

U.S. launches P1.1-billion Sibol project for PHL biodiversity conservation



By **Jonathan L. Mayuga**

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USAID's new biodiversity project will protect Cleopatra's Needle in Puerto Princesa City as a critical habitat for wildlife.

The United States government recently launched the Philippines Sustainable Interventions for Biodiversity, Oceans and Landscapes (Sibol) project that will support the management of the country's natural resources and combat environmental crimes.

The five-year P1.1-billion project will be implemented through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

It aims to help the government achieve its goal of improving natural resource governance and stimulate public and private investments leading to a greater ecosystem stability and inclusive green growth, USAID said in a news release.

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Under the project, USAID will work closely with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources.

"Effective conservation management and measurement of the value of natural resources contribute to the Philippines's economic development and environmental resilience," explained Lawrence Hardy II, mission director of USAID Philippines.

"Through Sibol, USAID is pleased to support the Philippines's efforts to conserve the country's rich biodiversity while improving the livelihoods of Filipinos whose incomes depend upon these natural resources," Hardy added.

RTI International, a US-based nonprofit organization, will lead the implementation of the Sibol project, building on its three decades of experience providing technical assistance, institutional strengthening, programmatic support, and research in a variety of sectors in the Philippines.

The Center for Conservation Innovations, Forest Foundation Philippines, Internews, Zoological Society of London, and the Resources, Environment and Economics Center for Studies will comprise the consortium partnering with RTI.

In the same news release, DENR Undersecretary Juan Miguel T. Cuna, for Policy, Planning and International Affairs, welcomed partnership with USAID.

"Ensuring ecosystem integrity and human well-being are among the key priorities of DENR," he said.

He said the DENR “look forward to partnering with USAID in advancing our goals of environmental sustainability and strengthening DENR’s capacity to combat environmental criminals, enhance the adaptive capacities of communities against natural disasters, as well as improve the economic conditions of affected local people.”

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Sought for reaction, DENR Assistant Secretary Ricardo Calderon said Sibol is a long-term investment program of the USAID.

Sibol is a product of a consortium of different consultancy groups commissioned to do the project, Calderon told the BusinessMirror in a telephone interview.

“Because of the pandemic, the project is very timely especially on building back a better nature. This is a very important project because for us to bounce back, we need to go back to biodiversity conservation and investment in natural resources conservation,” Calderon, concurrent director of Biodiversity Management Bureau, said.

This is a very crucial element of the project in partnership with key agencies of the government implementing land resources and coastal management, he added.

“We are looking at it as an area of convergence to enhance biodiversity conservation and sustainable development,” the BMB chief said.

Since 2014, USAID has provided more than P5 billion in assistance to the Philippine government in conserving the country’s biodiversity and protecting its landscapes and seascapes.

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