilitators of economic investment. This dual role often produces contradictory policies, where environmental protection goals coexist with

large-scale resource extraction projects.

Empirical research in Indonesia highlights these tensions within forest governance and peatland management. Studies on peatland policy demonstrate that restoration initiatives frequently intersect with competing development priorities, including plantation expansion and industrial forestry (Ichlas, 2020). Similarly, research on sustainable development policies in the palm oil sector indicates that regulatory frameworks often attempt to reconcile environmental protection with continued industrial growth (Hidayat and Fajri, 2026).

In the specific context of Riau Province, several studies have documented the environmental and social impacts of plantation expansion and forest concessions. Haryanto, Siregar, and Risaundi (2024) show that peatland ecosystems are closely linked to socio-economic conditions in rural communities. Environmental degradation in these ecosystems not only undermines biodiversity but also exacerbates local poverty and livelihood insecurity. [12]

Research on governance dynamics further reveals that corruption and regulatory manipulation can significantly shape land allocation processes. Yasa (2021) demonstrates how networks within forestry bureaucracies may influence licensing decisions, allowing corporations to secure access to large tracts of land. Such governance failures often marginalize local communities whose customary land rights remain weakly recognized within formal legal frameworks.

Other studies focusing on regional environmental initiatives highlight the challenges of implementing green development programs at the local level. Subhan, Meiwanda, and Putri (2022) analyze the stakeholder dynamics within the "Siak Hijau" program and show that coordination among government institutions, corporations, and communities remains uneven. [11] Similarly, Indah et al. (2024) identify several obstacles in the implementation of the Siak Green policy, including limited public participation and institutional fragmentation.

Environmental conflicts associated with industrial plantations have also been widely documented by civil society organizations and environmental researchers. Reports indicate that plantation expansion can generate tensions related to land rights, ecological degradation, and unequal distribution of economic benefits (WALHI Riau, 2025; Sahril, 2025). These conflicts frequently involve disputes between local communities and corporations operating under government-issued concessions.

2.4. Synthesis and Research Gap

The literature reviewed above demonstrates that environmental conflicts are shaped by complex interactions between ecological processes, political institutions, and economic structures. Green political theory highlights the ideological foundations of environmental governance, particularly the tension between reformist environmentalism and transformative ecologism. Social ecology further deepens this critique by

linking environmental destruction to hierarchical social structures and the expansionary logic of capitalist economies.

Political ecology, meanwhile, provides empirical insights into how these structural dynamics operate in specific contexts, including land conflicts, resource governance, and rural livelihoods. Research on peatland management and plantation expansion in Indonesia illustrates how state policies and corporate interests often reshape local landscapes while marginalizing community access to resources.

Despite these contributions, several gaps remain within the existing literature. First, many studies of agrarian conflict focus primarily on legal disputes over land ownership or administrative governance failures. While these analyses are valuable, they often overlook the ideological dimensions of environmental policy and development paradigms. Second, although political ecology research has examined land conflicts in Indonesia, relatively few studies integrate this empirical perspective with normative frameworks from green political ideology and social ecology. As a result, the broader ideological assumptions underlying environmental governance remain insufficiently explored.

This study addresses these gaps by combining the analytical insights of political ecology with the normative critique of green ideology and social ecology. Through this integrated approach, the research seeks to explain how environmental policies, economic structures, and power relations interact to shape land-use conflicts in Siak Regency. In doing so, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the political and ideological foundations of ecological conflict in contemporary Indonesia.

3. Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in three complementary theoretical perspectives: green ideology, social ecology, and political ecology. Green ideology provides a normative framework for analyzing how environmental policies conceptualize the relationship between economic development and ecological sustainability. Within green political theory, a key distinction exists between environmentalism and ecologism (Dobson, 2001). Environmentalism represents a reformist approach that attempts to mitigate environmental degradation without fundamentally transforming existing economic and political systems. In contrast, ecologism calls for structural changes in development models, emphasizing ecological limits, intrinsic value of nature, and social justice.

Social ecology further deepens this perspective by emphasizing that environmental crises are rooted in hierarchical social relations and unequal distribution of power (Bookchin, 1982). From this perspective, ecological degradation cannot be separated from political and economic structures that allow certain actors to dominate natural resources. Political ecology complements these perspectives by providing analytical tools to examine how environmental conflicts emerge from struggles over access, control, and governance of natural resources

(Robbins, 2012). By integrating these three approaches, this study analyzes environmental governance not only as a policy process but also as an ideological and structural phenomenon shaping land-use conflicts in Siak Regency.

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Sampling Strategy

This study uses purposive sampling in selecting documents relevant to environmental governance and land conflicts in Siak Regency. The selected materials include regional regulations, government reports, academic publications, and civil society reports that specifically address peatland management, plantation expansion, and agrarian conflicts.

4.2. Data Collection Procedure

The document collection process was conducted in three stages: 1) Identification of key policy documents related to the Siak Hijau program. 2) Compilation of academic and institutional studies discussing peatland governance and environmental conflicts in Riau Province. 3) Review of civil society reports and media publications documenting recent land disputes involving plantation companies and local communities.

4.3. Analytical Technique

The analysis applies qualitative content analysis combined with critical policy analysis. The process includes: thematic coding of policy narratives, identification of ideological assumptions in environmental discourse, interpretation using green political theory and political ecology frameworks.

4.4. Research Design

This research employs a qualitative research design using a case study approach to examine the ideological dimensions of land exploitation conflicts in Siak Regency. Qualitative research is appropriate for exploring complex socio-political and environmental phenomena because it allows researchers to interpret meanings, power relations, and ideological assumptions embedded in policy and social practice. The case study approach enables an in-depth investigation of a specific empirical context, namely the conflict surrounding land exploitation and environmental governance in Siak Regency, particularly in relation to the regional policy framework known as “Siak Hijau.” Through this approach, the study seeks to analyze how environmental discourse, policy formulation, and economic interests intersect in shaping land governance and environmental conflicts. The research focuses on examining how green ideology is articulated, interpreted, and implemented within regional environmental policy. By situating the analysis within the broader perspective of political

ecology and social ecology, the study investigates the ideological orientation underlying environmental governance and its implications for agrarian conflicts and natural resource management. Such an approach is essential for understanding how environmental narratives may simultaneously promote sustainability while accommodating extractive economic practices (Robbins, 2012; Heywood, 2017).

4.5. Research Approach

The study adopts an analytical framework grounded in green ideology and social ecology. Green ideology emphasizes the ethical, political, and ecological relationships between humans and nature and critically examines the structures that generate environmental degradation (Dobson, 2001). Meanwhile, social ecology highlights the interconnections between ecological crises and hierarchical social structures, arguing that environmental problems are deeply rooted in political and economic domination (Bookchin, 1982). By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the research aims to uncover the ideological assumptions embedded in environmental policy and land governance in Siak Regency. The framework also allows for the identification of tensions between environmental discourse and actual governance practices. This theoretical integration provides a critical lens through which environmental policies can be assessed beyond their formal objectives, focusing instead on their ideological foundations and socio-political consequences.

4.6. Research Site and Context

The research is conducted in Siak Regency, Riau Province, Indonesia, a region characterized by extensive peatland ecosystems and significant natural resource exploitation. Over the past decades, the region has experienced rapid expansion of plantation industries, particularly in the palm oil and pulp sectors, which has contributed to environmental degradation, peatland conversion, and land disputes involving corporations and local communities. In response to environmental challenges, the regional government introduced the “Siak Hijau” policy framework, which aims to promote sustainable development and environmentally responsible governance. This policy was formally institutionalized through Regional Regulation (Peraturan Daerah) Number 4 of 2022 concerning Siak Hijau. Despite its sustainability discourse, debates have emerged regarding the effectiveness and ideological orientation of the policy, particularly in addressing structural causes of environmental conflict and land exploitation.

4.7. Data Collection Techniques

Data for this research were collected through qualitative document analysis. The primary sources include regional policy documents, legal regulations, government reports, and official publications related to environmental governance and land management in Siak Regency. Key documents include

the Regional Regulation of Siak Regency Number 4 of 2022 on Siak Hijau, regional planning documents, and official environmental policy reports. Secondary data were obtained from academic literature, scholarly articles, books, and reports produced by civil society organizations that discuss environmental politics, agrarian conflict, and natural resource governance in Indonesia. These materials provide contextual understanding and theoretical insights relevant to the study. In addition, reports from non-governmental organizations and media publications were examined to capture broader perspectives regarding land conflicts and environmental governance in the region. Document analysis was chosen because policy documents and institutional texts often reflect underlying ideological orientations and political priorities. Examining these materials enables the researcher to identify how environmental narratives are constructed and how sustainability principles are translated into policy frameworks.

4.8. Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative critical analysis. This method involves interpreting texts and policy documents to identify ideological assumptions, policy orientations, and power relations embedded in environmental governance. The analysis process consists of several stages. First, relevant documents were systematically reviewed and categorized according to themes related to environmental governance, land exploitation, sustainability discourse, and agrarian conflict. Second, the texts were examined using concepts derived from green ideology and social ecology to identify ideological narratives and policy orientations. Third, the findings were interpreted in relation to the broader socio-political context of land conflicts in Siak Regency. Through this analytical process, the research seeks to reveal whether the Siak Hijau policy framework reflects a deep ecological transformation or merely represents a form of environmentalism that remains compatible with extractive economic structures. Such critical analysis is important for understanding the extent to which environmental policies address structural environmental problems or merely reproduce existing power relations (Dobson, 2001; Robbins, 2012).

4.9. Research Validity and Reliability

To ensure the credibility and reliability of the research findings, the study employs data triangulation through the use of multiple document sources, including policy documents, academic literature, and civil society reports. Comparing information from different sources helps to verify interpretations and reduce potential bias in the analysis. In addition, the research adopts a transparent analytical process by clearly outlining the theoretical framework, data sources, and interpretative procedures used in the study. Such transparency enhances the reliability of qualitative research by allowing other re-

searchers to understand and evaluate the methodological process.

4.10. Research Limitations

This research relies primarily on document-based analysis and therefore focuses on the ideological and policy dimensions of environmental governance. While this approach allows for a critical examination of policy discourse and institutional frameworks, it does not include extensive fieldwork or direct interviews with stakeholders. Consequently, the study emphasizes the structural and ideological aspects of environmental policy rather than the full range of experiential perspectives from local communities or corporate actors. Nevertheless, the methodological approach remains appropriate for the objective of this study, which is to analyze the ideological orientation of environmental policy and its relationship with land exploitation conflicts in Siak Regency. By focusing on policy discourse and institutional frameworks, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how environmental governance is shaped by ideological assumptions and political structures.

5. Research Findings

5.1. Overview of Land Exploitation Conflict in Siak Regency

The conflict over land exploitation in Siak Regency reflects a broader socio-ecological crisis shaped by the interaction between local communities, corporate actors, and state policies governing natural resources. [14, 15] The dispute involving the communities of Kampung Tumang and Merempun Hulu with PT Seraya Sumber Lestari (SSL) represents a critical manifestation of agrarian conflict in peatland areas of Riau Province. [16] The company operates under an Industrial Plantation Forest permit (IUPHHK-HTI) and functions as a supplier within the APRIL Group network. Reports from civil society organizations indicate that the company's operations have led to disputes regarding land ownership, environmental degradation, and the destruction of community oil-palm plantations. These tensions escalated into open conflict when community members protested corporate activities that were perceived to encroach upon customary and community-managed lands. [17] The burning of a company mess facility in June 2025 illustrates the escalation of grievances into direct confrontation.

Such conflicts illustrate what Indra et al. (2023) describe as structural ecological problems in Riau, where weak governance, overlapping regulations, and elite economic interests intersect in the management of forest and peatland resources. [5] In this context, agrarian conflict cannot be understood solely as a legal dispute over land tenure; rather, it represents a manifestation of deeper political-economic tensions embedded in

regional development strategies. [15]

5.2. Ideological Orientation of the “Siak Hijau” Policy

The Siak Regency government introduced the “Siak Hijau” policy framework as part of its commitment to environmentally oriented regional development. The policy was institutionalized through Regional Regulation (Peraturan Daerah) No. 4 of 2022, which aims to integrate environmental sustainability into local governance, spatial planning, and natural resource management. [10] Despite its normative commitment to sustainability, the analysis of policy documents reveals that the ideological orientation of Siak Hijau remains closely aligned with what green political theory identifies as environmentalism rather than ecologism. [7] According to Dobson (2007), environmentalism emphasizes managerial solutions to environmental problems while maintaining existing economic and political structures. [7] Environmental protection is treated as a technical challenge that can be addressed through improved regulation, technological innovation, and institutional management.

The Siak Hijau policy framework reflects this orientation by emphasizing conservation programs, restoration initiatives, and sustainable resource management strategies without fundamentally questioning the economic model based on large-scale plantation forestry and resource extraction. Development objectives such as investment expansion, industrial forestry production, and economic growth remain central to regional policy planning. This finding aligns with Heywood's (2017) characterization of modernist ecology, which acknowledges environmental degradation but maintains confidence that capitalist growth can be reconciled with ecological protection through mechanisms of “weak sustainability.” [8] In practice, such an approach tends to prioritize economic productivity while treating ecological concerns as constraints that must be managed rather than structural issues that require systemic transformation. [18]

5.3. Power Relations in Natural Resource Governance

The findings indicate that the governance of natural resources in Siak Regency is strongly shaped by asymmetrical power relations between corporate actors, the state, and local communities. [4, 14] Corporate entities operating within the industrial plantation forestry sector possess substantial economic resources, institutional access, and regulatory support, which enable them to secure long-term concessions over large areas of peatland. [16] At the same time, local communities frequently experience marginalization in decision-making processes related to land allocation and forest management. [6] Although formal mechanisms for public participation exist within environmental governance frameworks, these mecha-

nisms often function in a limited and procedural manner. Political ecology scholars emphasize that environmental conflicts are closely tied to questions of power, access, and control over natural resources. [4] In the case of Siak, the distribution of land concessions and forestry permits illustrates how regulatory systems can reinforce unequal power relations between communities and corporate actors.

Furthermore, historical patterns of forest concession allocation in Riau Province have created a landscape in which industrial forestry companies control extensive areas of peatland previously used by local communities for agriculture, fishing, and forest-based livelihoods. [19] This structural imbalance intensifies tensions whenever corporate operations expand or intersect with community-managed lands.

5.4. Socio-Ecological Impacts of Industrial Plantation Expansion

Industrial plantation expansion in peatland ecosystems generates a range of socio-ecological consequences. [20, 21] Environmentally, peatland conversion for plantation forestry alters hydrological systems, increases vulnerability to forest fires, and contributes to biodiversity loss. [1] These ecological transformations are particularly significant in Riau Province, where peatland degradation has been linked to recurring haze and forest fire crises. [12] From a social perspective, land conversion can disrupt local livelihood systems that depend on small-scale agriculture, forest products, and peatland ecosystems. [19] Communities in Kampung Tumang and Merempun Hulu reported concerns regarding the loss of productive land, reduced access to natural resources, and uncertainty surrounding land tenure.

The expansion of plantation forestry also alters traditional land-use practices and community governance structures. Local systems of resource management that previously regulated land use through customary norms are increasingly replaced by formal concession boundaries and corporate management regimes. [22] According to Bookchin's concept of social ecology, environmental crises are inseparable from social hierarchies and institutional structures that organize human interaction with nature. [23] In this perspective, ecological degradation emerges not merely from technological activities but from broader systems of domination embedded within political and economic institutions. [24]

5.5. Community Resistance and Environmental Justice Claims

Community resistance in Siak reflects broader demands for environmental justice and equitable resource governance. [15] Local communities have mobilized protests, engaged with civil society organizations, and raised concerns regarding the legitimacy of corporate land claims. Civil society groups such as WALHI have played an important role in documenting environmental impacts, advocating for community rights, and

raising awareness about governance failures within the forestry sector. [2] These advocacy efforts highlight issues related to permit transparency, corruption allegations in forestry licensing processes, and the lack of effective mechanisms for resolving agrarian conflicts. [6]

Environmental justice frameworks emphasize that ecological conflicts often involve unequal distributions of environmental benefits and burdens. [15] Communities that depend directly on local ecosystems frequently bear the social and environmental costs of large-scale resource extraction while receiving limited economic benefits. In the context of Siak, community resistance can therefore be interpreted not only as a reaction to land disputes but also as a broader critique of development models that prioritize industrial production over ecological sustainability and community welfare. [18]

5.6. Interpretation Through the Lens of Green Ideology

When interpreted through the framework of green ideology, the Siak case demonstrates the limitations of environmentalism-based policy approaches. [8] While the Siak Hijau initiative promotes sustainability narratives, the underlying development model remains consistent with extractive economic structures. [25] Green political theory distinguishes between environmentalism and ecologism as two fundamentally different responses to ecological crisis. Environmentalism seeks to mitigate environmental damage without altering the core dynamics of industrial capitalism, whereas ecologism calls for a deeper transformation of social, economic, and political systems. [7]

The empirical findings of this study indicate that environmental governance in Siak largely reflects the environmentalist paradigm. Policy instruments emphasize conservation programs and regulatory improvements but do not challenge the concentration of land control within industrial plantation concessions. [16]

Consequently, environmental policy operates within the same structural conditions that generate ecological degradation and social conflict. Without addressing these structural dimensions, initiatives labeled as “green” risk functioning primarily as symbolic commitments rather than transformative environmental governance strategies. [18]

5.7. Summary of Key Findings

The results of this research reveal several interconnected dynamics shaping land exploitation conflicts in Siak Regency. First, agrarian disputes between local communities and plantation forestry companies are rooted in structural inequalities in land governance and resource control. [16, 19] Second, the Siak Hijau policy framework, while rhetorically committed to environmental sustainability, reflects the ideological orientation of environmentalism rather than ecologism. [7, 8] Third,

corporate influence and regulatory structures create asymmetrical power relations that marginalize community participation in natural resource decision-making. [4]

Finally, the expansion of industrial plantation forestry in peatland ecosystems produces significant socio-ecological

consequences, including environmental degradation, livelihood disruption, and escalating community resistance. These findings reinforce the importance of analyzing environmental conflicts not only through legal or administrative perspectives but also through ideological and political frameworks that shape the governance of natural resources. [15, 18]

Table 1. Key Findings of Environmental Governance in Siak Regency.

Aspect	Findings	Interpretation
Policy orientation	Focus on sustainability programs	Environmentalism
Land governance	Dominated by corporate concessions	Power asymmetry
Community participation	Limited and procedural	Weak environmental democracy
Ecological impact	Peatland degradation and fire risk	Unsustainable development
Conflict dynamics	Increasing community resistance	Environmental justice issue

6. Discussion

The findings of this research reveal that the land exploitation conflict in Siak Regency cannot be adequately explained through legal-administrative frameworks alone. Rather, the conflict represents a deeper socio-ecological contradiction between an extractive development model and the ecological limits of peatland ecosystems. The dispute between local communities in Kampung Tumang and Merempun Hulu and PT Seraya Sumber Lestari illustrates how environmental conflicts are embedded in broader ideological and structural dynamics shaping natural resource governance in Indonesia. Previous studies have noted that environmental governance in Riau is often characterized by overlapping regulations, weak enforcement, and elite capture, which collectively sustain patterns of ecological degradation (Indra et al., 2023). Within this context, the persistence of agrarian conflict reflects the inability of conventional policy approaches to address the ideological foundations of resource exploitation.

From the perspective of green political theory, the empirical findings support the argument that environmental policies in Siak largely operate within the paradigm of environmentalism rather than ecologism. Environmentalism, as explained by Dobson (2001), represents a managerial approach that attempts to mitigate environmental damage without fundamentally transforming existing political and economic structures. The Siak Hijau policy framework, institutionalized through Regional Regulation No. 4 of 2022, embodies this orientation by emphasizing sustainable resource management while simultaneously maintaining the expansion of industrial forestry and plantation economies. The coexistence of conservation rhetoric and extractive economic practices suggests that environmental governance in Siak remains firmly embedded within the logic of

modernist ecology. Heywood (2017) describes this paradigm as one that recognizes environmental problems but assumes that capitalist economic growth can continue through technological innovation and regulatory adjustments.

