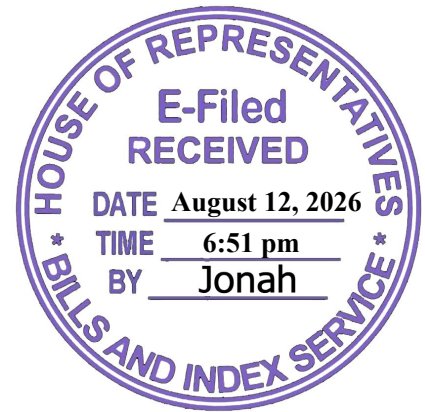


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 10762



Introduced by **Representative AGATHA “AGAY” CRUZ**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

A mountain range stretching more for than 540 kilometers across ten provinces¹ cannot be effectively managed one permit, one municipality, or one agency at a time.

The Sierra Madre is the longest mountain range in the Philippines and one of Luzon’s most important ecological systems. Extending from Cagayan to Quezon, it contains forests, watersheds, headwaters, river systems, wildlife habitats, ancestral domains, settlements, agricultural areas, and infrastructure that cut across political and administrative boundaries.

Its ecological value is substantial and increasingly under pressure. A satellite-based study reported that about half of the Philippines’ surviving old-growth forest is located in the Sierra Madre, while forest gains from 2001 to 2018 were offset by continuing losses of open and closed forests.² More recent research in General Nakar, Quezon and Rodriguez, Rizal likewise documented declining forest cover from 2016 to 2022 and identified kaingin, infrastructure expansion, timber poaching, small-scale mining, charcoal production, and natural hazards among the reported pressures on forests.³

The stakes are especially concrete in Bulacan. The Angat Watershed, situated at the southern end of the Sierra Madre, supports significant biodiversity and performs functions vital to water security, agriculture, energy, and downstream communities. Studies in Norzagaray and Doña Remedios Trinidad have documented considerable amphibian, reptile, and bird diversity, including Philippine endemic and threatened species.⁴ The Angat water system, meanwhile, supplies more than 90% of Metro Manila’s

¹ *Sierra Madre: Mountain Range of Resilience*, CLIMATE CHANGE COMMISSION, 26 September 2024, available at <https://climate.gov.ph/news/934>

² Perez, et. al., *Reforestation and Deforestation in Northern Luzon, Philippines: Critical Issues as Observed from Space*, FOREST (2020), available at <https://www.mdpi.com/1999-4907/11/10/1071>

³ Israel, et. al., *Deforestation and Forest Degradation Analysis of Southern Sierra Madre, Philippines Using Google Earth Engine and Community Mapping*, INTERNATIONAL ARCHIVES OF THE PHOTOGRAMMETRY, REMOTE SENSING AND SPATIAL INFORMATION SCIENCES (2023), available at <https://isprs-archives.copernicus.org/articles/XLVIII-4-W8-2023/313/2024/isprs-archives-XLVIII-4-W8-2023-313-2024.pdf>

⁴ McLeod, et. al., *Amphibians and Reptiles of Luzon Island, V: The Herpetofauna of Angat Dam Watershed, Bulacan Province, Luzon Island, Philippines*, ASIAN HERPETOLOGICAL RESEARCH (2011), available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/221673728_Amphibians_and_Reptiles_of_Luzon_Island_V_The_Herpetofauna_of_Angat_Dam_Watershed_Bulacan_Province_Luzon_Island_Philippines

domestic water requirements, supports irrigation in thousands of hectares of farmland, generates hydropower, and contributes to flood management.⁵

The Sierra Madre is also frequently described as Luzon's natural defense against tropical cyclones. Scientific studies found that the mountain range influences wind and rainfall patterns, but its effects vary depending on location and storm conditions.⁶ Its protection need not rest on the claim that it stops every storm. Its forests, watersheds, biodiversity, slopes, and ecological connectivity already provide compelling reasons for responsible management.

The challenge is that these ecological systems are interconnected, while government authority and management over them is necessarily divided.

Protected areas have their own statutory management bodies. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources exercises authority over forests and natural resources. Local government units perform land-use and development functions. Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples possess constitutionally and statutorily protected rights over ancestral domains and ancestral lands. Other agencies exercise mandates involving infrastructure, agriculture, energy, water resources, human settlements, and national development planning.

These institutions perform necessary functions, but no single one is positioned to manage the Sierra Madre as an interconnected landscape. A watershed may span several municipalities. A biodiversity corridor may extend beyond protected-area boundaries. Forest degradation upstream may affect communities downstream. Several projects that appear manageable when evaluated individually may, taken together, impose significant pressure on the same watershed or ecological corridor.

Environmental impacts do not cease to be cumulative simply because permits are issued separately.

This bill addresses that governance gap by establishing the Sierra Madre Management Area (SMMA) as a common framework for integrated, landscape-level planning and management. It adopts differentiated management based on ecological conditions and lawful existing uses. Areas of exceptional ecological, biological, hydrological, or disaster-risk significance may be delineated as Core Conservation Areas and accorded heightened protection. Degraded but ecologically important areas may be prioritized for restoration, while appropriate areas may continue to accommodate settlements, livelihoods, infrastructure, and responsible economic activity subject to applicable safeguards.

⁵ Tejada, et. al., *Spatiotemporal Analysis of Extreme Rainfall and Meteorological Drought Events over the Angat Watershed, Philippines*, ATMOSPHERE (2023), available at <https://doi.org/10.3390/atmos14121790>

⁶ Bagtasa and Racoma, *Does the Sierra Madre Mountain Range in Luzon Act as a Barrier to Typhoons?*, PHILIPPINE METEOROLOGICAL RESEARCH (2023), available at https://philjournalsci.dost.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/does_the_Sierra_Madre_Mountain_Act_as_Barrier_to_typhoons_.pdf

The measure adopts a balanced approach of stronger protection where ecological conditions demand it, restoration where degradation has occurred, and responsible development where compatible with environmental limits and existing rights. It also ensures that decisions made within one jurisdiction are assessed in relation to their broader effects on the Sierra Madre as an interconnected landscape.

For this purpose, the bill creates the Sierra Madre Conservation and Management Authority (SMCMA). Its principal role is to provide the whole-of-government planning, coordination, scientific monitoring, and policy convergence required by a mountain system that cuts across agencies, regions, provinces, and municipalities.

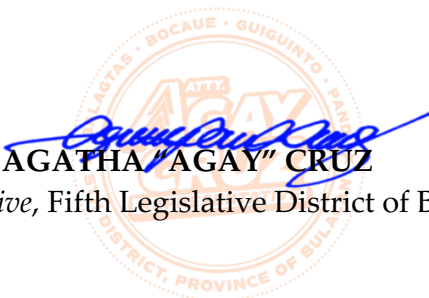
At the center of this framework is the Sierra Madre Conservation and Sustainable Development Plan, integrating ecological zoning, watershed and biodiversity conditions, land and resource use, climate and disaster risks, major infrastructure, restoration priorities, cumulative environmental impacts, and measurable performance indicators.

The measure likewise recognizes that conservation cannot be separated from the people who have long lived within and depended upon the Sierra Madre. It safeguards the rights of Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples, including rights over ancestral domains, traditional resource use, customary practices, and participation in the management of ecologically significant areas, while maintaining safeguards against commercial or destructive exploitation.

The Sierra Madre contains forests and biodiversity of national significance, while its watersheds sustain communities and major economic activities. The consequences of decisions made within it frequently extend beyond the jurisdiction in which those decisions originate.

This bill provides a framework that enables the government of seeing the Sierra Madre as a whole by protecting what must be protected, restoring what has been degraded, and allowing responsible development where ecological conditions permit.

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



AGATHA "AGAY" CRUZ
Representative, Fifth Legislative District of Bulacan

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 10762

Introduced by **Representative AGATHA “AGAY” CRUZ**

AN ACT
INSTITUTIONALIZING A LANDSCAPE-LEVEL FRAMEWORK FOR THE
CONSERVATION, PROTECTION, RESTORATION, CLIMATE RESILIENCE, AND
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SIERRA MADRE MOUNTAIN RANGE,
CREATING THE SIERRA MADRE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT
AUTHORITY, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

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

CHAPTER I
PRELIMINARY PROVISIONS

Section 1. *Short Title.* – This Act shall be known as the “Sierra Madre Conservation and Management Act.”

Section 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to conserve, protect, restore, and sustainably manage the Sierra Madre Mountain Range as an interconnected ecological system vital to biodiversity conservation, watershed and water security, climate resilience, disaster risk reduction, sustainable livelihoods, and the well-being of present and future generations.

The State shall adopt an integrated, science-based, risk-informed, climate-resilient, and landscape-level approach to the management of the Sierra Madre, recognizing the ecological interdependence of its forests, watersheds, river systems, habitats, biodiversity corridors, communities, and lawful land and resource uses. Ecologically critical and environmentally sensitive areas shall be accorded appropriate protection, while sustainable livelihoods, responsible economic activities, essential public infrastructure, and other lawful uses shall be allowed in areas where they are environmentally compatible and consistent with applicable laws and management plans.

The State shall respect and protect the rights of Indigenous Cultural

Communities/Indigenous Peoples (ICCs/IPs), including their rights to ancestral domains and ancestral lands, native title, customary laws, traditional knowledge, governance systems, and sustainable resource use practices. It shall likewise uphold local autonomy and promote the meaningful participation of local government units (LGUs), affected communities, civil society, and other stakeholders in the planning and management of the Sierra Madre.

