

DATE : 07 DEC 2018

DAY : FRIDAY

DENR

IN THE NEWS

Strategic Communication and Initiative Service



Environment protection volunteers hailed

By **Kuhlin Ceslie Gacula**

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has honored its partners from government, non-government organizations, academe and the business sector for their valuable contributions to the environment through volunteer work.

The appreciation program is in line with the DENR's celebration of December as the National Volunteer Month.



A total of 55 partner organizations—10 government agencies and state-owned corporations, 14 local government units from Metro Manila, 15 from the academic community, seven NGOs and nine private companies—were recognized for their active participation in over 500 volunteer projects and special events organized by the department since 2012.

Among those

that received a certificate of appreciation were Earth Day Network Philippines, National Bicycle Organization and Land Bank of the Philippines.

The appreciation program is in line with the DENR's celebration of December as the National Volunteer Month, pursuant to Presidential Proclamation 55, Series of 1998.

DENR Undersecretary for Solid Waste Management and LGU Concerns Benny Antiporda said the program aims not only to recognize the agency's volunteer partners, but also encourage more people and organizations to help in protecting the environment.

Antiporda has expressed gratitude to the volunteer partners for their "invaluable support for the DENR's pursuit of sustainable development."

"This is our small way of thanking you for the big contributions you have made to the success of the DENR's programs and activities," Antiporda told the agency's partner organizations.

Antiporda has expressed gratitude to the volunteer partners for their "invaluable support for the DENR's pursuit of sustainable development."

In recognizing the importance of environmental volunteerism, Antiporda said the "citizen's support alone will dictate either the success or failure of DENR's programs."

He noted that volunteerism is "crucial" to the mission of Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu to demonstrate President Rodrigo Duterte's "strong political will in seriously addressing the country's environmental challenges."



Encouraging grassroots to save PH forests

A NEW book jointly launched by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) seeks to mobilize more grassroots action on forest and biodiversity conservation nationwide.

Launched Monday (Dec. 3) in Quezon City, the book "In the Heart of the Forest" aims to promote such action by showcasing real-life stories of people working at the grassroots level, with assistance from the government.

Among conservation champions featured in the book are former rebel Mansueto Puerpas, who is helping monitor Negros Oriental province's forests, and Marisa Naputo, who lost her husband and two daughters when Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) struck Samar Island but is already helping educate communities about the importance of forest conservation.

"I support and encourage all of you

to share our beautiful stories to others. Let's work hard to tell and spread narratives of commitment and service to the environment for our children and future generations of Filipinos," DENR Secretary Roy Cimatu said in a message read by DENR Undersecretary Rod Garcia at the book launch.

Cimatu thanked the USAID for partnering with DENR on B+WISER, which sought to boost forest and biodiversity conservation in the country.

"We preserve our memories of success through the launch of 'In the Heart of the Forest,' a beautiful book that collects photos of Philippine forests and people dependent on them," the Secretary said.

USAID Philippines Environment Office Chief John Edgar praised the people featured in the book for their dedication to and resilience in saving Philippine forests and biodiversity.

"Their stories are all inspiring and collectively demonstrate the strength

of Filipinos," Edgar said at the event.

DENR and USAID came up with B+WISER, as data showed that during the 20th century, the Philippines lost nearly 75 percent of its natural forests to illegal logging and other causes.

"The B+WISER program started six years ago amidst need to address deforestation and biodiversity decline in the country," DENR's Forest Management Bureau (FMB) Director Nonito Tamayo said at the launch.

He said the DENR, the local governments concerned, the private sector, and upland communities have received local capacity-building through science-based strategies, so these can conserve biodiversity in forest areas, protect remaining natural forests, and reduce disaster risk.

FMB noted B+WISER has helped improve management for 6.3 million hectares or over 90 percent of forest areas nationwide.



