

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

Twentieth Congress
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 4010



Introduced by **Representative RAYMOND ADRIAN SALCEDA**

AN ACT
DECLARING THE JOVELLAR CAVE AND UNDERGROUND RIVER LOCATED
IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF JOVELLAR, PROVINCE OF ALBAY, AN
ECOTOURISM SITE, PROVIDING FOR ITS DEVELOPMENT AND
MANAGEMENT, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Municipality of Jovellar in the Province of Albay hosts the Jovellar Cave and Underground River, locally known as the Quitinday Underground River, situated in Barangay Quitinday. The Provincial Government of Albay promotes this site as a navigable underground river attraction, underscoring its growing tourism value for southern Albay.

Cave and subterranean river systems are sensitive resources that require clear legal protection and science-based management. The National Caves and Cave Resources Management and Protection Act, Republic Act No. 9072, declares as state policy the conservation, protection, and management of caves and cave resources and strengthens coordination among government agencies and resource users for scientific, educational, recreational, and tourism purposes. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources issued Administrative Order No. 2003-29 to operationalize this law, including the national system for cave assessment, listing, and classification, which governs allowable uses and access controls.

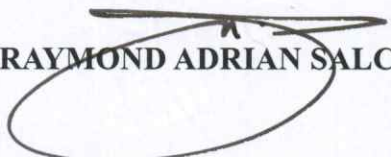
Pursuant to this framework, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources has classified the Jovellar Underground River, also referred to as Quitinday Cave, as a Class II cave. Class II caves contain sensitive values and may include hazardous sections, and are generally open only to guided educational visits or experienced cavers, with the possibility of seasonal or permanent closures of some sections. This classification establishes the legal basis for regulating visitor access, setting carrying capacity, instituting safety protocols, and restricting activities that could degrade the site.

Philippine ecotourism policy likewise directs that development be low impact, conservation oriented, and community participatory. Executive Order No. 111 created the National Ecotourism Development Council and mandated national guidelines, complemented by the Joint DENR-DOT Memorandum Circular No. 98-02 that sets criteria for ecotourism site development, including uniqueness, accessibility, carrying-capacity based facilities, benefit sharing with local communities, and sustained environmental monitoring. These instruments provide an enabling framework for a managed, conservation-led tourism program for Jovellar.

Declaring the Jovellar Cave and Underground River an ecotourism site through this measure will align on-the-ground management with national law and policy while delivering local benefits. The Act will mandate the preparation of a sustainable development and management plan led by the Department of Tourism in coordination with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the Department of Public Works and Highways, and the concerned local governments. The plan should, at minimum, do the following: identify conservation zones and regulated use areas consistent with the cave's Class II status; determine visitor carrying capacity and guided route design; establish water quality and biodiversity monitoring consistent with Department of Environment and Natural Resources and Department of Health standards; and create a benefit-sharing scheme that channels a defined share of fees to local barangays and people's organizations for conservation, safety, and livelihood.

The site's formal recognition by the Province of Albay and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources cave classification together demonstrate both the tourism potential and the conservation sensitivity of the resource. A statute will consolidate these strands by codifying a governance structure, enforcing existing prohibitions under Republic Act No. 9072 and related environmental laws, and requiring periodic reporting to Congress on ecological condition, visitor numbers, and community benefits. This will help ensure that the Jovellar Underground River becomes a model of community-based, conservation-first ecotourism for Albay and the Bicol Region.

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



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

SECTION 1. *Title.* This Act shall be known as the “Jovellar Cave and Underground River Ecotourism Act.”

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* It is the policy of the State to pursue a balanced approach to tourism and environmental conservation, ensuring that the development of natural attractions such as caves and underground rivers is consistent with the principles of sustainable development, biodiversity conservation, and community empowerment.

SEC. 3. *Ecotourism Site Declaration.* The Jovellar Cave and Underground River, located in Barangay Quitinday and adjoining areas in the Municipality of Jovellar, Province of Albay, is hereby declared an ecotourism site.

SEC. 4. *Development and Management.* The Department of Tourism (DOT), in coordination with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), the Provincial Government of Albay, and the Municipal Government of Jovellar, shall prepare a sustainable ecotourism development and management plan for the Jovellar Cave and Underground River. The plan shall:

(a) ensure conservation of the cave system, underground river, and surrounding ecosystems;

(b) provide for infrastructure consistent with environmental carrying capacity, including visitor centers, access roads, and sanitation facilities;

- (c) regulate and monitor tourist activities to prevent environmental degradation; and
- (d) establish benefit-sharing mechanisms to ensure that local communities, including indigenous peoples and barangay residents, directly benefit from tourism revenues.

SEC. 5. *Prohibited Acts.* To protect the integrity of the Jovellar Cave and Underground River, the following acts are prohibited within the declared ecotourism area:

- (a) dumping of waste and pollutants;
- (b) illegal logging, quarrying, or mining activities;
- (c) unregulated entry into restricted zones of the cave and underground river; and
- (d) other activities that endanger biodiversity, water quality, or geological features.

Violations shall be penalized under existing environmental laws, including the National Caves and Cave Resources Management and Protection Act (Republic Act No. 9072).

SEC. 6. *Funding.* The amount necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act. The DOT, DENR, and the concerned LGUs may also mobilize resources from ecotourism fees, grants, donations, and partnerships with private stakeholders.

SEC. 7. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the DOT, DENR, DPWH, and the concerned LGUs shall jointly promulgate the necessary rules and regulations to implement this Act.

SEC. 8. *Separability Clause.* If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, the remaining provisions not affected shall remain in full force and effect.

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

Approved,