To this end, the State shall promote coordinated action among national government agencies, LGUs, protected area management bodies, ICCs/IPs, and other concerned stakeholders; harmonize relevant plans, programs, investments, and regulatory actions; promote ecological restoration and conservation-compatible livelihoods; and ensure transparency, accountability, public participation, and measurable ecological and socioeconomic outcomes in the implementation of this Act.

Section 3. Definition of Terms. – For purposes of this Act:

- (a) *Core Conservation Area* refers to a specifically delineated area within the Sierra Madre Management Area determined, pursuant to this Act, to possess exceptionally high ecological, biological, hydrological, geological, climate-resilience, or disaster-risk significance and, by reason thereof, requiring the highest level of protection and is subject to the restrictions prescribed under this Act;
- (b) *Natural forest* refers to a forest composed predominantly of indigenous tree and plant species arising through natural regeneration, including primary and secondary natural forests, as classified by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR);
- (c) *Sierra Madre Management Area (SMMA)* refers to the geographic area established under this Act for integrated, landscape-level planning, ecological management, conservation, restoration, sustainable development, monitoring, and inter-agency coordination of the Sierra Madre and its interconnected ecological and socioeconomic systems, comprising relevant mountain, forest, watershed, riverine, biodiversity, and associated areas situated within the Provinces of Cagayan, Isabela, Nueva Vizcaya, Quirino, Nueva Ecija, Aurora, Bulacan, Rizal, Laguna, and Quezon, as delineated pursuant to this Act; and
- (d) *Sierra Madre Plan* refers to the Sierra Madre Conservation and Sustainable Development Plan established under Section 10 of this Act.

Section 4. Establishment and Delineation of the Sierra Madre Management Area.

– The SMMA is hereby established as the overall geographic framework for integrated, landscape-level planning, ecological management, conservation, restoration, sustainable development, monitoring, and inter-agency coordination under this Act.

1
2 Inclusion within or delineation of the SMMA shall not, by itself, constitute a land
3 classification, alter land ownership or lawful tenure, extinguish vested rights, modify
4 legal status or boundaries of a protected area, or subject any land, property, activity, or
5 resource use to the restrictions applicable to a Core Conservation Area.
6

7 The inclusion of a province under Section 3(c) of this Act shall not be construed as
8 placing the entirety of its territorial jurisdiction within the SMMA.
9

10 Within eighteen (18) months from the effectivity of this Act, the DENR, in
11 coordination with the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority
12 (NAMRIA), shall prepare the technical delineation of the SMMA using the best available
13 scientific, ecological, hydrological, geological, hazard, land-use, tenure, and
14 socioeconomic information.
15

16 The delineation shall take into account, among others, the following:

- 17 (a) Natural forests and forestlands;
18 (b) Protected areas;
19 (c) Watersheds, headwaters, and river basins;
20 (d) Critical habitats and biodiversity corridors;
21 (e) Environmentally sensitive and hazard-prone areas;
22 (f) Ancestral domains and ancestral lands;
23 (g) Existing settlements, agricultural areas, and lawful landholdings; and
24 (h) Existing infrastructure.
25

26 The proposed delineation shall be subjected to public consultation, including
27 consultation with affected ICCs/IPs in accordance with Republic Act No. 8371, otherwise
28 known as the “Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act of 1997.” The final delineation shall be
29 approved by the Sierra Madre Governing Council and made publicly accessible.
30

31 CHAPTER II

32 SIERRA MADRE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

33

34 **Section 5. *Creation of the Sierra Madre Conservation and Management Authority.***

35 – There is hereby created under the Office of the President the Sierra Madre Conservation
36 and Management Authority (SMCMA).
37

38 The SMCMA shall serve as the principal government body for integrated,
39 landscape-level planning and inter-agency coordination for the conservation, protection,
40 restoration, climate resilience, and sustainable development of the SMMA. It shall
41 promote coordinated management of ecological systems, communities, land and resource
42 uses, and development activities that extend across political, administrative, and sectoral
43 boundaries.
44

1
2 The SMCMA shall exercise its functions without diminishing, superseding, or
3 transferring the powers, functions, and jurisdiction vested by law in national government
4 agencies, LGUs, protected-area management bodies, or other government entities.
5

6 The SMCMA shall not be organized as a government-owned or -controlled
7 corporation and shall not exercise commercial or proprietary powers except as may
8 otherwise be expressly provided by law.
9

10 **Section 6. *Sierra Madre Governing Council.*** – The governing and policy-making
11 body of the SMCMA shall be the Sierra Madre Governing Council, composed of the
12 following:

