

Palawan's Mount Mantalingahan mapped to protect, develop Pts265 billion worth of resources

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Upland farmers now practice sustainable agriculture on Mount Mantalingahan, protecting its forests and producing agricultural commodities and products.

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THE highest peak in Palawan will now be preserved, protected and developed through a land-use plan (LUP), mapping its economic resources valued at P265 billion.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said that 206,567 hectares of Mount Mantalingahan's protected landscape had been zoned, a news release said.

The LUP is part of DENR's technical assistance program called "Protect Wildlife Project" funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The zoned area also includes forest land outside the protected area of 153,836 hectares.

Mapping for economic benefits

THE mapping of Mount Mantalingahan Protected Landscape (MMPL) is a powerful tool in defining the activities appropriate for each zone and prescribing what is allowed in each area.

With its 120,457 hectares of forest, Mount Mantalingahan is the headwater for 33 watersheds, according to the DENR.

The agency said it is important to preserve the habitat of many important species of animals in Mount Mantalingahan—the Philippine cockatoo, the talking mynah, the blue-naped parrot and the Philippine pangolin, among other highly endangered wildlife.

Production area totaling to 82,469 hectares of protected area and 71,367 hectares of conservation area have also been designated under the Forest Land Use Plan (FLUP) of Southern Palawan.

Ecosystem services from MMPL's rich natural resources bring about economic benefit to the community valued at P265 billion (\$5.5 billion), according to Jeanne G. Tabangay, managing director of Palawan Biodiversity Conservation Corridor.

“This was based on a 2008 study conducted by Conservation International as there were claims that the mining resources in Palawan bring huge economic value. But this study showed the natural resources themselves have value for ecosystem services,” Tabangay said.

Conserving biologically significant sites

THE Protect Wildlife Project of USAID targets to conserve around 750,000 hectares of biologically significant sites. These are protected areas, forestlands, watersheds, mangrove forests, and coastal and marine areas.

The biggest ecosystem services in MMPL, based on the Conservation International study, include indigenous people (IP) land-based livelihood, P2 billion; water resources, P83 billion; and ecotourism, P84 billion.

Marine biodiversity's indirect use was valued at P13 billion and carbon, P34 billion. Ecosystem services of tropical forests was valued at P108 billion and recreation, P6 billion.

The Water Wildlife Project leveraged P368 million of commitments from private and public sector partners to fund conservation activities, including support for sustainable livelihood and social enterprises.

Highest peak in Palawan

THE highest peak in Palawan, Mount Mantalingahan straddles the towns of Bataraza, Brooke's Point, Rizal, Quezon and Sofronio Española.

It plays an important role as a deterrent to flashfloods and other destructive forces.

However, even Mount Mantalingahan faces natural and man-made threats from illegal logging, wildlife poaching, mining and kaingin (slash and burn) farming.

It also faces the risks of high poverty incidence, unclear or inconsistent regulatory policies on resource uses, communities that lack tenure rights, weak enforcement systems and the vulnerability to climate risks, such as drought and intense rainfall, according to the USAID.

LUP now compliant to policies

THE Protect Wildlife Project aligned the LUP with prevailing policies as it found that the actual land use of several areas differed from what the policies prescribed.

USAID said that this caused much of the degradation within the protected area and adjoining forest lands.

The LUP is now compliant to the policies on Environmentally Critical Areas Network strategy for Palawan, National Integrated Protected Areas Systems Act, Forestry Code, the Local Government Code and the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act.

Land use includes forest lands designated into protection, conservation and production areas. Production areas are further divided into sub-zones, such as agriculture, tourism and special areas.

“Each zone and sub-zone have corresponding evidence-based land and resource use prescriptions—the rules for how an area of land may be legally used. Zoning decisions are derived from spatial analysis but also consider socioeconomic and political realities,” USAID said.

USAID added, “Land use zoning provides a solid basis for LGUs [local government units] and the DENR to make informed decisions for investments on natural assets enhancement, restoration, basic infrastructure, social services and enterprises.”

Project partners

THE DENR said the project's partners for its livelihood programs are Lutheran World Relief, Abraham Holdings Inc. and Sunlight Foods Corp.

These partners support the establishment of enterprises in five LGUs within the MMPL.

Participating in an ube (purple yam) production are upland communities in tenured areas in Bataraza, Brooke's Point and Sofronio Española, while 14 communities with a total of 1,500 households are involved in conservation agriculture and agroforestry.

Image courtesy of Incredible Palawan

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