The case of PT Seraya Sumber Lestari demonstrates the limitations of this approach. Although corporate actors often claim to operate within sustainability frameworks through compliance with administrative instruments such as annual work plans and licensing procedures, these mechanisms frequently function as forms of bureaucratic legitimacy rather than genuine ecological safeguards. The reliance on technical compliance as evidence of sustainability reflects what political ecology scholars identify as the technocratization of environmental governance, in which complex socio-ecological problems are reframed as technical issues that can be solved through administrative management (Robbins, 2012). However, the escalation of conflict between local communities and the company suggests that such managerial mechanisms are insufficient to address the structural inequalities underlying land control and resource access.

The ecological characteristics of peatland landscapes further complicate the sustainability claims associated with industrial plantation expansion. Peat ecosystems possess unique hydrological and ecological functions, including carbon storage, water regulation, and biodiversity support. Studies on peatland management in Riau indicate that large-scale conversion of peat forests into monoculture plantations significantly alters these ecological systems and increases the risk of environmental disasters such as fires and haze pollution. In Siak Regency, peatland ecosystems constitute a substantial proportion of the regional territory, making them central to both environmental protection and local livelihoods (Subhan et al., 2022). Consequently, policies that prioritize industrial exploitation without addressing ecological limits risk undermining the long-term

sustainability of the region's socio-ecological systems.

The empirical findings also reveal the persistence of anthropocentric assumptions in natural resource governance. Within the dominant development paradigm, nature is primarily valued in terms of its economic utility, while ecological systems are treated as resources that must be managed for continued productivity. Green political theorists identify anthropocentrism as a key driver of environmental degradation because it positions human economic interests above ecological integrity (Dobson, 2001). In the case of Siak, peatlands are frequently represented in policy discourse as underutilized economic assets that must be optimized through plantation development. This framing obscures the ecological complexity of peat ecosystems and reduces environmental protection to a question of resource management rather than ecological preservation.

The conflict between local communities and PT Seraya Sumber Lestari therefore reflects a broader clash between two competing understandings of human–nature relations. On one side stands the market-oriented logic of industrial expansion, which prioritizes economic growth, production efficiency, and capital accumulation. On the other side lies the ecological knowledge embedded within local livelihood systems that depend on the stability of peatland environments. For many rural communities in Siak, land is not merely an economic asset but a socio-ecological space that sustains cultural identity, subsistence activities, and community cohesion. When corporate land concessions encroach upon these spaces, the resulting conflict is not only material but also ideological, involving fundamentally different interpretations of how humans should relate to nature.

The persistence of this conflict can be further understood through the lens of social ecology. According to Bookchin (1982), environmental crises are inseparable from hierarchical social structures that allow certain groups to dominate both other humans and the natural environment. In this perspective, ecological degradation is not simply the result of technological activity but rather a manifestation of unequal power relations embedded within political and economic institutions. The governance of land concessions in Siak illustrates this dynamic, as corporate actors often possess greater political influence and economic resources than local communities. This asymmetry shapes decision-making processes regarding land allocation, environmental regulation, and conflict resolution, frequently marginalizing community interests.

Evidence of corruption and irregularities in forestry licensing processes further highlights the structural nature of this power imbalance. Research on governance in Riau has documented networks of political and bureaucratic actors involved in manipulating forestry permits and regulatory approvals (Yasa, 2021). Such practices illustrate how environmental governance can become entangled with broader systems of political patronage and economic interests. When regulatory institutions themselves are embedded within these networks, environmental policies risk becoming instruments for legiti-

mizing resource extraction rather than mechanisms for ecological protection.