Forest tree species undergo 'genetic diversity' assessment

BY JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

✉ @jonlmayuga

TO boost the production and ensure the constant supply of quality wood, five forest tree species—the Benguet pine, *bagalunga*, molave, ipil and narra—have been placed under “genetic diversity” assessment by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

The “Genetic Improvement of Priority Forest Tree Species for Quality Wood Production Project,” of the Environmental Research Development Bureau, or ERDB, a staff bureau of the DENR, is pursuing further study of the five tree species after successfully assessing the genetic diversity of rattan limuran, Project Leader Dr. Theresa de los Reyes said in a news statement.

Rattan limuran is an important industrial species for wood products exported by the country.

For limuran, Bataan turned out to be the best possible source of planting materials with the highest genetic diversity.

ERDB had also initially found that the Ilocos province has the highest potential for tree improvement and breeding for narra based on broad

genetic diversity.

“Assessment of genetic variation among and within populations is essential for the success of any tree-breeding and selection programs. It holds vast potentials for the preservation of the forest ecosystems in the Philippines,” said Dr. Sofio B. Quintana, ERDB director.

According to the ERDB, with the changing environment and increase in global temperature, some species of forest trees fail to cope with changes while others, under the same species, succeed in adaptation.

By assessing the genetic makeup of forest trees through DNA analysis, differences among similar trees can be distinguished with the aid of molecular tools.

The variation that is observed in the genetic makeup of species is called genetic diversity.

“With more genetic variations, it is more likely that some individuals possess alternative form of genes that better suit the environment,” ERDB study proponents and authors Karol Josef Lucena, Jordan Abellar and Jorge Cyril Viray added.

Because of the success of these individual species, their population will continue for more generations.

Having less genetic diversity leads to uniformity. Such population has individuals less likely to adapt to new environment.

Monoculture wherein a single crop is planted in a large farm area is beneficial only for growing and harvesting crops on the short term. In the long run, it will be a problem when a disease or parasites attack the field.

Due to genetic uniformity, every plant is vulnerable, however.

The same is true for forest trees. Tree domestication tends to decrease genetic variability as limited plants are selected and propagated. Little genetic variation within a species impedes the process of healthy reproduction as evident by the expression of harmful traits in the offspring resulting from inbreeding or mating of genetically related organisms.

Inbred trees that develop slowly are often deformed. Many die suddenly and inexplicably before reaching maturity. Few inbred trees survive and reproduce in a natural forest setting.

With low genetic diversity comes increased susceptibility to disease and increase mortality of the population in environmental disturbances.



ENVIRONMENTALISTS FIRM ON KEEPING FOREST IN SUMMER CAPITAL

BAGUIO CITY—Twenty-four types of birds have made their home in a 1.4-hectare forest flanked by a mall, the Supreme Court courthouse and justices' cottages, and the University of the Philippines Baguio.

The presence of warblers, thrushes, doves, swallows, crows and even migratory birds like the brown shrike proved that the wooded area, known to many as the "Tree Park," is a valuable component of the ecosystem in this city, according to biology professor Zenaida Baoanan.

She said the tree park near the town center was also home to grassland animals and worms.

But people continue to make life difficult for these birds and animals, said

Baoanan, who was tasked by UP Baguio to examine the plant and animal life thriving there.

Dump

She said the park had been used as a garbage dump and toilet. Garbage thrown by people who work or live around the park has been polluting the soil and water that nurture both plants and animals in the area.

Half of pine trees there also suffer from pest infestation. The number of trees has gone down from 800 to a little over 500 since 2016.

Baoanan said the dwindling number may soon drive away birds and animals clinging to this green patch.

Baguio universities and en-

vironmental groups are regrouping to once again push for the park's preservation.

UP students helped plant the trees there in 1972. They also joined environmental activists and pupils of several schools who formed a human chain around the tree park in 2008 to protest its planned lease to a condominium developer.

Heeding the public outcry, the city government in 2008 refused to issue permits for developing the forest patch, which had been classified as a park.

