



Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 1380



Introduced by **REPRESENTATIVES EDDIEBONG G. PLAZA** and
ALFEL M. BASCUG

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Agusan Marsh is one of the country's most vital ecological areas. It provides critical shelter for unique and endangered flora and fauna and serves as a feeding and breeding place for migrating birds and endangered wildlife. It is also home to indigenous Manobo communities, who regard the Marsh as a sacred site. For these communities, the Marsh is a symbol of their identity and heritage. Beyond its ecological and cultural significance, the Marsh functions as a natural flood-retention basin, absorbing excess water during the rainy season and protecting various areas across Mindanao from heavy floods.

The invaluable ecosystem and unique beauty of the Agusan Marsh have attracted researchers, educators, environmental enthusiasts, and tourists over the years. In Sitio Panlabuhan, a small community nestled within the Marsh, grassroots efforts have begun to introduce cultural tourism activities that highlight the Marsh's environmental and cultural significance.

However, with the growing interest in the Agusan Marsh comes the increasing threats to the area and its people. According to the Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary, illegal fishing, timber poaching, wildlife hunting, the construction of man-made canals, peat fire incidents, and land-use conversion remain persistent threats to the Marsh and its inhabitants.

It is vital that appropriate measures and support be provided by both the local and the national governments to preserve the natural beauty of Agusan Marsh while also maximizing its potential as a sustainable tourism destination. The ecotourism zone must be developed in line with the State policy which states that tourism development must be ecologically sustainable, responsible, participatory, culturally sensitive, ethically and socially equitable for local communities.

With this measure having already reached the Senate during the 19th Congress, it is hoped that necessary initiatives for the development and conservation of the Agusan Marsh will be institutionalized.

In view of the foregoing, approval of this bill is earnestly sought.

ALFEL M. BASCUG
1ST District, Agusan del Sur

EDDIEBONG G. PLAZA
2nd District, Agusan del Sur



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**AN ACT DECLARING THE AGUSAN MARSH LOCATED IN THE
MUNICIPALITIES OF TALACOGON, SAN FRANCISCO, ROSARIO,
BUNAWAN, LORETO, LA PAZ AND VERUELA, ALL IN THE PROVINCE
OF AGUSAN DEL SUR, AN ECOTOURISM ZONE**

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

SECTION 1. Declaration of Policy. – The State is mandated to promote a tourism industry that is ecologically sustainable, responsible, participative, culturally sensitive, economically viable, and equitably beneficial to local communities.

SECTION 2. Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Zone. – The Agusan Marsh located in the Municipalities of Talacogon, San Francisco, Rosario, Bunawan, Loreto, La Paz, and Veruela in the Province of Agusan del Sur is hereby declared an ecotourism zone. Pursuant thereto, its development shall be prioritized and supported by the Department of Tourism (DOT), subject to the rules and regulations governing the development of ecotourism zones.

SECTION 3. Scope and Coverage. – This Act shall cover the municipalities of Talacogon, San Francisco, Rosario, Bunawan, Loreto, La Paz, and Veruela.

The setting of technical boundaries of the ecotourism zone shall be undertaken by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and other concerned agencies of the government.

SECTION 4. Definition of Terms. – As used in this Act:

- a. *Biodiversity conservation* refers to the practice of preserving the variety of species, habits and ecosystems, and genetic diversity of the place, including *inter alia*, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems, and the ecological complexes which they are a part of;
- b. *Community-based tourism* refers to a form of tourism where the local community and its residents have substantial control over and involvement

- in the development and management of the local tourism industry and a greater portion of the economic gains remain within the community;
- c. *Ecotourism* refers to a form of sustainable tourism within a natural area where community participation, protection and management of natural resources, cultural and indigenous knowledge and practices, environmental education and ethics, as well as economic benefits are fostered and pursued for the enrichment of host communities and satisfaction of visitors;
 - d. *Homestays* refer to a system of tourist accommodation where a tourist stays with local residents and experiences their day-to-day life;
 - e. *Responsible ecotourism* refers to a form of sustainable tourism in which both the tourism sector and the tourists take responsibility in the protection, respect, and conservation of the natural environment and the local culture and ways of life, and where community participation as well as economic benefits are fostered and pursued for the well-being of the local residents and visitors;

