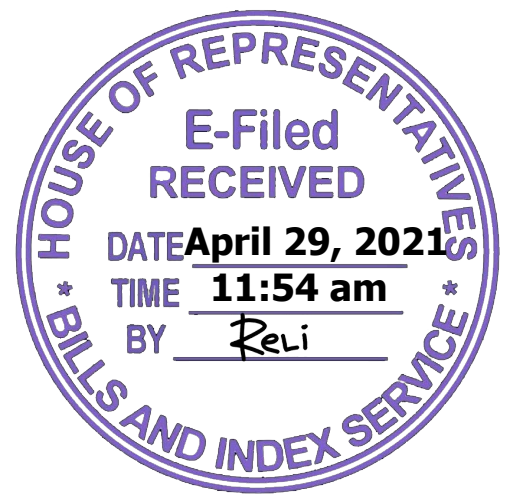


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

House Bill No. **9273**



Introduced by Representative MANUEL ANTONIO F. ZUBIRI

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Section 16, Article II of the 1987 Constitution provides that The State shall protect and advance the right of the people to a balanced and healthful ecology in accord with the rhythm and harmony of nature.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is the agency tasked for the protection, conservation and rehabilitation of the environment. However, the enforcement capabilities of DENR enforcers such as our forest rangers is in need of further support. In 2019 alone, 46 Filipino environment defenders were killed. Out of this 46, 13% were forest rangers. A year before that, the International Non-governmental Organization Global Witness dubbed the Philippines as the most dangerous country for environmental defenders and foresters in 2018 over the controversial killing of Forest Ranger Bienvenido Veguilla, Jr. in El Nido, Palawan.

Given the foregoing, it is apparent that incentives, benefits and the appropriate training and equipment are needed to be given to our forest rangers.

The passage of this bill is earnestly sought.

MANUEL ANTONIO F. ZUBIRI

Representative
Third District, Bukidnon

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Manuel Antonio F. Zubiri', written over the printed name and title of the Representative.

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AN ACT
TO PROTECT THE FOREST RANGERS BY PROVIDING THE NECESSARY
TRAINING, EQUIPMENT AND BENEFITS, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR
AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

Section 1. Short Title. – This Act shall be known as the “Forest Ranger Protection Act”.

Section 2. Declaration of Policy. – It is the policy of the State to increase the capability of forest rangers in order to better protect the environment and wildlife in the country. It is also the declared policy of the State to protect and preserve our environment and natural resources for the benefit of both the present and future generations.

Section 3. Salaries of Forest Rangers. – The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), and the Civil Service Commission (CSC) shall convene upon the enactment of this Act to review the items and salary grade classification of forest rangers with the end in view of increasing their number, salary and benefits commensurate to the risk involved in performing their functions.

After ninety (90) days after the effectivity of this Act, the increased number of items and new salary grade classifications shall be released and published to be filled up and applied.

Section 4. Increase of Forest Ranger Personnel. – The Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources shall prepare the policy and guidelines on the selection and appointment of forest rangers in accordance with civil service, rules and regulations as mentioned in the preceding section.

Section 5. Increased Deployment Ratio of Forest Rangers. – The Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources shall upgrade the deployment ratio of forest rangers to an average of at least one forest ranger per five hundred (500) to one thousand (1000) hectares.

Section 6. Education and Training. – The Philippine National Police (PNP) or Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and other law enforcement agencies or bureaus

shall provide education and training programs to forest rangers. The DENR shall see to it that this shall be on a regular basis to standardize the capability and merits of being a forest ranger. The education and training programs for forest rangers shall include topics—which however, shall not be limited to the following:

- a) Proper and responsible use of firearms and tactical self-defense training;
- b) Lessons on laws and ordinances pertinent to the protection of the environment;
- c) Strategies and tactics to undertake detection, surveillance, investigation and prevention of environment crimes, and assist in their prosecution;
- d) Procedure of arresting offenders with or without a warrant of arrest, how to serve search warrant, detaining arrested persons and proper way of testifying in the court;
- e) Use of advanced information technology systems and effective information management such as computers, digital maps and other uses of technology relating to environment crimes, its prevention and surveillance;
- f) Conduct of search and rescue operations;
- g) Emergency medical aid;
- h) Fire prevention and firefighting; and
- i) Other education and training programs necessary for the effective exercise of their duties and responsibilities.

Section 7. Transportation and Protection. – Forest rangers shall be issued with a safety bullet-proof vest in all operations with body cameras which shall be online and feeding information to the DENR; an advanced information technology equipment necessary for surveillance and communication within their areas of jurisdiction; and a means of transportation to allow the forest rangers to respond quickly to matters pertaining to their functions.

Section 8. Possession and Carrying of Firearms by the Forest Rangers. – Forest rangers are hereby authorized to possess and carry defensive firearms in the performance of their official duties within their areas of jurisdiction. The necessary firearms to be issued to forest rangers shall be determined by the PNP and the Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources.

For purposes of this Act, forest ranger refers to an officer or employee of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) who, by the nature of the appointment or the function of the position, is authorized by law or by competent authority to execute, implement or enforce the provisions of Presidential Decree No. 705 otherwise known as the “Revised Forestry Code of the Philippines”, other related laws, as well as their implementing regulations.

Section 7. Law Enforcement Assistance. – Members of the PNP, AFP, barangay officials, or other persons authorized by law to protect and preserve the forest

shall assist and actively work together with forest rangers upon prior coordination in performing the following duties:

a) Routine patrol of any area defined in Presidential Decree No. 705, where forest officers are authorized to enter and perform official duties and functions;

b) Immediate investigation of the reports and complaints provided in Section 80 of Presidential Decree No. 705;

c) Execute the warrant of searches and seizures; and

d) Lawful arrest with or without a warrant of any person in violation of environmental protection laws and ordinances.

Section 9. Transitory Provision. – Individuals currently employed by the DENR as forest rangers on contractual basis shall be given priority in hiring for permanent positions provided they meet the qualifications and standards required for the position.

Section 10. Implementing Rules and Regulations. – Within ninety (90) days from the approval of this Act, the Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources, in consultation with the Secretary of Interior and Local Government and the chief of the Philippine National Police, shall issue the necessary rules and regulations for the effective implementation of this Act.

Section 11. Appropriation. – The amount necessary for the implementation of this Act shall be charged to the appropriation for the DENR. Thereafter, such sums as may be necessary for its continued implementation shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

Section 12. Separability Clause. – If any provision of this Act is declared invalid or unconstitutional, the remaining parts or any provision not affected shall remain in full force and effect.

Section 13. Repealing Clause. – All laws, presidential decrees, executive orders and their implementing rules, inconsistent with the provision of this Act are hereby repealed, amended or modified accordingly.

Section 14. Effectivity. – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved.