

SITE DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR ECOTOURISM PROGRAM OF BULABOG PUTI- AN NATIONAL PARK

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Abstract: The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) identified Bulabog Puti-an National Park (BPNP) as a Pilot Site among Protected Areas in Region VI for Eco-tourism Development. It has no Comprehensive Site Development Plan that served as guide in the development of specific sites in the Park. Iloilo Science and Technology University (ISAT U) embarked on preparing its comprehensive site development plan. This 3-year research cum extension project aimed to come up with a comprehensive site development plan for BPNP. Data collection were done by actual zoning and survey, using transit and ground positioning system instruments, while, transect line method was used in terrestrial assessment. Focused group discussion and feedbacking were used in the analysis of data. The site development plan consists of structures distributed within the periphery of the 300 hectares recreational zone. There is a guard house at the entrance, and nearby are the multi-purpose building, a souvenir shop, an activity/camping area. On the southern and northern sides of the compound are cottages, at the western side is the proposed swimming pool, while at the eastern side are the butterfly garden and viewing deck. There is an access trail along the way from the compound to the caves up to the Mt. Puti-an. Other proposed features include cave protection, park mascot, miniature of the park, signages, entrance marquee and kiosks. With the collaborative efforts of all partners, ISAT U, DENR, and LGUs, BPNP is now in the list of the Department of Tourism as one of the tourist destinations in Western Visayas, Philippines.

Keywords: eco-tourism, national park, protected area, site development plan, Bulabog –Putian Philippines.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1991, the Department of Tourism in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the World Tourism Organization (WTO), prepared the Philippine Tourism Master Plan with the objective of positioning the Philippines as a world-class tourism destination. It was in 1992 that the National Tourism Congress took up this theme and the concept of “ecotourism” was introduced in the Philippines.

According to the Joint Memorandum Circular No. 98-02 of the Department of Tourism and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, through the Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau, **ecotourism** is a low-impact, environmentally sound and community-participatory tourism activity in a given natural environment that concerns the conservation of biophysical and cultural diversity, promotes environmental understanding and education, and yield socio-economic benefits to the concerned community.

Protected Areas (PA’s) managers should seize the opportunity to capture a chunk of the market not only to increase revenues, but also to engage tourism industry stakeholders to help promote PA conservation. Joint public-private sector conservation activities, such as mangrove planting, bird inventory, clean-ups, and public awareness raising programs are some initiatives that can harness volunteerism and be incorporated in tourism product packages (Bagadion and Soriano, 2013).

The DENR Region VI has identified the Bulabog Puti-an National Park as a Pilot Site among Protected Areas in Region VI for Eco-tourism Development and Biodiversity Conservation.

BPNP was declared in June 14, 1961 by then Philippine President Carlos P. Garcia as Protected Area with an area of 854.33 hectares covering the portions of the Municipalities of Dingle and San Enrique in the Province of Iloilo.

Bulabog Puti-an National Park (BPNP) covers 854.33 hectares which is almost 99 percent nature made. More than thirty magnificent caves serve as valued tourist attractions. Its breathtaking profile captivates many guests to witness its beautiful scenery and unique natural spots.

Visitors who came to the park include students and pupils from different schools, local and foreign tourists, for their recollection, vacation, conduct researches, field trips and many other activities.

The BPNP is being managed by the Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) composed of representatives from GOs, NGOs, and the Academe. Since the facilities are not sufficient to cater to the needs of the visitors, the PAMB, having seen the potential of the park for eco-tourism, prioritized the preparation of the Site Development Plan of the park that will serve as its guide in the development of specific sites in the park, hence, this project.

Objectives:

1. To prepare a comprehensive site development plan for Bulabog Putian National Park that will serve as its guide in the development of specific sites in the Park.
2. To design and implement a project for the community through the collaboration of students and faculty.
3. To assist DENR in its advocacy on environmental conservation and protection through lectures and symposia in order to promote awareness of the importance of natural environment.