- 13 (a) Executive Secretary, as Chairperson;
- 14 (b) Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources, as Vice Chairperson;
- 15 (c) Secretary of Economy, Planning, and Development;
- 16 (d) Secretary of the Interior and Local Government;
- 17 (e) Chairperson of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples;
- 18 (f) Secretary of Agriculture;
- 19 (g) Secretary of Agrarian Reform;
- 20 (h) Secretary of Energy;
- 21 (i) Secretary of Public Works and Highways;
- 22 (j) Secretary of Human Settlements and Urban Development;
- 23 (k) One (1) LGU representative each from Regions II, III, and IV-A; and
- 24 (l) One (1) ICC/IP representative each from the northern, central, and southern
25 Sierra Madre.
26

27 The manner of selection and tenure of the LGU and ICC/IP representatives shall
28 be prescribed in the implementing rules and regulations. ICC/IP representatives shall be
29 selected by the concerned ICCs/IPs in accordance with their customary processes.
30

31 The Council may invite other government agencies, academic and research
32 institutions, civil society organizations, professional organizations, and technical experts
33 to participate as resource persons whenever necessary.
34

35 **Section 7. *Powers and Functions of the SMCMA.*** – The SMCMA shall:

- 36 (a) Formulate, coordinate, periodically update, and monitor the implementation
37 of the Sierra Madre Plan;
- 38 (b) Coordinate the delineation and ecological zoning of the SMMA;
- 39 (c) Promote and coordinate, consistent with existing laws, the harmonization of
40 national, regional, local, protected area, watershed, ancestral domain,
41 infrastructure, climate, and sectoral plans affecting the Sierra Madre;
- 42 (d) Coordinate and provide technical assistance for forest, watershed, biodiversity,
43 ecological restoration, climate resilience, and conservation-compatible
44 livelihood programs;

- (e) Maintain an integrated scientific and geospatial monitoring system and coordinate research on the ecological and socioeconomic condition of the Sierra Madre;
- (f) Conduct Sierra Madre Plan Consistency Reviews and issue the corresponding findings and recommendations in accordance with Section 19 of this Act;
- (g) Convene concerned agencies for coordinated enforcement against violations of environmental and natural resource laws;
- (h) Recommend to the proper agencies or to Congress the establishment or strengthening of protected areas, critical habitats, watershed reservations, biodiversity corridors, and other appropriate conservation instruments;
- (i) Identify and recommend priority conservation, restoration, watershed, climate-resilience, and green-infrastructure investments for implementation by the appropriate government agency or LGU;
- (j) Coordinate with the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) and other appropriate agencies on watershed and water-resource matters affecting the Sierra Madre;
- (k) Mobilize grants, technical assistance, and other lawful resources for programs consistent with this Act; and
- (l) Submit the reports required under this Act and perform such other functions consistent with its mandate and existing laws.

Section 8. *Limitations on the Powers of the SMCMA.* – The SMCMA shall not, solely by virtue of this Act:

- (a) Grant, cancel, suspend, or renew permits, licenses, concessions, water rights, environmental compliance certificates, mining or quarrying permits, land-use approvals, energy service contracts, or other authorizations vested by law in another government agency or LGU;
- (b) Supersede or exercise powers vested by law in a Protected Area Management Board (PAMB), LGU, regulatory agency, or other government body;
- (c) Borrow or lend money, issue or guarantee debt, act as surety, invest in securities or commercial enterprises, establish subsidiary corporations, or engage in proprietary business ventures;
- (d) Exercise eminent domain independently of an agency or entity otherwise authorized by law to exercise such power; or
- (e) Levy taxes or impose compulsory fees or charges not expressly authorized by law.

Section 9. *Executive Director and Personnel.* – The SMCMA shall be headed by an Executive Director who shall be appointed by the President of the Philippines.

The Executive Director shall have the rank of Undersecretary and shall possess proven competence and at least ten (10) years of relevant professional experience in environmental management, biodiversity conservation, forestry, watershed or river-basin management, climate and disaster resilience, land-use or spatial planning, natural-

resource governance, or a closely related field.

The Executive Director shall administer the SMCMA and implement the policies and resolutions of the Council.

The organizational structure and staffing pattern of the SMCMA shall be subject to the approval of the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) and applicable civil service, compensation, and government reorganization laws and rules.

CHAPTER III SIERRA MADRE PLAN AND ECOLOGICAL ZONING

Section 10. *Sierra Madre Conservation and Sustainable Development Plan.* – Within twenty-four (24) months from the effectivity of this Act, the SMCMA shall formulate and the Council shall adopt a twenty (20)-year Sierra Madre Conservation and Sustainable Development Plan, which shall be reviewed at least once every five (5) years.

The Sierra Madre Plan shall provide an integrated, participatory, science-based, climate-resilient, and risk-informed framework covering:

- (a) Ecological, hydrological, socioeconomic, land-use, tenure, climate, and disaster-risk conditions of the SMMA;
- (b) Ecological management zoning and priorities for forest, watershed, biodiversity, habitat, and ecological-corridor conservation and restoration;
- (c) Water security, climate-change adaptation, and disaster-risk reduction;
- (d) Sustainable land and resource use and conservation-compatible livelihoods;
- (e) Harmonization of protected-area management plans, ancestral-domain plans, and relevant national and local plans;
- (f) Existing and proposed land uses, major infrastructure, and their individual and cumulative environmental impacts;
- (g) Natural-capital and ecosystem-service information relevant to planning and public investment; and
- (h) Measurable targets, financing requirements, and monitoring and evaluation indicators.

The Sierra Madre Plan shall undergo a strategic and cumulative impact assessment and shall consider reasonable alternatives to policies, programs, land uses, and major investments that may materially affect the SMMA.

The Department of Economy, Planning, and Development (DEPDev) shall ensure the appropriate integration of the Sierra Madre Plan into national and regional development planning, spatial planning, and public investment programming.

Section 11. *Ecological Management Zones.* – Areas within the SMMA, other than protected areas governed by Republic Act No. 7586, otherwise known as the “National

Integrated Protected Areas System Act of 1992,” as amended by Republic Act No. 11038, otherwise known as the “Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System Act of 2018,” or by site-specific protected area laws, shall as appropriate, be classified into the following ecological management zones:

- (a) *Core Conservation Areas*, consisting of ecologically irreplaceable or highly sensitive areas requiring the highest level of protection;
- (b) *Ecological Restoration Areas*, consisting of degraded but ecologically significant areas requiring restoration or rehabilitation;
- (c) *Sustainable Use Areas*, where compatible economic, livelihood, community, and other lawful activities may be undertaken subject to applicable environmental and land-use safeguards; and
- (d) *Settlement and Existing Development Areas*, consisting of existing built-up areas, settlements, and lawful infrastructure requiring appropriate environmental, climate-resilience, and disaster-risk safeguards.

Inclusion within the SMMA shall not, by itself, determine the ecological management zone applicable to an area. Each ecological management zone shall be separately delineated based on the standards prescribed under this Act.

The SMCMA, in coordination with the DENR, NAMRIA, affected LGUs, and other concerned agencies, shall delineate the ecological management zones for approval by the Sierra Madre Governing Council as part of the Sierra Madre Plan.

Ecological zoning shall be based on scientifically defensible criteria and shall be undertaken with public consultation and the participation of affected LGUs and ICCs/IPs.

A Core Conservation Area may be designated only upon a finding, based on the best available scientific evidence, that the area contains or performs one or more of the following:

- (a) Primary forests or other natural forests of high ecological significance;
- (b) Critical habitats or ecosystems essential to threatened or endemic species;
- (c) Critical watersheds, headwaters, groundwater recharge areas, or riparian ecosystems;
- (d) Biodiversity or wildlife corridors essential to ecological connectivity;
- (e) Ecosystems providing significant protection against flooding, erosion, landslides, or other natural hazards; or
- (f) Other ecosystems of comparable ecological significance or vulnerability to irreversible degradation.

The designation of a Core Conservation Area shall be supported by technical findings, mapped boundaries, field validation, and consultation with affected LGUs, ICCs/IPs, landholders, communities, and other relevant stakeholders.

1 Within protected areas, the management zones established under applicable
2 protected area laws and management plans shall govern. Ecological zoning under this Act
3 shall not, by itself, transfer ownership, extinguish native title or lawful tenure, or alter the
4 legal classification of land.
5

6 **Section 12. *Interim Protective Measures.*** – Pending completion of the initial
7 ecological zoning, SMCMA, upon the technical recommendation of the DENR and in
8 coordination with the NAMRIA, and after consultation with affected LGUs and ICCs/IPs,
9 shall identify provisional Candidate Core Conservation Areas based on the criteria
10 prescribed under Section 11 of this Act and the best available scientific evidence.
11

12 Until final ecological zoning is adopted, but in no case for more than eighteen (18)
13 months from the publication of the provisional identification, no new or expanded permit
14 shall be issued within such areas for:

- 15 (a) Commercial logging or harvesting of natural forests;
- 16 (b) Mining or quarrying;
- 17 (c) Conversion or clearing of natural forests for incompatible land uses; or
- 18 (d) Other extractive activities determined by the DENR to pose a substantial risk
19 of irreversible ecological damage.
20

21 This section shall not automatically suspend or revoke an existing valid permit,
22 contract, agreement, or authorization and shall not prevent emergency works necessary
23 to protect life and public safety, ecological restoration, scientific research, or
24 environmental monitoring.
25

26 **Section 13. *Protection of Core Conservation Areas.*** – Subject to existing rights
27 governed by Section 15 of this Act and to stricter protection under other laws, the
28 following activities shall be prohibited within Core Conservation Areas:

- 29 (a) Commercial logging or harvesting of natural forests;
- 30 (b) Mining, quarrying, or other commercial extractive operations;
- 31 (c) Conversion or clearing of natural forests for subdivisions, industrial estates,
32 commercial resorts, or other incompatible uses;
- 33 (d) Dumping, disposal, or storage of toxic, hazardous, or industrial wastes;
- 34 (e) Deliberate destruction or substantial fragmentation of critical habitats or
35 ecological corridors; and
- 36 (f) New major infrastructure whose principal footprint would be located within a
37 Core Conservation Area, unless the competent approving agency or agencies
38 determine, after consideration of reasonable alternatives and applicable
39 environmental and social safeguards, that the project is necessary to protect
40 life, public safety, national security, or an overriding public necessity and that
41 no practicable less-damaging alternative exists.
42

43 Nothing in this section shall prohibit lawful scientific research, ecological
44 restoration, environmental monitoring, law-enforcement and disaster-response activities,

1 maintenance of existing essential facilities, or the occupation, traditional resource use,
2 subsistence activities, and sustainable customary practices of ICCs/IPs undertaken in the
3 exercise of rights recognized under Republic Act No. 8371 and other applicable laws,
4 consistent with their customary laws and their responsibility to conserve and protect their
5 ancestral domains and natural resources.

6
7 The foregoing shall not be construed to authorize commercial logging, mining,
8 quarrying, hazardous waste disposal, or other commercial or destructive activities
9 otherwise prohibited under this Act or other applicable laws.

10 11 CHAPTER IV 12 RESTORATION, RIGHTS, AND COORDINATED GOVERNANCE

13
14 **Section 14. *Ecological Restoration and Community Stewardship.*** – The SMCMA,
15 in coordination with the DENR and other concerned agencies, PAMBs, LGUs, ICCs/IPs,
16 people’s organizations, academic and research institutions, and other stakeholders, shall
17 establish and coordinate a long-term program for the restoration of degraded forests,
18 watersheds, riparian areas, biodiversity corridors, and other priority ecosystems within
19 the SMMA.

20
21 Restoration targets shall be science-based, site-specific, measurable, and supported
22 by appropriate maintenance and monitoring. Restoration shall prioritize ecosystem
23 recovery and long-term ecological function rather than the number of seedlings planted
24 or the area nominally planted.

25
26 The SMCMA and participating agencies shall likewise promote conservation-
27 compatible livelihood and stewardship programs, with priority to ICCs/IPs, legitimate
28 forest-dependent communities, and other communities directly affected by conservation
29 measures.

30
31 **Section 15. *Existing Rights and Authorizations.*** – Within twelve (12) months from
32 the effectivity of this Act, the concerned government agencies, in coordination with the
33 SMCMA, shall complete an inventory of existing permits, contracts, agreements,
34 concessions, licenses, tenurial instruments, and other authorizations within the SMMA.

35
36 Existing valid rights and authorizations shall not be automatically cancelled,
37 suspended, or revoked solely by reason of the enactment of this Act or the ecological
38 zoning undertaken hereunder. Where an existing authorization is found to violate
39 applicable law or is materially inconsistent with the restrictions applicable to a duly
40 established Core Conservation Area, the government agency having jurisdiction over
41 such authorization shall, after notice and opportunity to be heard, determine the
42 appropriate action in accordance with applicable law.

43
44 Nothing in this Act shall impair vested rights except in accordance with the

1 Constitution and existing laws.

2
3 **Section 16. *Protected Areas.*** – Nothing in this Act shall diminish or supersede the
4 powers, functions, jurisdiction, revenues, or management authority of a PAMB, Protected
5 Area Superintendent, DENR, or other body vested with authority under the National
6 Integrated Protected Areas System Act of 1992, as amended, or under a site-specific
7 protected-area law.

8
9 The Sierra Madre Plan shall incorporate and complement, but shall not supersede,
10 duly approved protected-area management plans.

11
12 The SMCMA shall focus on matters requiring landscape-level coordination,
13 including ecological connectivity, shared watersheds, biodiversity corridors, regional
14 restoration, integrated monitoring, and threats extending beyond individual protected
15 area boundaries.

16
17 **Section 17. *Rights of Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples.*** –
18 Nothing in this Act shall diminish the rights of ICCs/IPs under the Constitution, the
19 Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act of 1997, and other applicable laws, including rights to
20 ancestral domains and ancestral lands, native title, customary laws, traditional
21 knowledge, and sustainable traditional resource use.

22
23 Plans, projects, zoning decisions, and other actions covered by this Act shall
24 comply with the requirements on free and prior informed consent (FPIC) and the National
25 Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) certification precondition whenever required
26 by law.

27
28 Relevant Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plans
29 (ADSDPPs) shall be considered and, where appropriate, harmonized with the Sierra
30 Madre Plan.

31
32 **Section 18. *Role of Local Government Units.*** – Consistent with local autonomy
33 and existing laws, affected LGUs shall progressively harmonize their land-use,
34 development, climate-change, disaster-risk reduction, and other relevant plans with the
35 Sierra Madre Plan and applicable protected area management plans.

