

DENR in 2018: Exceeding targets, Boracay as biggest accomplishment

By [BusinessMirror](#)
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Tourists frolic on the world-famous Boracay beach in June 2017.

The year 2018 was marked with hits and misses as far as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is concerned.

Having its hands full following President Duterte’s marching order to rehabilitate Boracay Island in Malay, Aklan, the DENR, however, exceeded its year-end targets for environmental programs on solid waste management, clean air and clean water, which are among the top priorities of Environment Secretary Roy A. Cimatu.

On the other hand, it took the department more than a year to resolve controversial mine closure and suspension orders, during which mining companies accused of failing environmental standards were able to continue their operation.

Cimatu considered the successful rehabilitation of Boracay as the “single biggest accomplishment” of the DENR in 2018 after the agency—along with other government offices—devoted much of its time, effort and resources to carry out the President’s directive.

“What we have done in Boracay could well serve as one of the DENR’s best legacies. We have done something, but we will not stop there,” Cimatu was quoted in a December 27 news release.

Cimatu is hopeful to replicate the success of the Boracay rehabilitation in the heavily polluted Manila Bay.

Boracay rehabilitation

As early as March 2018, the DENR has had its hands full preparing for the rehabilitation of Boracay, the country's top tourist destination, which no less than Duterte once tagged as the country's biggest cesspool.

Having been tapped to lead the rehabilitation of the world-renowned tourism site, the department launched a massive crackdown on erring tourism establishments, deploying close to 200 of its officials and personnel—including experts in various fields, from the department's central and regional offices, including those assigned in various units, bureaus and offices—to work with stakeholders.

The six-month closure, which began from April 26, 2018, until its reopening on October 26, 2018, proved taxing as other issues were momentarily set aside—including the resolution of contested mine closure and suspension orders issued by Cimatu's predecessor, Regina Paz L. Lopez.

Nevertheless, the DENR claimed to have succeeded in removing the cesspool tag on Boracay by instituting corrective measures, including the dismantling of illegal structures in supposedly “no-build” zones along beachfronts; implementing a road-widening program; addressing garbage problems; and, more important, preventing the direct discharge of untreated wastewater from tourism-related establishments near beachfronts.

The site's rehabilitation has set a new benchmark in tourism areas, as the DENR has been ordered to strictly implement various environmental laws in known beach and coastal or marine ecotourism magnets elsewhere in the country, including Palawan, Mindoro in Luzon, Siargao in Mindanao and Panglao in Bohol.

Exceeding targets

In a report to Cimatu, DENR Undersecretary for Policy, Planning and International Affairs Jonas R. Leones said the agency's program on solid waste management topped the list of the DENR's major accomplishments in 2018.

For one, the DENR was able to exceed its own target in the implementation of rehabilitation and closure plans of open and controlled dumps by 22 percent.

“Through its Environmental Management Bureau [EMB], the DENR was supposed to monitor only 535 closure and rehabilitation plans of local government units [LGUs] this year, but it ended up monitoring 654 as of November,” Leones said in his report, covering the DENR accomplishments from January to November 2018.

As of end November 2018, the EMB also monitored 919 materials-recovery facilities, around 11 percent higher than the original target of 829 MRFs for 2018.

“Both the implementation of closure and rehabilitation plans and the establishment of MRFs by LGUs are mandated under Republic Act 9003 [RA], or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000,” Leones added.

Also this year, the National Solid Waste Management Commission was able to approve a record 322 solid-waste management plans (SWMPs) of LGUs, bringing to 806 the total number of approved SWMPs since the enactment of RA 9003.

Clean air, water programs

Leones reported that the DENR surpassed its 2018 targets in the implementation of RA 8749, or the Clean Air Act of 1999.

The EMB registered a 102-percent accomplishment in terms of monitoring the compliance of industries to emission standards set by the EMB. A total of 16,117 industries were monitored for their emissions in 2018.

There was also 100-percent accomplishment in the formulation and updating of 22 airshed action plans and maintenance of 98 air quality monitoring stations (AQMS) across the country.

Properly maintained AQMS are crucial to the monitoring of air quality in Metro Manila and other urban centers.

As part of its implementation of RA 9275, or the Clean Water Act of 2004, the DENR was able to monitor the compliance of 8,664 firms or industries, equivalent to 122 percent of the annual target of 7,123.

The DENR had also entered into 92 agreements with LGUs under the Adopt an Estero, or Water Body Program, instead of the original target of 64.

Six new water quality management areas (WQMAs) were also designated this year. These are Upper Amburayan River System; Lower Amburayan River System; Dupong, Matlang and Merida; Malabon-Navotas-Tullahan-Tinajeros River System; Iyam-Dumacaa Rivers; and Las Piñas-Parañaque River System.

WQMA is a significant tool in enforcing the country’s clean water law. It aims for the improvement of water quality to meet the guidelines under which water bodies have been classified or to improve their classification and meet their potential use, he added.

As soon as he assumed the DENR post in May 2017, Cimatú vowed to prioritize environmental protection through full implementation of existing laws on clean air, clean water and solid waste management.

Reforestation, other programs

Meanwhile, Leones reported that the National Greening Program (NGP) also ended on a high note.

A total of 144,827,921 seedlings have been produced in 2018, exceeding the target by 5 percent.

On the other hand, a total of 125,214 hectares, or 92 percent, of the annual target of 135,859 hectares have been planted with 116,502,217 seedlings of various commodities nationwide.

Further, 1,175 forest-protection officers have been hired, including the total accomplishment of 508 in Payapa at Masaganang Pamayanan (Pamana).

To date, 108,353 kilometers of forests have been patrolled, 38,879 have been accomplished more than the annual target of 69,474 kilometers.

On lands disposition, a total of 17,044 (81 percent) agricultural and 36,605 (82 percent) residential patents have been issued to untitled public alienable and disposable lands of the public domain out of the annual targets of 21,163 and 44,740, respectively.

Disappointed on mining performance

Meanwhile, the nongovernment group Alyansa Tigil Mina (ATM) welcomed the accomplishment report of the DENR for 2018.

“We are glad the DENR has exceeded its performance targets in the fields of solid waste management, air-pollution monitoring and water-quality assessments. We also give credit to the DENR for the rehabilitation of Boracay,” Jaybee Garganera, ATM national coordinator, told the BusinessMirror.

However, Garganera said the alliance “is disappointed with the performance of the department in addressing mining issues, particularly in the performance of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau [MGB].”

“We have yet to see the report of the fact-finding mission in Surigao del Sur after the landslides and floods brought by Typhoon Basyang in January 2018,” he said.

Garganera said his group has not seen any concrete action “in the demands for rehabilitation, repair and compensation to mining-affected communities in Santa Cruz [Zambales], Aroroy [Masbate] and Narra [Palawan].”

“Communities affected by OceanaGold in Didipio, Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya, have submitted a petition for nonrenewal of the Didipio Gold Mining Project, but [they] still have not received any concrete response,” he pointed out. “Worse, anti-mining and environmental activists in Didipio have been erroneously and maliciously tagged as communists supporters, which is a baseless accusation.”

Garganera said the “most disappointing fact” is that the mine closures and suspension orders issued against 26 mining projects “have not been fully enforced by DENR.”

“This, despite the recent review of the MICC [Mining Industry Coordinating Council] and the DENR itself that there are enough legal, technical and social basis to enforce the closures,” he added.

“Our deepest disappointment is that 2018 [is over] but President Duterte has not issued his executive order to ban open-pit mining, a promise that he has made repeatedly and publicly in the past,” Garganera lamented.

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