SECTION 5. *Development Strategies.* – To accomplish the development of the Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Zone, the State shall:

- a. Develop and promote responsible, community-based ecotourism as the core management strategy in the development of the Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Zone;
- b. Ensure the conservation of the biodiversity and the preservation of the said ecotourism zone;
- c. Develop ecotourism products and programs that will generate employment and livelihood for the local residents concerned, consistent with the preservation and maintenance of the natural resources;
- d. Guarantee that the financial and economic benefits of the tourism industry are equitably shared by, and distributed among the local residents concerned, by giving preference and support to community – and home-based micro and small tourism enterprises such as homestays, restaurants, food and fruit stands, and other similar tourism-oriented businesses and activities;
- e. Ensure that the equality of local tourism programs and activities are educational and enriching for tourists and visitors through the provision of orientation, educational and tour programs by local tour operators, non-government organizations (NGOs), the concerned Local Government Units (LGUs), the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), and the Department of Tourism (DOT); and,
- f. Guarantee that in the development and promotion of the local tourism industry, the concerned Local Government Units (LGUs) shall ensure the adequate provision of water supply, food, energy and transportation for the needs of the local residents and communities.

SECTION 6. *The Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Development and Management Plan.* – Within one twenty (120) days after the approval of this Act, the municipal governments of Talacogon, San Francisco, Rosario, Bunawan, Loreto, La Paz, and Veruela shall, in coordination with the Department of Tourism (DOT), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), and other concerned agencies of the government, prepare the Agusan Marsh Ecotoursim Development and Management Plan that shall be complemented by a set of guidelines for a responsible community-based ecotourism.

The Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Development and Management Plan shall ensure the preservation of the ecotourism zone and shall include the following components:

- a. Carrying capacity of the Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Zone, including its endemic and migratory birds species;
- b. Specific site assessment;
- c. Identification of strategic priorities;
- d. Product development plans for local income generation;
- e. Capacity-building for the local community so residents therein can ably manage economically viable and responsible, community- based ecotourism business enterprises;
- f. Strategies to promote the formulation of local production groups and networks, including the marketing and pricing of products; and
- g. Marketing strategies that uphold the natural, social and environmental integrity Agusan Marsh Ecotourism zone and its local residents.

SECTION 7. *Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Board.* – The Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Board, hereinafter referred to as the Board, is hereby created. It shall be composed of the following members:

- a. The Governor of the Province of Agusan del Sur, as Chairperson;
- b. The Secretary of the Department of Tourism (DOT), or a duly authorized representative;
- c. The Secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), or a duly authorized representative;
- d. The Mayors of the Municipalities of Talacogon, San Francisco, Rosario, Bunawan, Loreto, La Paz, and Veruela;
- e. Representative from a non-government organization whose advocacy is environmental preservation;
- f. Representative from the academe;
- g. Representative from the business sector; and

h. Representative from the private sector.

The Board shall, in coordination with the DOT and other concerned agencies of the government, promulgate the necessary rules and regulations to implement this Act; and, as the need arises, shall amend, modify or revise such rules and regulations to meet the needs of changing times.

SECTION 8. *Role of the DOT.* – The Department of Tourism (DOT) shall assist the municipal governments of Talacogon, San Francisco, Rosario, Bunawan, Loreto, La Paz, and Veruela in the implementation of the Agusan Marsh Ecotourism Development and Management Plan by providing technical assistance in tourism capacity building. It shall also include the Agusan Marsh in its national and regional promotion programs.

SECTION 9. *Appropriations.* – The funding for the implementation of this Act shall be included in the respective annual budgets of the municipal governments of Talacogon, San Francisco, Rosario, Bunawan, Loreto, La Paz, and Veruela. The DOT may augment such allocation with internally generated funds.

SECTION 8. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision or part of this part Act shall be declared unconstitutional or invalid, the other provisions not affected thereby shall remain in full force and effect.

SECTION 9. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, rules, regulations, executive orders, presidential decrees or other issuances contrary to or inconsistent with any of the provisions of this Act are hereby deemed repealed or modified accordingly.

SECTION 10. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the *Official Gazette* or in any newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,