Mayor Mauricio Domogan said the city is bent on maintaining the area as a tree park.

—REPORTS FROM VINCENT CABREZA
AND KARLSTON LAPNITEN INQ



PINE COVER This patch of pine forest surrounded by a university, a mall and a government compound in Baguio City has become home to wildlife, but some people have been treating it as a dump. —EV ESPIRITU

Boracay welcomes back cruise ship

By **TARA YAP**

ILOILO CITY — More than a month after it reopened to tourists, the resort island of Boracay in Aklan welcomed back a cruise ship Thursday.

Niven Maquirang, port administrator both in Boracay Island and mainland town of Malay, said the MS Star Legend arrived around noon.

The cruise liner under Windstar Luxury Cruise Line has 372 guests and crew.

Maquirang told The Manila Bulletin those who will disembark will have half

a day to tour the island. The ship will depart by 9 p.m.

Star Legend is the first cruise liner to dock off Boracay after it was closed last April 26 for a six-month environmental clean-up.

Another cruise liner, the MS World Dream, is scheduled to arrive on Dec. 19. The ship can carry 3,400 passengers and a crew of 2,000.

Around 48 cruise liners were originally scheduled to visit Boracay this year, but the six-month closure prompted cancellations. Before the April 26 closure, only 16 liners visited Boracay.



Department of Environment and Natural Resources
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Manila Standard



07 DEC 2013

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BORACAY UPDATE. Aklan Rep. Teodorico 'Nonong' Haresco discusses the rehabilitation of Boracay Island and other projects in the province as he met the media (inset) and vowed to continue the projects of the Duterte administration. **Andrew Rabulan**





WHO advice for cleaner PH air: Curb use of private cars

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By Jhesset O. Enano
@JhessetEnanoINQ

KATOWICE, POLAND—The Philippines should invest in healthy urban planning to combat climate change, promote better public health, and save lives, a top World Health Organization (WHO) official said on Wednesday.

Maria Neira, WHO director for public health, said reducing the carbon emissions in the country's cities, where a large number of people live, would go a long way not only in improving the environment but also in curbing deaths due to air pollution from fossil fuels, a major culprit for climate change.

On the sidelines of the United Nations climate talks in this coal mining city, the UN body on Wednesday launched a historic report that showed the link between the rapidly warming planet and public health.

Neira said burning fossil fuels that produced carbon dioxide was one of the major causes of air pollution, which results in 7 million deaths per year around the world.

122,000 deaths annually

Meeting the commitments of the 2015 Paris Agreement, where governments pledged to act to keep global warming to "well below" 2 degrees Celsius, could save millions of lives a

year by 2050, the report said.

A WHO report earlier this year ranked the Philippines third in the Asia-Pacific region in the number of deaths due to outdoor air pollution. The organization's BreatheLife campaign reported that more than 122,000 people in Metro Manila die yearly from air pollution.

Neira said in an interview that the transport system in Philippine cities was one of the major causes of air pollution.

"You should promote a cleaner public transport system, which is reliable and affordable for citizens, and discourage the use of private cars," she said.

Diseases, falling crop yields

The WHO report said the transport sector accounted for about 23 percent of global energy-related greenhouse gas emissions.

"A vast majority [of private vehicles] run on petrol or diesel fuel. They emit not only greenhouse gases, but also particulate matter, which contributes to poor air quality," the report said.

Neira said political willingness was greatly needed to deal with the pollution problem.

"You can develop economically without destroying your lungs and the environment," she said.

Kristie Ebi, professor of global health at the University

of Washington, said scientific evidence now showed that "people today are suffering and dying from climate change."

The consequences range from chronic diseases linked to air pollution, such as asthma and lung cancer, to undernutrition as crop yields fall and rising carbon dioxide levels in the air slash nutrients in staple foods, she added.

