

# DENR Oks P175M for Quirino watershed rehab

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THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has approved P175-million fund for the protection of Quirino province's watershed areas on the verge of being degraded as a result of upland farmers' use of chemical compound against perennial weeds, among others.

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Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu has approved the implementation and funding of two priority environment protection programs of the province which include the Quirino Protection of Watersheds, Ecosystems and Rivers (QPOWER) for P155-million and the Enhanced National Greening Program (ENGP) for P20 million.

Gov. Junie Cua said Quirino had adopted a massive watershed rehabilitation program, utilizing high value crops, among others, as an effective forest cover to prevent soil degradation and river siltation.

It is believed that the introduction of glyphosate in eradicating weeds and making it easy for upland farmers to cultivate even steep slopes, converting them into corn plantation which has deteriorated watershed areas causing soil erosion and river siltation.

Quirino province is a mountainous area of about 70 percent and 20 percent of its population live in the uplands. Its topography is dominated by the rugged and forested Sierra Madre Mountain Range.

It has a total area of 305,718 hectares with only 23 percent or 70,258 hectares are alienable and disposable lands while 77 percent or 235,460 hectares are classified as forestlands.

Cua said the province, being the headwaters of the Cagayan River system, plays a great role on watershed rehabilitation and protection to avoid flooding and river siltation in the whole Cagayan Valley.

"The degraded watershed areas can still be developed into a sustainable agroforestry industry if properly rehabilitated and managed by upland farmers with full support from the government," Cua pointed out.

During the 46th Quirino Day celebration held recently, Cimatu lauded the initiative of the provincial government saying, "I am impressed by the provincial leaders' progressive mindset that propels greater development for the province."

Cimatu said he plans to make the provincial QPOWER and ENGP programs as model for the country's forest protection programs.

QPOWER is a watershed rehabilitation program which covers 16 barangay (villages) while the ENGP is a reforestation program covering three villages with 260 hectares.

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