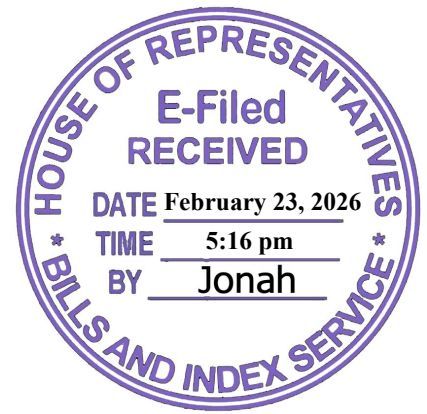


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. 7976



Introduced by Representative ERIC G. YAP

EXPLANATORY NOTE

This bill seeks to reclassify specific portions of the Busol Watershed located in Barangays Ambiong, Lubas, and Beckel in the Municipality of La Trinidad, Province of Benguet. This shall reflect actual land use and shall recognize the ancestral land rights of Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples (ICCs/IPs) who have long occupied and cultivated these areas. The measure aims to correct a long-standing inconsistency between the present legal classification of the land and the historical and continuing use of the area by ICCs/IPs, while still upholding essential environmental safeguards.

The Busol Watershed, covering 336.58 hectares¹, was designated as a forest and watershed reservation under Proclamation No. 15 issued on April 27, 1922. While its ecological importance remains clear, particularly its role in water and timber resource conservation, the proclamation did not account for communities that had already settled, farmed, and managed portions of the area since time immemorial. These lands have long served as ancestral domains and traditional livelihood sites for ICCs/IPs residing in Barangays Ambiong, Lubas, and Beckel.

Today, because the land remains classified as a watershed reservation, ICCs/IPs face legal and administrative barriers in securing ownership documents and obtaining formal recognition of their ancestral land rights. Despite their deep-rooted presence and stewardship of the area, they cannot secure Certificates of Ancestral Land Titles (CALTs) under Republic Act No. 8371, otherwise known as "*The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997*" (IPRA) due to the current land classification.

This bill reclassifies specific, validated portions of the Busol Watershed into Alienable and Disposable (A&D) lands exclusively for the purpose of recognizing qualified ancestral land claims. The proposed measure ensures that only areas historically occupied and used by ICCs/IPs will be reclassified, and excludes ecologically sensitive portions of the watershed such as protected forests, riparian

¹ VITTORIO, Jericho Cawis. *Watershed management in the City of Baguio*. June 2016. <https://rdc.ubaguio.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/UB-Research-Journal-2016-Issue.pdf>

zones, and recharge areas. In this way, it upholds both environmental protection and social justice.

The recognition of ancestral land rights is not merely a legal mandate, but an affirmation of identity, dignity, and cultural continuity. It acknowledges the deep relationship between indigenous communities and the land they have cultivated, nurtured, and protected across generations.

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



HON. ERIC G. YAP

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

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. **7976**

Introduced by Representative ERIC G. YAP

AN ACT

RECLASSIFYING SPECIFIC PORTIONS OF THE BUSOL WATERSHED LOCATED IN BARANGAYS AMBIONG, LUBAS, AND BECKEL IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF LA TRINIDAD, PROVINCE OF BENGUET, TO REFLECT ACTUAL LAND USE AND RECOGNIZING THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS CULTURAL COMMUNITIES/INDIGENOUS PEOPLES (ICCs/IPs) THEREIN, 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 “*Busol Watershed Reclassification and ICC/IP Rights Recognition Act*”.

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to protect and conserve forest and watershed reservations while ensuring the recognition, promotion, and protection of the rights of Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples (ICCs/IPs) to their ancestral lands as mandated under Republic Act (RA) No. 8371, otherwise known as “*The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997*”.

Towards this end, the State recognizes that protecting the environment and upholding social justice must go hand in hand. It affirms its commitment to ensure that the lands long lived in, cared for, and cultivated by ICCs/IPs are properly recognized and classified according to how these communities genuinely use them, while still upholding environmental safeguards and complying with existing laws. This honors both the people who have nurtured these lands for generations and the need to preserve them for the future.

SEC. 3. *Coverage.* – This Act shall apply to specific portions of the Busol Watershed located within Barangays Ambiong, Lubas, and Beckel in the Municipality of La Trinidad, Province of Benguet, which:

a. have been occupied, developed, or utilized since time immemorial by ICCs/IPs for residential, agricultural, and traditional livelihood purposes; and

b. are no longer consistent with the current classification as watershed and forest reservation under Proclamation No. 15, series of 1922.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), in coordination with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), and the Municipality of La Trinidad, shall delineate the specific areas to be reclassified based on cadastral surveys, actual land use, and validated historical occupation by ICCs/IPs.

SEC. 4. *Reclassification.* – The identified portions of the Busol Watershed shall be reclassified from Watershed and Forest Reservation to Alienable and Disposable (A&D) lands, strictly limited to the validated ancestral lands of ICCs/IPs.

Such reclassification shall not include protected areas, riparian zones, recharge areas, or areas crucial to the ecological function of the watershed.

SEC. 5. *Recognition of ICC/IP Ancestral Lands.* – Upon reclassification and delineation, the NCIP shall initiate and fast-track the processing of Certificates of Ancestral Land Titles (CALTs) for qualified ICC/IP claimants consistent with RA No. 8371, and its implementing rules and regulations.

The CALTs issued shall serve as evidence of ownership, subject to the customary laws, traditions, and collective rights of the ICCs/IPs.

SEC. 6. *Environmental Safeguards.* – Nothing in this Act shall diminish the ecological significance of the Busol Watershed. All reclassified areas shall remain subject to:

a. sustainable land use practices;

b. environmental compliance requirements;

c. development restrictions necessary to protect the watershed; and

d. the implementation of DENR, NCIP, and local government environmental policies.

SEC. 7. *Inter-Agency Committee.* – An Inter-Agency Committee, herein referred to as the Committee, is hereby created to implement this Act. It shall be composed of members from the Municipality of La Trinidad, the Provincial Government of Benguet, and representatives of ICCs/IPs of Barangays Ambiong, Lubas, and Beckel. The Committee shall be jointly chaired by the Secretary of the Natural Resources and the Chairperson of the NCIP.

The Committee shall oversee the delineation, survey validation, environmental assessment, and processing of CALTs.

SEC. 8. *Funding.* – The amount necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged to the appropriations of the DENR and NCIP. Thereafter, funding shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act (GAA).

SEC. 9. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, the DENR and NCIP, in coordination with the Municipality of La Trinidad, shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations to effectively implement the provisions of this Act.

SEC. 10. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional, the remaining provisions shall remain in full force and effect.

SEC. 11. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, decrees, proclamations, orders, and issuances inconsistent with this Act are hereby amended, modified, or repealed accordingly.

SEC. 12. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

Approved,