A recent report by C40, a network of the world's megaci-

ties committed to dealing with climate change, said cities had a leading role in capping the rise in global temperature at 1.5 C, in line with the 2015 Paris accord.

Premature deaths

Shifting to cleaner transport can slash greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent and prevent at least 86,000 premature deaths, it said.

Milag San Jose-Ballesteros, C40 director for East, Southeast

Asia and Oceania, said Southeast Asian cities emitted lower emissions than big cities in China and India, but the region's urban areas continued their rapid growth, which would also result in increased emissions if a low carbon development approach was not taken.

"One of the challenges is really the transition to zero or low carbon transportation. [There is] lack of planning for optimal deployment of walking, cycling



Editorial

Public needs clear govt action on Panglao, El Nido

UNLIKE the decisive action by the government to shut down, rehabilitate and reopen Boracay island to tourism, recreation and business, the Cabinet statements on Panglao and El Nido are confusing and not reassuring to the public.

When Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo declared in a statement that there is no need for President Rodrigo Duterte "to issue an executive order for the rehabilitation of Panglao Island in Bohol and El Nido in Palawan," or that the Cabinet members have agreed on the non-action, he did not clarify the matter.

A week ago, Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat publicly declared the government has ordered a ban on swimming in two particular beaches in Panglao and El Nido.

She explained that the Alona Beach in Panglao and Buena Suerte Beach in El Nido contained high levels of coliform, stressing that the swimming ban would be in effect "until the coliform levels are acceptable."

Despite Puyat's declaration, no such Executive Order has been issued in fact.

And now comes Secretary Panelo saying the Cabinet members have agreed that an EO was no longer necessary for the government to rehabilitate both Panglao and El Nido.

Should the public take his statement as a declaration of policy or a form of government action?

At this point, the government position on the situation was still woefully unclear. It has not said whether the situation in Panglao and El Nido is similar to the problem faced by Boracay that prompted its shutdown and rehabilitation.

It has not said whether the combined action of several departments will again be necessary, as in Boracay.

The trouble probably lies in several cabinet secretaries talking at the same time and not singing the same song. Secretary Puyat sings one tune, while Panelo and other Cabinet secretaries evidently sing other tunes.

Coliform is a type of bacteria that comes from human or animal feces. It can cause diarrhea and other water-borne diseases that can be fatal to children. Puyat explained that the coliform levels in Panglao and El Nido have exceeded the acceptable count, which is 88 per 100 milliliter (mL) in any one sample.

Then she declared that the ban is part of a government effort to rehabilitate the beaches of El Nido and Panglao — a rehabilitation that, to our knowledge, has not yet been formally announced.

It is at this point that the Boracay Inter-Agency Task Force has gotten into the picture. The force, composed of Puyat, Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu and Interior Secretary Eduardo Año, declared that El Nido faces environmental problems similar to Boracay, such as the easement of shoreline, waste disposal management and overcrowding.

Panglao, the force said, also suffers from environmental problems because of unregulated development, lax enforcement of laws, and large influx of tourist arrivals.

The Panelo intervention now appears to be irrelevant and unnecessary.

The task force says it does not plan to totally shut down Panglao and El Nido, as it did in the case of Boracay, which was closed to the public for six months.

A decision not to issue an executive order does not require a public statement by the spokesman. If and when the President decides to act, that would be the time for him to talk.



Department of Environment and Natural Resources
STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION INITIATIVES SERVICE

WHO advice for cleaner PH air: Curb use of private cars

P2

and mass transit," Ballesteros said. "Much of the infrastructure that remains to be built is locking in the metro in high carbon facilities and energy sucking buildings."

Call to mayors

The WHO report recommended that city mayors and other local leaders be mobilized to cut carbon emissions, increase resilience and promote health.

