

DENR issues guidelines providing livelihood for mining communities

By BusinessMirror, March 5, 2017

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has issued policy guidelines for two major programs designed to provide mining communities with sustainable livelihood opportunities while protecting the environment.

In line with her promise to give sustainable livelihood programs to affected mining communities, Environment Secretary Regina Paz L. Lopez signed Department Administrative Orders (DAO) 2017-02 and 2017-05.

DAO 2017-02 calls for the formulation and implementation of a six-year Sustainable Integrated Area Development (SIAD) Action Plan by the government, civil society and the private sector, while DAO 2017-05 gives the guidelines on the implementation of the Biochar Program, an initiative that uses the SIAD approach.

An environmental advocate, Lopez defines SIAD as “an approach, a strategy and a guiding philosophy that weaves environmental considerations with social justice and human development”.

Lopez said the SIAD strategy aims to apply area-based interventions and concepts on its natural resources development programs, including the Enhanced National Greening Program (eNGP), and integrated island development.

The eNGP is a massive reforestation program of the government that doubles as investments toward sustainable community enterprise.

SIAD will cover, but is not limited to, river basins and watersheds and will be initially implemented in 29 priority sites and expansion areas identified by the DENR.

“Beginning this year, SIAD will be implemented in other areas of the Philippines as long as the implementers follow our guidelines and the principles behind this strategy,” Lopez said.

SIAD is pursuant to the provisions of the 1987 Constitution on the policy of the State “to protect and advance the right of the people to a balanced and healthful ecology in accord with the rhythm and harmony of nature” and on the “promotion of social justice and human rights, including the commitment to create economic opportunities based on freedom of initiative and self-reliance.”

“This strategy is also in response to the clamor of the Filipino people for a system of governance that will finally reverse centuries’ worth of human suffering, environmental desolation, societal discrimination, moral hazard and historical injustice toward activating the full potential of the Philippines within the next 15 years,” Lopez said.

Lopez said the Biochar Program calls for the wise utilization of abundant agricultural waste materials into marketable products created by rural communities for green energy, soil enhancement, mine revegetation, and a host of environmental products and services, making it a remarkable climate-change mitigation technology with poverty alleviation through community enterprise.

Biochar is charred biomass strictly from agricultural waste like rice hull and straw, bagasse, *pili* shell, mango seed, coconut husk and shell and corn cobs, which are produced by high heating with very limited oxygen. Lopez clarified that cutting of trees to serve as raw materials for biochar is “strictly prohibited.”

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