

DENR, USAID launch P1.2-billion biodiversity-conservation project

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In Photo: Sen. Cynthia A. Villar (from left), United States Ambassador to the Philippines Sung Kim and Environment Secretary Regina Paz L. Lopez exchange pleasantries during the Department of Environment and Natural Resources-United States Agency for International Development launching of Protect Wildlife Project, a new biodiversity-conservation project to help protect and manage the Philippines's diverse habitats and species, at a hotel in Quezon City on Monday. The project will use a comprehensive strategy that combines technical assistance for government and civil-society partners, partnership for conservation financing, behavior-change campaigns and social marketing, science and technology, and environmental law enforcement.

To enhance the protection and conservation of the country's rich biological diversity, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has partnered with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to launch Protect Wildlife Project.

A five-year, P1.2-billion project, Protect Wildlife aims to address biodiversity loss and wildlife trafficking in the Philippines.

Proponents of the project have identified two pilot areas. These are the Palawan province, including Tubbataha Reef; and the Sulu Archipelago, including Zamboanga City and Tawi-Tawi province.

Environment Secretary Regina Lopez and US Ambassador to the Philippines Sung Kim led the launch during simple rites held at Sequoia Hotel in Quezon City on Monday.

Coorganized by the USAID and the DENR's Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB), the event was part of the World Wildlife Day, which was celebrated on March 3.

A follow through of the continuing collaboration between the two governments along with the private sector, civil society and individual communities to strengthen natural and environmental resource management in the country, Kim said the project aims to highlight the importance of biodiversity in improving the quality of life and ensuring sustainable development in the Philippines.

“‘Protect wildlife’ is not only the name of our project. It is also the imperative for all of us to take care of the species with which we share the planet,” he said in a news statement.

For her part, Lopez said: “Conservation is not protecting nature from people. It is protecting nature for people.”

The perspective of the DENR under her leadership was area development, and making sure that the resources, especially its flora and fauna, in an area are enjoyed by the people themselves, Lopez said.

She added that nurturing the country’s endemic species was the country’s contribution to humanity.

“Wildlife is therefore an integral part of developing areas. Taking care of them will give us great ecotourism zones that can help people in the communities and lift them out of poverty,” Lopez stated.

DENR-BMB Director Theresa Mundita Lim welcomed the launching of the Protect Wildlife Project, saying the project focuses on improving the benefits provided by ecosystems for food, water, livelihood and ecotourism.

“With the Philippines being both one of the world’s most megadiverse countries and a critical biodiversity hot spot, we need to see how we can communicate development programs more effectively so that people will appreciate better the benefits of conservation,” Lim said.

She added among the strategies to be used in the project include improving the attitude and behavior of stakeholders toward biodiversity, and intensifying their involvement in conserving and financing biodiversity initiatives.

The project will also enhance the competencies of stakeholders and implementers, such as local government units, civil-society organizations, academe and other government agencies on biodiversity conservation.

Lim said the project also highlights the need to fight threats posed by wildlife trafficking, illegal fishing, land-use conversion, irresponsible mining and indifference of stakeholders.

“The more habitats deteriorate and wildlife existence is endangered, the less we benefit from the goods and services that ecosystems provide to sustain human life,” Lim pointed out.