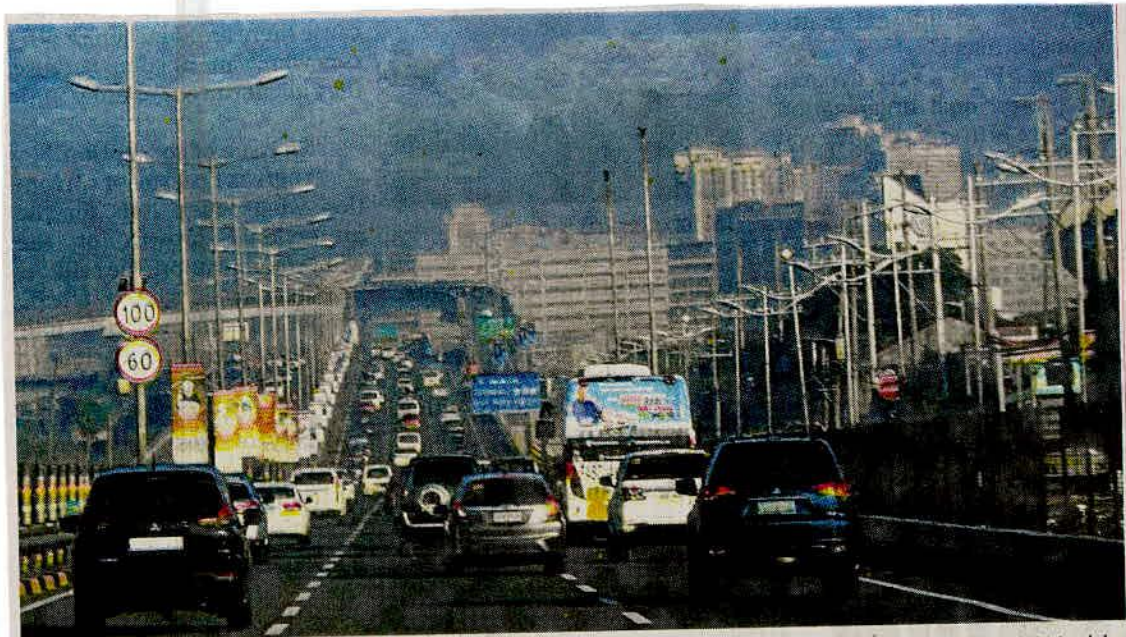
The report, which was written at the request of Fiji Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama, a former Conference of the Parties president, was crucial in making sure that peoples' health would be incorporated in the climate discussion.

"The drivers of carbon emissions and air pollution are the same: It's the fossil fuel combustion," Neira said. "For us, the climate change negotiators need to incorporate those 7 million deaths in all of their calls for action."

WHO scientist and report author Diarmid Campbell-Lendrum said buying cheap but polluting technology eventually leads to high health costs.

"We should be making the fight for climate action same as air pollution," he said. "We urge people to recognize that this is the same fight and we have the same answers." —WITH A REPORT

FROM THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION INQ



DIRTY AIR Smog veils the Metro Manila skyline as seen from the Skyway on Thursday. A World Health Organization report released earlier this year ranked the Philippines third among Asia-Pacific countries with the highest number of deaths due to air pollution, next only to China and Mongolia. —REM ZAMORA

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

UN agency urges action on climate change to cut pollution deaths

KATOWICE, Poland (Thomson Reuters Foundation) – Fighting climate change is one of the best ways to improve health around the world, and the benefits of fewer deaths and hospitalizations would far outweigh the costs of not acting, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Wednesday.

Keeping global warming "well below" two degrees Celsius (3.6F), as governments have pledged to do under the 2015 Paris Agreement, could save about a million lives a year by 2050 through reducing air pollution alone, the UN agency said.

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UN agency urges action...

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Burning fossil fuels – which emit carbon dioxide, the main culprit for climate change – is a major driver of air pollution, the WHO said in a report issued at UN climate talks in Poland.

Maria Neira, WHO's director for public health, said exposure to air pollution causes seven million deaths worldwide every year.

