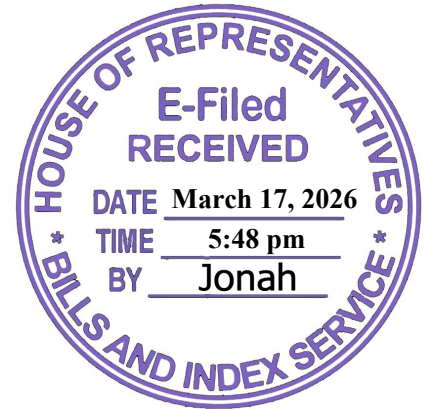


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

House Bill No. 8642



Introduced by Representative ERIC G. YAP

EXPLANATORY NOTE

This bill seeks to reclassify certain forest lands in the Province of Benguet into alienable and disposable lands of the public domain in order to align legal land classification with actual land use and to enable Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples (ICCs/IPs) to secure ownership documents over lands they have long possessed, occupied, and cultivated.

A significant portion of the land area of Benguet remains classified as forest land under existing national land classification policies. However, many of these areas have long been developed and utilized for agricultural production, residential settlements, commercial establishments, public infrastructure, and other community purposes. This long-standing mismatch between the legal classification of land and its actual use has created persistent challenges for local communities, particularly for ICCs/IPs who have lived on and stewarded these lands since time immemorial.

Because these lands remain officially classified as forest lands, many residents, including ICCs/IPs, cannot secure formal land ownership documents such as titles, tax declarations, or other tenure instruments. As a result, they face limitations in exercising their property rights, accessing government services and development programs, and using their lands as collateral for financial opportunities. This situation also creates uncertainty in land tenure and restricts the ability of local government units to effectively regulate development and implement land use plans.

Updated and accurate land classification is therefore essential to ensure sound land governance and sustainable development. Reclassifying areas that have long been developed or occupied will help harmonize legal land status with present realities on the ground. Such action will support local government units in the formulation and updating of their Comprehensive Land Use Plans (CLUPs) and other development plans, thereby promoting more effective land use management across the Province of Benguet.

Furthermore, this measure complements the policy of the State to recognize and promote the rights of Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples

under Republic Act No. 8371, otherwise known as the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997. Facilitating appropriate land classification and tenure mechanisms will help ensure that ICCs/IPs are able to secure the legal recognition and protection of the lands they have traditionally occupied and cared for.

In view of the foregoing, the approval 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. **8642**

Introduced by Representative ERIC G. YAP

AN ACT

RECLASSIFYING CERTAIN FOREST LANDS IN THE PROVINCE OF BENGUET INTO ALIENABLE AND DISPOSABLE LANDS TO REFLECT ACTUAL LAND USE AND TO ENABLE INDIGENOUS CULTURAL COMMUNITIES/ INDIGENOUS PEOPLES (ICCs/IPs) TO SECURE OWNERSHIP DOCUMENTS OVER THEIR LANDS

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

SECTION 1. *Declaration of Policy.* - It is hereby declared the policy of the State to recognize and promote the rights of Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples (ICCs/IPs) within the framework of national unity and development, consistent with the provisions of the Constitution and Republic Act (RA) No. 8371, otherwise known as the "Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997."

The State likewise recognizes the need to ensure that land classification reflects actual land use in order to promote equitable access to land ownership, sustainable development, and effective land use planning.

SEC. 2. *Reclassification of Certain Forest Lands.* - Subject to existing laws, rules, and regulations, certain portions of forest lands in the Province of Benguet which have long been occupied, cultivated, or developed for agricultural, residential, commercial, institutional, and other community purposes are hereby identified for reclassification into alienable and disposable lands of the public domain, provided that such areas are no longer needed for forest purposes.

SEC. 3. *Identification and Delineation of Areas.* - The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), in coordination with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), the Provincial Government of Benguet, and the concerned Local Government Units (LGUs), shall conduct the necessary land classification, survey, and validation to determine the specific areas to be reclassified under this Act. In undertaking such process, priority shall be given to areas:

- a. Already used for agricultural production;
- b. Occupied for residential and community purposes;
- c. Developed for public infrastructure and institutional facilities; and
- d. Traditionally occupied or possessed by ICCs/IPs since time immemorial.

SEC. 4. *Recognition of Indigenous Peoples' Rights.* - The reclassification of lands under this Act shall respect and uphold the rights of ICCs/IPs to their ancestral domains and ancestral lands, consistent with the provisions of RA No. 8371.

Nothing in this Act shall prejudice the rights of ICCs/IPs to apply for and secure Certificates of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) or Certificates of Ancestral Land Title (CALT) under existing laws.

SEC. 5. *Issuance of Land Ownership Documents.* - Upon completion of the land classification process and the declaration of the areas as alienable and disposable lands, qualified occupants, including ICCs/IPs and other legitimate occupants, may apply for appropriate land ownership documents, titles, tax declarations, or other tenure instruments, subject to existing laws and regulations.

SEC. 6. *Support for Local Land Use Planning.* - The updated land classification resulting from this Act shall serve as a basis for the formulation or updating of the Comprehensive Land Use Plans (CLUPs) of the local government units in the Province of Benguet, consistent with national land use policies and sustainable development goals.

SEC. 7. *Implementing Agencies.* - The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), in coordination with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), and the Provincial Government of Benguet, shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations to effectively implement the provisions of this Act within one hundred eighty (180) days from its effectivity.

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

SEC. 9. *Repealing Clause.* - All laws, executive orders, rules and regulations, or parts thereof inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

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

Approved,