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USAID Sustainable Interventions for Biodiversity, Oceans and Landscapes

Newsletter #7 (April-June 2023)

USAID assistant administrator visits PPSRNP



In June, USAID Assistant Administrator Michael Schiffer, Mission Director Ryan Washburn, and Environment Office Chief Ryder Rogers visited the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park (PPSRNP), and learned how community members and environmental law enforcers do their part in conserving the protected area.

Schiffer spoke with PPSRNP Protected Area Superintendent Elizabeth Maclang, who shared about the national park's recovery after being badly hit by Super Typhoon Odette in December 2021. The PPSRNP engagement was part of the assistant administrator's visit to Palawan, where he also visited a waste collection site, discussed illegal fishing with civil society organizations and met with Philippine Coast Guard officials aboard BRP Teresa Magbanua to talk about the protection of the country's marine resources.





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Indigenous groups in Palawan work to regain their main source of livelihood



SIBOL from June 29 to July 6 mobilized indigenous groups to clear obstructions and cut down more than a hundred huge uprooted trees along the trails going to the almaciga areas in the uplands of Marufinas, Palawan. The Puerto Princesa City Environment and Natural Resources Office and staff from PPSRNP protected area management office also conducted an initial assessment of the almaciga trees in Marufinas.

USAID provided food supplies for the eight-day activity. The community organization in Marufinas also used their resources to provide a counterpart budget as compensation for the community members who worked as chainsaw operators, brushers, cook and porters.

For almost four years now, indigenous groups in Marufinas, Puerto Princesa City, Palawan have lost access to their main livelihood—almaciga resin collection. Almaciga resin is a synthetic material used as adhesive, plastic, coating, or varnish.

Their permit to harvest the valuable raw material expired in 2019 and its renewal was delayed by the pandemic that began in 2020 and the devastations caused by Super Typhoon Odette in December 2021. The super typhoon knocked down huge trees that blocked the trails leading to the almaciga trees.

Through the trail clearing initiative, the indigenous groups in Marufinas are closer to regaining their main source of livelihood. SIBOL continues to support the livelihoods of indigenous cultural communities while working to improve natural resources management and promote biodiversity conservation.





SIBOL pilot tests EarthRanger app with DENR BMB



SIBOL on May 14-21 pilot tested the EarthRanger app with DENR BMB, protected area management offices from Palawan, Siargao and Zambales, and Bataan Natural Park. SIBOL consolidated from the participants feedback on the EarthRanger features and will be used to further refine the software.

EarthRanger is a free software solution owned by Allen Institute for Artificial Intelligence and consolidates, in real-time, field reports of patrollers on the state of biodiversity, habitats and threats in conservation areas. Through the app, protected area managers can monitor vast expanses of landscapes and seascapes while maintaining integrity of data.

The pilot testing is a prerequisite for the adoption and streamlining of EarthRanger as a tool in DENR BMB's biodiversity monitoring system. Once adopted, the tool can improve the data collection process and provide accurate and up-to-date information on the state of biodiversity, habitats and threats in protected areas in the Philippines.

SIBOL completes data gathering for assessment of MMPL



SIBOL in May completed the comprehensive assessment of Mt. Mantalingahan Protected Landscape (MMPL) insouthern Palawan. The agency assessed the current state of biodiversity, ecosystems and human-induced threats in the protected area.

The team used a high conservation value framework—a planning tool for assessing existing natural assets and their corresponding ecosystem services in a certain area. The study initially identified 97 bird species, 24 mammals, 67 reptiles and amphibians, and 290 species of plants. SIBOL also recorded slash-and-burn farming, timber poaching, fuelwood collection, charcoal making, construction and development activities, and hunting.

SIBOL's science-based results and recommendations will feed into MMPL's management plan. It will also prompt relevant stakeholders in crafting better informed programs and policies in effectively managing the natural resources of the protected area.





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Community members join SIBOL-organized coastal cleanup in Masinloc, Zambales



At least 300 community members who are part of the USAID-established community-managed savings and credit associations (CoMSCA) joined SIBOL's coastal cleanup in Masinloc, Zambales last June 5. Representatives from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, law enforcement agencies, the local government of Masinloc and academia joined the activity.

The cleanup was held in observance of World Environment Day on June 5 and World Oceans Day on June 8. The participants filled 124 sacks or 2,857 kilograms of trash collected along the coast of barangays Balogo and Matalvis in Masinloc. The cleanup is one of many conservation initiatives of SIBOL that taps local partners and community members to actively engage in addressing pressing environmental concerns in Masinloc-Oyon Bay Protected Landscape and Seascape.

USAID announces partnership with DOJ



USAID and the Department of Justice - Philippines in June announced a partnership to improve the prosecution of violations related to natural resources management and biodiversity conservation in the Philippines.

Under this partnership, USAID will support the DOJ's National Prosecution Service to develop e-learning materials and train prosecutors working on protected areas, fisheries and maritime domains, forestry and forest lands, and wildlife.





SIBOL gathers couriers, shops in conference vs. IWT



To rally the support of the business sector in fighting against illegal wildlife trade, USAID and the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development held on June 25 the Couriers and Souvenir Shops Conference in Puerto Princesa City.

In the Philippines, violators of environmental laws often use courier services to sell unregistered chainsaws, illegal fishing paraphernalia and even wildlife. Some wildlife byproducts and derivatives acquired through unlawful means are also sold to the public through souvenir shops, contributing to an illicit multi-billion-peso industry. Palawan is considered a hotspot in wildlife trafficking, both as a source and a transshipment route.

USAID and PCSD sought the commitment of couriers and souvenir shops to observe environmental laws in the conduct of their business and support the broader effort to reduce wildlife crime in the country.

SUMBONG app launched



USAID and the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) on June 19, 2023 launched SUMBONG, a free mobile application that allows the public to report issues or violations related to the environment, wildlife, biodiversity, protected areas, sanctuaries, and other areas and zones covered by special protection.

The app is a step towards the creation of an integrated and interoperable information and resource sharing network that will help environmental enforcement agencies in Palawan like the PCSD and the Palawan Environmental Enforcement Network to respond more effectively to wildlife crimes and other violations. The app is available on Google Play.

The launch took place at the opening of the Wildlife Enforcement Officers' Congress in Puerto Princesa City which coincided with the 31st anniversary of the Strategic Environmental Plan for Palawan Act, the main framework for the sustainable development of the province.





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SIBOL conducts webinar for youth environmental advocates



In celebration of International Day for Biological Diversity, SIBOL on May 20 engaged youth environmental advocates in a webinar to share their common interests in the sustainable management of natural resources. Youth groups from Siargao, Palawan and Zambales joined the activity.

The webinar involved students in an interactive panel discussion to share their experiences and challenges in their environmental campaigns. SIBOL capped off the activity with the announcement of 18 youth groups who would join the Youth Advocacy Communications Bootcamp.

The activity aims to inform and inspire young people about the value of protecting biodiversity and to share skills they need to effectively advocate for environmental conservation.





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SIBOL conducts policy workshops to improve environmental law enforcement



SIBOL on June 6 to 9 conducted a series of workshops to provide technical assistance to the drafting of national policies to improve environmental law enforcement and natural resource management in protected areas. Around 100 participants from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, Department of the Interior and Local Government, and law enforcement agencies joined the activity.

The draft policies are concerned mainly on the adjudication process, fines and penalties, and special use of resources in protected areas. All highlight the importance of natural resources and the need to conserve, invest in, and protect them.

SIBOL continues to support policy-level initiatives to strengthen biodiversity conservation and environmental law enforcement across all protected areas in the Philippines.





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KEY EVENTS FOR NEXT TWO QUARTERS

- International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem - July 26
- World Ranger Day - July 31
- International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples - August 9
- International Youth Day - August 12
- World Tourism Day - September 27
- Sustainable Supply Chains Conference - October
- World Migratory Bird Day - October 9
- SIPLAS Week - October 9-13
- Philippine Clean Air Month - November
- National Environmental Awareness Month - November
- International Conference on Biosphere and Sustainability - November 3-7
- Celebration of Day of Youth, IPs, LGBTQIA+ in STEM - November 18
- National Day for Youth in Climate Action - November 25
- Private Sector Summit on Supporting Measures to Combat IWT in the Philippines - December
- Green Recovery Forum - December
- International Mountain Day - December 11

ABOUT SIBOL

Launched in 2020, the Sustainable Interventions for Biodiversity, Oceans, and Landscapes (SIBOL) is a P1.35-billion natural resources management and biodiversity conservation project of the United States Agency for International Development in partnership with RTI International. SIBOL works closely with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development. The Center for Conservation Innovations, Forest Foundation Philippines, Zoological Society of London, and the Resources, Environment and Economics Center for Studies, comprise the consortium partnering with RTI.

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