

‘Half of PHL needs biodiversity protection’

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Aerial view of mangrove forest and river on Siargao island.

MORE than half of the Philippine archipelago should be protected to preserve rare and endangered species and high-biodiversity areas, according to US-based scientists.

The report, “A ‘Global Safety Net’ (GSN) to reverse biodiversity loss and stabilize the Earth’s climate,” said 54 percent or 15.8 million hectares of the Philippines should be considered protected land or areas.

However, only 15 percent of the country is currently considered protected areas. This means an additional 36 percent should be protected to preserve rare and endangered species and another 2 percent to conserve high-biodiversity areas.

“If we fail to protect lands for ecosystem services and carbon sequestration, we will not be able to achieve the Paris Climate Agreement. The two conventions are intertwined,” Karl Burkart, [One Earth](#) managing director, said.

One Earth is one of the institutions that came up with the GSN.

“There is a very finite amount of natural land that could be converted to human use before we lose the 1.5-degree Celsius window. Therefore, we need to protect all remaining natural lands by 2030—approximately 50 percent of the Earth—in order to save biodiversity and stabilize our global climate system,” he said.

A group of scientists and experts produced the first comprehensive global-scale analysis of terrestrial areas essential for biodiversity and climate resilience, totaling 50.4 percent of the Earth’s land.

It highlights the importance of protecting and restoring the natural world to address three converging crises—climate change, the loss of biodiversity, and the emergence of novel viruses such as Covid-19.

Based on the report, the Philippines is also ranked 45th out of 70 large countries with a protection level of 3. This means only about 30 percent of the country’s biologically important land is currently protected.

The Protection Level is a simple score of 0 to 10 based on the percentage of biologically important lands identified in the GSN that are currently designated as protected by each government as recorded in the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA).

A score of 0 indicates that less than 5 percent of areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services are protected. A score of 10 indicates that more than 95 percent of these lands are protected, with a score of 5 indicating that roughly half of important lands are protected.

Those in the Asean-5 that are part of the large country classification include Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. Thailand was ranked 19th with a protection level of 6; Malaysia, 42nd with a protection level of 3; and Indonesia, 47th with a protection level of 2.

“The Global Safety Net shows a way forward to conserve wild places and ensure that nature isn’t something left in a few remote, far-off places. All of humanity deserve access

to nature and the myriad of benefits it provides to our mental, physical and spiritual health,” Carly Vynne-Baker, strategic partner at research firm Resolve, said.

The report concludes that an additional 35.3 percent of land is needed to conserve sites of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Some 50 ecoregions and 20 countries contribute disproportionately to the total. One immediate priority identified is the protection of 2.3 percent of land area, which provides critical habitat for the world’s most endangered species.

The paper presents for the first time a “common but differentiated” approach for area-based targets under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, which will be held next year in Kunming, China.

Each of the world’s 846 ecoregions has a unique combination of layers, offering recommended area-based conservation targets for each country.

The two-year research effort builds upon multiple global-scale data sets to identify areas that require conservation beyond the 15.1 percent of land area currently protected.

These are compiled into five main layers at a 1- kilometer resolution: Species Rarity Sites, High Biodiversity Areas, Large Mammal Landscapes, Intact Wilderness, and Climate Stabilization Areas.

The research team was led by the research organization RESOLVE in collaboration with the University of Minnesota, Arizona State University, Globaia, and others with support from One Earth.

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