

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 697



Introduced by **REP. JAVIER MIGUEL "JAVI" L. BENITEZ**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Tourism is an important engine of economic growth. However, tourism may have negative social and environmental impacts. Tourism activities may cause environmental damage and exceed the ecological carrying capacity of an area.

To address this, the Government has committed to promote sustainable tourism – tourism that addresses “the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.”

Ecotourism is a form of sustainable tourism. The United Nations World Tourism Organization defines ecotourism as tourism wherein the main motivation of tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature and traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas. It is a form of tourism that generates economic benefits for host communities, nature conservation organizations or authorities managing natural areas; provides alternative employment and income for local communities; but minimizes negative impacts on the natural and socio-cultural environment, and increases awareness towards conservation of natural and cultural assets, both among locals and tourists.

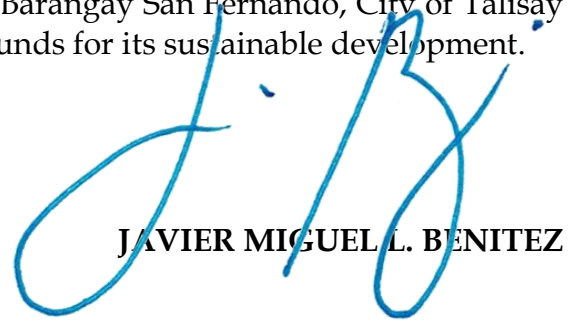
Understanding this, the Provincial Government of Negros Occidental (PGNO) has outlined plans to develop a portion of the 62-hectare forest land in Sitio Pulak-Pulakan, Talisay City as an ecotourism site. The forest land lies at the edge of the Northern Negros Natural Park and is part of a larger watershed that fills an intricate network of rivers. Initial survey also revealed rich biodiversity in the area. The PGNO has started the process of declaring the forest land as a Local Conservation Area, but will need a steady source of funds to protect the area.

Developing the 1.3-hectare clearing or grassy area of said forest land to host ecotourism activities will help generate income to support the PGNO's efforts to protect the rich biodiversity in the area and ensure water security in the province.

Presently, PGNO already maintains a bamboo nursery in the site, using agroforestry techniques. Part of the Provincial Government's plan is to establish a bamboo treatment facility and a livelihood center where local artisans can make bamboo crafts. Inspired by bamboo architecture in Bali, Indonesia, PGNO is also integrating bamboo in the design of the facilities that will be constructed in the site, such as an information center, a multipurpose hall, a workshop or livelihood center, and a view deck.

The Provincial Government of Negros Occidental, however, cannot bear the full cost of the establishment of this Nature Tourism and Biodiversity Conservation Center in Sitio Pulak-Pulakan. It needs the support of the National Government.

Investing in ecotourism is investing in the future, ensuring that future generations will benefit from the beauty and bounty of nature. Apropos to this proposition is our earnest request for the immediate approval of this measure that will declare Sitio Puluk-Pulukan, Barangay San Fernando, City of Talisay an ecotourism zone and will channel funds for its sustainable development.



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AN ACT DECLARING SITIO PULAK-PULAKAN, BARANGAY SAN FERNANDO, CITY OF TALISAY, PROVINCE OF NEGROS OCCIDENTAL, AN ECOTOURISM ZONE, PROVIDING FOR ITS DEVELOPMENT AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

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

SECTION 1. Sitio Pulak-Pulakan, Barangay San Fernando, City of Talisay, Province of Negros Occidental, is hereby declared an ecotourism zone. As such, its development shall be prioritized by the Department of Tourism (DOT) and shall be subject to the rules and regulations governing the development of ecotourism zones.

SEC. 2. Within one (1) year after the approval of this Act, the DOT, in coordination with the Provincial Government of Negros Occidental, the local government of the City of Talisay and agencies of the government, shall prepare a tourism development plan involving the construction, installation, and maintenance of appropriate infrastructure and facilities that shall enhance tourism in the area, including an information center, a view deck, a multipurpose hall, a bamboo treatment facility, a plant nursery, a wildlife research center, a livelihood center, and lodging facilities: *Provided*, That said development plan shall ensure the preservation and conservation of the natural ecosystems and resources of the area: *Provided, further*, That any activities and developments to be carried out in the area should conform with the concept of ecotourism as provided in the national ecotourism strategy jointly issued by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the DOT.

SEC. 3. The DOT and its concerned attached agencies shall take immediate steps to implement the tourism development plan that will suit the natural characteristics of Sitio Pulak-Pulakan, and shall incorporate the same in its tourism development program for the ensuing calendar year. It shall also include Sitio Pulak-Pulukan in all its national, regional and local promotion programs.

SEC. 4. The Secretary of the DOT shall include in the Department's program the implementation of this Act, the funding of which shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act and from internally generated funds of the DOT.

SEC. 5. The DOT shall transfer the management of the facilities to the Provincial Government of Negros Occidental within two (2) years after construction through a memorandum of agreement.

SEC. 6. Within sixty (60) days from the effectivity of this Act, the Secretary of the DOT, in consultation with the Provincial Government of Negros Occidental and the local government unit of Talisay City, shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations for the proper implementation of this Act.

SEC. 7. If any provision of this Act or any part hereof is declared unconstitutional, the same shall not affect the validity and effectivity of the other provisions.

SEC. 8. All laws, rules, regulations, proclamations and executive orders, or parts thereof, contrary to or inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SEC. 9. This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the *Official Gazette* or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,