2. METHODOLOGY

A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the joint undertaking of the on-site planning and preparation of Bulabog Puti-an National Park Development Plan was signed. The Protected Area Management Board was represented by its Chairperson, the Regional Executive Director of DENR Region VI. ISAT U was represented by the University President.

ISAT U design team attended PAMB meetings to define the scope and requirements of the DENR-BPNP-PAMB for the preparation of the site development plan.

A project team, who prepared the project proposal for the conduct of the activities was organized. The activities include orientation and lecture on environment protection to the students, site assessment, conceptual planning, drafting and development of the plans and drawings, presentation of drawings, report writing and preparation of miniature model of the proposed development plan.

The on-site activities were started in March 2006, with a rapid assessment of the area of the park which was conducted by one hundred six (106) students who were divided into seven teams headed by a faculty member. A Global Positioning System (GPS) and transits were used as survey equipment in the conduct of actual zoning and survey.

The assessment of the resources, issues and concerns showed that the root causes of the destructions in the Protected Area were poverty and rapid increase of population. There were also other illegal activities within the area such as conversion of natural forest to coffee plantation, girdling/timber poaching, fuelwood gathering, hunting/collection of wildlife, vandalism in the caves and uncontrolled influx of visitors during holy week, destruction of cave resources and visitors garbage.

Furthermore, there were no definite access and perimeter road within the area. The facilities within the BPNP compound were not sufficient to cater to the needs of the tourists/visitors. The administration building, comfort rooms and two bamboo cottages were already dilapidated. Only few community members were utilized as tour guides. No available food for the tourists except from nearby sari-sari stores in the barangay.

Analyses of data gathered from the site were done in school by the Architecture faculty and students. Plans were conceptualized and preliminary drafts were presented during the PAMB meetings for approval. When approved, the team prepared the final plan.

The final site development plan with the miniature model were turned over during the launching of “Adopt A Proposed Structure in the Park” last March 28, 2010. It was attended by the Governor, Municipal Mayors and other stakeholders.

Activities on environmental advocacy were done before, during and after the conduct of activities in the field such as lectures, feed backing and focus group discussions. School based advocacy such as Lecture on Ecological Solid Waste Management and Symposium on National Greening Program were attended by students from the College of Engineering and Architecture and the College of Arts and Sciences. Poster making contest also held in school, was participated by ten (10) teams of five members composed of students from different departments of the college.

As part of its social preparation, a needs assessment survey was done to determine what environment friendly and sustainable livelihood the people in the needed.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After a series of activities, the ISAT U design team was able to come up with a proposed site development plan for Bulabog Puti-an National Park in accordance to National Integrated Protected Areas Act or R.A. 7586, Section 2, that is: to promote the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable development in protected areas and buffer zones in order to maintain essential ecological processes and life support systems which will enhance people’s capacity to sustain human life and development, as well as plants and animals.

A comprehensive site development plan and plans of the proposed structures for Bulabog Puti-an National Park was realized and turned over to DENR-PAMB. Faculty and students of the College of Engineering and Architecture of WVCST were given opportunity to design for the community. Students were exposed to the actual conduct of site assessment, data gathering, and design process. The conduct of various activities contributed to the advocacy on environmental awareness, appreciation and understanding of the importance of conservation of natural resources.

The 854.33 hectares BPNP area was divided into two zones: the recreational zone and the strictly protected zone. An area equivalent to three hundred (300) hectares was identified as the Recreational Zone within the BPNP Office compound with the following features and estimated budget.

Table 1: Features included in the development of Recreational Zone and the estimated budget.

Features	Estimated Budget (‘000,000.00)
Multi-Purpose Building (2 units)	8.00
Camping Area	0.50
Cottages (20 units)	3.00
Botanical Garden	0.15
Cave Protection/Site Development	0.25
Viewing Deck	0.20
Access Trail Improvement	0.25
Souvenir Shop	0.25
Entrance Marquee	0.15
Guard House	0.15
Park Mascott	0.15
Rock Climbing Area Improvement	0.20
Miniatures of the park and structures	0.10
Swimming Pool	3.50
Signages	0.025
TOTAL	16.875

Furthermore, a turn-over of the plans and launching of “Adopt A Proposed Structure in the Park” program attended by the stakeholders resulted to a grant of P300,000.00 from the Provincial Government Office for the construction of Multi-Purpose Building, construction of Butterfly Garden funded by NPC, DOE & LGU of Dingle & San Enrique, provision of cyclone wire for the entrance of Guiso Cave to prevent further disturbance of the bats inhabiting inside the cave, establishment of eight hundred seventy (875) meters of access trail from BPNP compound to Tuko and Maestranza Caves.

The proposed site development plan for eco-tourism in the park was also the basis of formation of the People Organization (PO) named the Rural Improvement Club (RIC). It had strengthened the tour guiding activity in the Park and had been the basis of RIC of Brgy. Moroboro, Dingle, Iloilo to avail of the P100,000.00 grant from the Department of

Tourism (DOT) for the purchase of their tour guiding equipment (head lamps and hard hats) and catering utensils. They have also availed the training for tour guides conducted by the DOT.

The advocacy on environmental issues raises the peoples' awareness on protecting their valuable resources and thus with their concerted efforts and cooperation the suspects in the cutting down of the century old Narra tree were apprehended and a case was now filed in court.

The needs assessment also resulted to the conduct of an 80 hours furniture and cabinet making training. Participants earned income from their outputs like beds, chairs, tables and cabinets. Waste materials were made as souvenir items and are now sold in the park.

With the collaborative efforts of all the partners, the ISAT U, DENR-BPNP PAMB, LGU of Dingle and San Enrique, and the Department of Tourism, Bulabog Puti-an National Park is now in the list as one of the potential tourist destinations in Western Visayas, Philippines.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The DENR and PAMB should initiate the sourcing of fund for the development or improvement of the facilities in the park based on the development plan. It should also involve stakeholders and LGUs in the protection and conservation of the environment and natural resources.

ISAT U should sustain the support initiated in the proposed development and implementation of the projects in the park.

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APPENDICES - A

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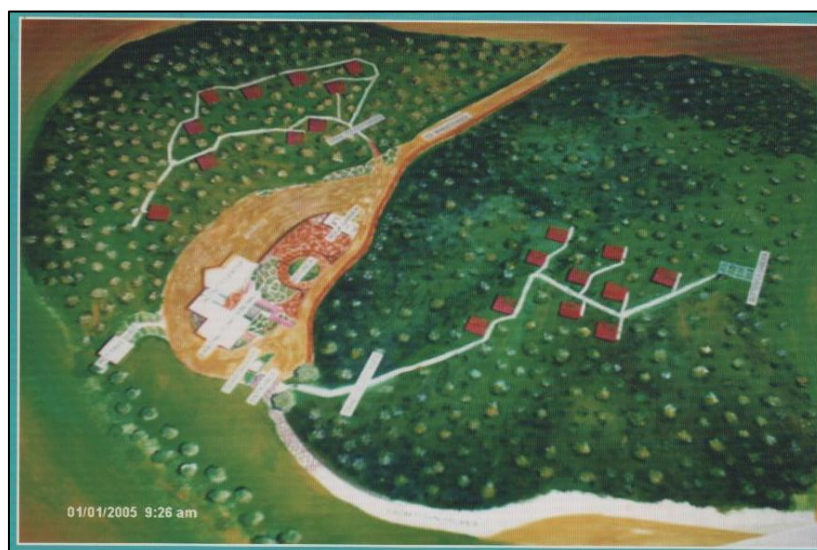


Figure 1: The Site Development Plan for Recreational Zone



Figure 2: The Proposed Multi-Purpose Building