Community resistance in Siak must therefore be interpreted within this structural context. Acts of protest, including demonstrations and confrontations with corporate actors, represent attempts by marginalized communities to defend their access to land and ecological resources. Political ecology scholarship emphasizes that conflicts over natural resources frequently emerge when local populations experience processes of marginalization and dispossession resulting from state-supported development projects (Robbins, 2012). In such circumstances, environmental conflict becomes a form of social struggle over justice, recognition, and access to ecological resources. These dynamics also reveal the limitations of sustainability narratives that emphasize collaboration between governments and private sector actors without addressing underlying power asymmetries. Initiatives such as multi-stakeholder partnerships or corporate sustainability coalitions may provide platforms for dialogue, but they rarely challenge the structural concentration of land control within industrial concessions. As a result, sustainability discourse risks functioning as a legitimizing framework that allows extractive activities to continue under the label of “green development.” This phenomenon has been widely criticized in environmental governance literature as a form of greenwashing, in which ecological language masks the continuation of environmentally harmful practices.

The findings of this study therefore reinforce the argument that meaningful environmental transformation requires a shift from environmentalism toward a more radical ecological paradigm. Ecologism, in contrast to environmentalism, calls for a fundamental reconfiguration of economic and political systems to align human activities with ecological limits (Dobson, 2001). Such a transformation would involve recognizing the intrinsic value of ecosystems, strengthening community rights over natural resources, and restructuring development policies to prioritize ecological resilience over short-term economic growth.

In the context of Siak Regency, this implies that resolving agrarian conflict cannot rely solely on technical regulatory reforms or improved administrative procedures. Instead, it requires a deeper reconsideration of how natural resources are governed and who holds authority over land use decisions. Policies that seek to reconcile conservation and industrial expansion without addressing structural inequalities are unlikely to produce lasting solutions. Rather, a more transformative approach to environmental governance—one that integrates ecological limits, social justice, and participatory decision-making—may offer a more viable pathway toward sustainable and equitable land management in peatland regions.

7. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that the agrarian conflict surrounding peatland exploitation in Siak Regency cannot be understood merely as a legal dispute or administrative failure in land

governance. Instead, the conflict represents a deeper socio-ecological crisis rooted in the ideological and structural tension between capitalist development and the sustainability of local ecological systems. By employing the framework of green ideology, this research reveals that the regional policy of “Siak Hijau” remains largely embedded within the paradigm of environmentalism rather than ecologism. The policy attempts to manage environmental degradation without fundamentally transforming the political-economic structures that drive resource exploitation. Consequently, environmental protection is framed primarily as a managerial strategy compatible with economic growth rather than as a transformative ecological commitment. The findings further indicate that the governance of natural resources in Siak continues to be shaped by an anthropocentric perspective in which peatland ecosystems are valued mainly for their economic utility. Licensing practices for industrial forest plantations and large-scale plantations demonstrate how ecological functions and community livelihoods are frequently subordinated to capital accumulation. Through the integration of green ideology and social ecology, this study highlights that ecological degradation is closely linked to hierarchical power relations that privilege state–corporate alliances over local communities. The conflict involving PT Seraya Sumber Lestari therefore reflects a broader structural imbalance in the distribution of power, access, and environmental risk.

The primary contribution of this study lies in advancing the analysis of environmental politics in Indonesia by bridging theoretical insights from green political thought and social ecology with empirical examination of local agrarian conflicts. This approach demonstrates that ecological crises should be understood not only as environmental problems but also as manifestations of socio-political inequality embedded in resource governance systems. The study also challenges technocratic interpretations of sustainable development that rely heavily on regulatory instruments while neglecting structural transformation and ecological justice.

In terms of policy implications, this research suggests that regional environmental governance should move beyond administrative sustainability frameworks toward more transformative ecological governance. Strengthening community land rights, improving transparency in licensing processes, and integrating local ecological knowledge into environmental planning are crucial steps for reducing socio-ecological conflicts. Furthermore, regional green policies should incorporate stronger mechanisms for participatory decision-making and ecological protection in peatland management.

Abbreviations

APRIL	Asia Pacific Resources International Limited
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PT	Perseroan Terbatas

Riau	Riau Province
Siak	Siak Regency
SSL	Seraya Sumber Lestari
WALHI	Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia

Author Contributions

Arya Ramadhan: Conceptualization, Methodology, Resources

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the outcome of this research work has been reported in this manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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