

# DENR secures P1.2-billion biodiversity deal with USAID

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*By Madelaine B. Mirafior*

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is hoping it could get more support from the US government after securing yesterday a P1.2-billion biodiversity deal with one of its agencies.

The US government, through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), just recently partnered with the DENR to launch a five-year biodiversity conservation project in the Philippines.

Called "Protect Wildlife," the project will address biodiversity loss and illegal wildlife trade in some of the richest yet most vulnerable ecosystems in the Philippines.

During the inauguration of the project yesterday, DENR Secretary Gina Lopez said she hopes for the successful implementation of the project so the US can give more support to the Philippines in the future.

US Ambassador to the Philippines Sung Kim, who also led the inauguration, said for his part that the project was part of the continuing collaboration between the two governments, along with the private sector, civil society, and individual communities to strengthen natural and environmental resource management in the country.

"It will demonstrate that protecting and managing the Philippines' diverse habitats and species lead to improved quality of life and sustainable development," Kim said. According to DENR Director Theresa Mundita Lim, the Protect Wildlife Project would focus on improving benefits provided by ecosystems for food, water, livelihood and ecotourism.

"With the Philippines being both one of the world's most megadiverse countries and a critical biodiversity hotspot, we need to see how we can communicate development programs more effectively so that people will appreciate better the benefits of conservation," Lim said.

Lim said that among the strategies to be used in the project include improving the attitude and behavior of stakeholders toward biodiversity, and intensifying their involvement in conserving and financing biodiversity initiatives.

The project will also enhance the competencies of stakeholders and implementers such as local government units, civil society organizations, the academe, and other government agencies on biodiversity conservation.

Two pilot areas have been selected for the project. These are the Palawan province including Tubbataha Reef, and the Sulu Archipelago including Zamboanga City and Tawi-Tawi province.

The USAID will ensure that the project's impact is sustained by using an ecosystem approach in addressing threats to biodiversity within the sites. This would enable the local community to have a strong sense of ownership and promptly adapt to lessons they learn from the project.

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