"This is one of the most outrageous things happening today," she said. "We want to tell countries: The more you delay this (clean energy) transition, the more you will be responsible for the... millions of deaths that are recorded every year."

Health gains resulting from action to curb climate change – from adopting renewable energy to getting people out of cars and onto bicycles – would add up to about twice the cost of rolling out those policies globally, and even more in China and India, the WHO said, citing a recent study.

WHO scientist and report author Diar-

mid Campbell-Lendrum said health had often been disconnected from discussions on climate change, but there was now an urgent need to break down the barriers and talk about the benefits for society.

"This is the same fight, and we have the same answers," he added.

In the 15 countries that emit the most greenhouse gases, the cost of air pollution for public health is estimated at more than four percent of gross domestic product, the WHO report said.

In comparison, keeping warming to the Paris deal temperature limits would require investing about one percent of global GDP.

Kristie Ebi, professor of global health at the University of Washington, said the world now had scientific evidence that "people today are suffering and dying from climate change."

The consequences range from chronic diseases linked to air pollution, such as

asthma and lung cancer, to under-nutrition as crop yields fall and rising carbon dioxide levels in the air slash nutrients in staple foods, she added.

Inia Seruiratu, Fiji's minister of agriculture and disaster management, said his Pacific island nation was already experiencing the effects of climate change on health, such as an increase in water-borne diseases after storms and floods.

It is working to build solar-powered health clinics that can also withstand strong winds and other extreme weather, he noted.

Despite such efforts, the WHO report said financial support – particularly for small island nations and the poorest countries – remains "woefully inadequate."

Only about 0.5 percent of funds provided by international institutions for measures to adapt to climate change have been allocated to health projects, it added.

Money is also lacking for scientific research into the different options for tackling the problem, Ebi said.



Urgent climate action sought

United Nations chief António Guterres recently presented his longer-term vision for the 2019 Climate Change Summit to thousands who have gathered in Katowice, Poland for the 24th Conference of the Parties (COP24) meeting to chart the way forward for climate action.

"The Summit will focus on delivering three key outcomes: Raising real ambition; transformative action in the real economy; and an unprecedented citizen and youth mobilization," said the UN Secretary-General to participants of the COP24 of the UN Climate Change Convention (UNFCCC).

Scheduled for 23 September 2019 at UN headquarters in New York, the event aims to galvanize support for urgent climate action at the highest political levels. "We are holding the event during the high-level week of the UN General Assembly to ensure we have as many heads of state and heads of Government as possible in attendance," he explained.

The UN General Assembly usually attracts well over 100 national leaders to discuss and set the global agenda for the following year.

"The outcomes of the summit will be your outcomes," stressed Mr. Guterres who invited "all governments, businesses, sources of finance – public and private – and civil society organizations to join in the preparatory process."

Asked by a reporter if the UN was planning to engage in dialogue with fossil fuel producers in the oil, gas and coal industry, he noted that interactions have already started and although "the dialogue

with the industry is sometimes difficult and complex," these businesses were increasingly recognizing the need to switch and develop renewable energy strategies.

The Summit will focus on driving action in six areas: Transition to renewable energy; funding of climate action and carbon pricing; reducing emissions from industry; using nature as a solution; sustainable cities and local action; and climate change resilience.

Last month, in order to lead the way to the Summit, the UN chief appointed Luis Alfonso de Alba as his Special Envoy. Also present in Katowice for COP24, he explained that one of his highest priorities in the coming months will be strong and deep engagement with each and every party to the UN Climate Change Convention, as well as other stakeholders, to raise ambition.

"The intention is not to have a negotiated outcome, but rather to incentivize highest level participation, to be very selective in what goes to the Summit in terms of ambition and innovation... and then have a summary of the discussions during the meeting itself," said Ambassador de Alba.

Paving the way, a special session of the UN General Assembly will take place in March.



UNITED Nations Secretary-General António Guterres speaks in the 2019 Climate summit in Katowice, Poland.