36
37 The SMCMA, DENR, Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG),
38 Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD), DEPDev, and
39 other concerned agencies shall provide appropriate technical assistance for such
40 harmonization.

41
42 Nothing in this Act shall authorize the SMCMA to enact, amend, or invalidate a
43 local zoning ordinance.

1 **Section 19. Sierra Madre Plan Consistency Review.** – A project located wholly or
2 partly within the SMMA that is required under applicable law or regulation to undergo
3 an environmental impact assessment (EIA) shall be subject to a Sierra Madre Plan
4 Consistency Review by the SMCMA.
5

6 The Review shall determine the project’s consistency with the Sierra Madre Plan
7 and the applicable ecological management zone, taking into account its material effects
8 on watersheds, biodiversity and ecological connectivity, cumulative environmental
9 impacts, climate and disaster risks, and conservation and restoration priorities.
10

11 Upon completion of the Review, the SMCMA shall transmit its findings and
12 recommendations to the government agency or local government unit having authority
13 to approve, permit, or implement the project.
14

15 The Sierra Madre Plan Consistency Review shall not constitute a separate permit,
16 clearance, license, certification, or environmental compliance certificate, and shall, to the
17 greatest extent practicable, be integrated into existing environmental, planning,
18 investment, protected area, Indigenous Peoples, or other applicable review and approval
19 processes.
20

21 Where the SMCMA finds that a proposed project is materially inconsistent with
22 the Sierra Madre Plan or the applicable ecological management zone, the SMCMA and
23 the concerned approving or government implementing agency or LGU shall, prior to final
24 action on the project, undertake consultation to determine whether the inconsistency may
25 reasonably be addressed through project modification, alternative siting or design,
26 additional safeguards, or other appropriate measures.
27

28 Where the material inconsistency remains unresolved after such consultation, the
29 competent government agency or LGU may proceed only upon a written determination
30 stating the substantial reasons therefor, including the public interest sought to be served,
31 the reasonable alternatives considered, the reasons such alternatives are not practicable,
32 and the measures to avoid, minimize, restore, or otherwise address adverse impacts. The
33 determination, together with the findings and recommendations of the SMCMA, shall be
34 made publicly accessible, subject to limitations on disclosure provided by law.
35

36 An unresolved material inconsistency involving a major national government
37 project that raises a substantial inter-agency policy conflict may be elevated by the
38 SMCMA or the concerned agency to the Sierra Madre Governing Council for appropriate
39 resolution, without prejudice to the jurisdiction of the agency vested by law with the
40 authority to approve or regulate the project.
41

42 Nothing in this section shall authorize the SMCMA, the Sierra Madre Governing
43 Council, or any approving agency to waive, override, or authorize an exception to a
44 prohibition or requirement expressly imposed under this Act or any other law.

1
2 The procedures and timelines for the Review and consultation shall be prescribed
3 in the implementing rules and regulations in a manner that avoids duplicative
4 requirements and unnecessary delay.
5

6 **Section 20. *Coordinated Environmental Enforcement.*** – The SMCMA shall
7 coordinate with the DENR, concerned national government agencies, law enforcement
8 bodies, PAMBs, and LGUs in monitoring, investigating, and referring for appropriate
9 action violations of environmental and natural-resource laws within the SMMA.
10

11 Nothing in this Act shall confer police, arrest, prosecutorial, adjudicatory, or
12 regulatory authority upon the SMCMA beyond that expressly provided by existing law.
13

14 **CHAPTER V** 15 **ACCOUNTABILITY AND FINAL PROVISIONS** 16

17 **Section 21. *Penalties.*** – Any person who knowingly undertakes an activity in
18 violation of Section 13 of this Act without lawful authority shall, upon conviction, be
19 punished by a fine of not less than One million pesos (PhP 1,000,000.00) but not more than
20 Five million pesos (PhP 5,000,000.00), or imprisonment of not less than six (6) years but
21 not more than twelve (12) years, or both, at the discretion of the court.
22

23 Where the same act constitutes an offense under another law imposing an equal or
24 greater penalty, prosecution shall be under such applicable law.
25

26 No ICC/IP shall be held criminally liable under this Act solely by reason of
27 residence or occupation within a Core Conservation Area, or for traditional resource use,
28 subsistence activities, cultural or spiritual practices, or other sustainable customary
29 practices undertaken in the exercise of rights recognized under Republic Act No. 8371 and
30 other applicable laws. In determining whether an activity falls within this protection, due
31 regard shall be given to applicable customary laws and practices, the nature, purpose,
32 scale, and environmental impact of the activity, and whether it is undertaken primarily
33 for subsistence, cultural, spiritual, or community purposes rather than for commercial
34 exploitation.
35

36 The foregoing shall not exempt any person from liability for commercial logging,
37 mining, quarrying, hazardous waste disposal, or other commercial or destructive
38 activities prohibited under this Act or other applicable laws.
39

40 If the offender is a juridical entity, the director, officer, partner, manager, or other
41 responsible person who knowingly authorized, ordered, consented to, or participated in
42 the prohibited act shall be liable.
43

44 In addition to the penalties imposed, the court may require the offender to

1 undertake or pay for the restoration or rehabilitation of the affected area and may order
2 such other remedies authorized by law.

3
4 **Section 22. *Ecological Monitoring and Transparency.*** – The SMCMA shall
5 establish an integrated geospatial and ecological monitoring system for the SMMA, using
6 the best available scientific information, remote sensing, field monitoring, and other
7 appropriate methods.

8
9 The SMCMA shall utilize relevant information generated under Republic Act No.
10 11995, otherwise known as the “Philippine Ecosystem and Natural Capital Accounting
11 System (PENCAS) Act,” and shall coordinate with the Philippine Statistics Authority
12 (PSA), DENR, DEPDev, and other concerned agencies in providing data relevant to
13 ecosystem and natural capital accounting.

14
15 Official boundaries, ecological zoning, material changes in forest and land cover,
16 restoration progress, major environmentally significant projects, performance indicators,
17 and other non-sensitive information necessary for public accountability shall be made
18 publicly accessible through an online platform.

19
20 Information protected by law, including information whose disclosure would
21 prejudice national security, law enforcement operations, threatened wildlife, data
22 privacy, sacred sites, or protected Indigenous knowledge, shall be appropriately withheld
23 or generalized.

24
25 **Section 23. *Funding.*** – The amount necessary for the initial implementation of this
26 Act shall be charged against the current appropriations of the Office of the President,
27 DENR, and other participating agencies, as may be appropriate. Thereafter, such sums as
28 may be necessary for its continued implementation shall be included in the annual
29 General Appropriations Act.

30
31 The SMCMA may receive grants, donations, technical assistance, and other lawful
32 contributions from domestic and international sources, subject to existing budgeting,
33 accounting, auditing, national-security, conflict-of-interest, and other applicable laws and
34 regulations.

35
36 Funds and revenues specifically assigned by law to PAMBs, LGUs, or other
37 government entities shall not be transferred to the SMCMA, except as may otherwise be
38 provided by law.

39
40 **Section 24. *Annual Report and Periodic Evaluation.*** – The SMCMA shall submit
41 to the President of the Philippines and Congress an annual State of the Sierra Madre
42 Report on the ecological condition of the SMMA, implementation of the Sierra Madre
43 Plan, restoration outcomes, significant environmental threats, enforcement coordination,
44 major programs and expenditures, and progress against measurable performance

1 indicators. The report shall be made publicly accessible, subject to lawful limitations on
2 disclosure.

3
4 Every five (5) years, DEPDev, in coordination with the DENR and DBM and with
5 independent technical participation from qualified academic or research institutions, shall
6 evaluate the implementation of this Act, including the ecological outcomes,
7 socioeconomic impacts, institutional effectiveness, fiscal efficiency, and continuing
8 necessity and appropriateness of the mandate and structure of the SMCMA. The
9 evaluation and recommendations shall be submitted to the President and Congress and
10 made publicly accessible.

11
12 **Section 25. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.*** – Within one hundred twenty
13 (120) days from the effectivity of this Act, the Sierra Madre Governing Council, through
14 the SMCMA, in coordination with DENR, DEPDev, DILG, NCIP, and other concerned
15 agencies, and after consultation with affected LGUs, PAMBs, ICCs/IPs, civil society
16 organizations, academic and research institutions, and other relevant stakeholders, shall
17 promulgate the implementing rules and regulations necessary to carry out this Act.

18
19 **Section 26. *Transitory Provision.*** – Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of
20 this Act, the Executive Secretary, in coordination with the Secretary of Environment and
21 Natural Resources, shall convene the Sierra Madre Governing Council and designate an
22 interim secretariat from qualified personnel of the Office of the President, DENR,
23 DEPDev, and other concerned agencies, pending the organization and staffing of the
24 SMCMA.

25
26 Existing offices, personnel, programs, permits, contracts, assets, and statutory
27 functions of the DENR and other government agencies shall continue, unless otherwise
28 modified in accordance with this Act or another law.

29
30 **Section 27. *Separability Clause.*** – If any part or provision of this Act is held
31 unconstitutional or invalid, the remainder thereof not otherwise affected shall remain in
32 full force and effect.

33
34 **Section 28. *Repealing Clause.*** – All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules and
35 regulations, and other issuances or parts thereof inconsistent with this Act are hereby
36 repealed, amended, or modified accordingly.

37
38 **Section 29. *Effectivity.*** – This Act shall take effect after fifteen (15) days following
39 its publication in the *Official Gazette*, or in a national newspaper of general circulation.

40
41 *Approved,*