

Detailed Final Report for Rufford Small Grants

Project Title: Establishment of Marine Reserve in St. Paul Bay

Organisation: Saguda Palawan Inc.

Background

Saguda Palawan, Inc. is a non-government organization that has been working actively in the field of protected area management, particularly in the island of Palawan in the western Philippines, for many years. It is a member of the Management Board for the Tubbataha Reef National Marine Park and World Heritage Site. It has also conducted a baseline assessment of biodiversity in and around the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park and World Heritage Site, which includes a section of St. Paul Bay.

Majority of the local residents around St. Paul Bay rely on fisheries for their livelihood. However, the open access regime has led to the depletion of marine resources, mostly by commercial fishers from other provinces. Saguda Palawan Inc. proposed the marine reserve project in order to support the management of the national park in pursuing sustainable approaches to improve the standard of living of surrounding communities, thereby reducing pressure on park resources.

Objectives

The project aims to improve the productivity of the marine ecosystem in the localities surrounding St. Paul Bay in order to enhance the quality of life in its fishing communities. The main strategy for achieving this is the establishment of a marine reserve in St. Paul Bay, through city legislation, to ensure the sustainable use of marine resources. The zoning scheme that shall be done through public participation would identify marine sanctuaries as no-take zones where the resources would be allowed to recover and regulate the extraction of marine life in the rest of the protected area.

Project Results

With the enactment of City Ordinance No. 325 by the Puerto Princesa City Council on November 29, 2006, establishing the St. Paul Bay Marine Reserve, Saguda Palawan Inc. has successfully accomplished its project objectives. The marine protected area covers 7,454 hectares of waters adjacent to the national park and straddles three *barangays* (villages; smallest political unit in the Philippines) in Puerto Princesa City. A copy of the legislation shall be sent by courier to Rufford Small Grants, along with the receipts and pertinent documentary outputs from this project.

This vital legislation is the product of a lengthy process that included several community consultations, a preliminary resource assessment, meetings with key agencies involved in marine protected areas, preparation of documentary requirements, and lobbying with the city government for the passage of the ordinance.

These activities served as an opportunity for residents to express their aspirations for the resources found within their localities. The training on scientific assessment and planning workshop, for instance, helped residents to realize that it is within their powers to determine the condition and the future of their resources. Most importantly, the

establishment of the marine reserve engaged various agencies, organizations and communities in common planning efforts towards a mutual goal.

In brief, the following steps illustrate the process that Saguda Palawan Inc. facilitated in working for the establishment of St. Paul Bay as a marine reserve:

- A. A series of community consultations was conducted in the three *barangays* along the coast of St. Paul Bay to explain the project and determine their concerns on the matter. The public meetings in the *barangays* of Marufinas, Cabayugan, and New Panggangan generated much discussion on the relevance of the proposed marine reserve. In addition, the Tagbanua indigenous community whose ancestral domain in Cabayugan includes part of St. Paul Bay, where they have done traditional fishing for many decades, was included in the consultations. The general sentiment that emerged was that the establishment of the marine reserve is timely, due to the persistent operation of commercial fishers within their waters and the perceived loss of marine productivity in St. Paul Bay. Hence, there was overwhelming approval for the project. In addition, local residents improved on the initial plan of merely identifying marine sanctuaries in each *barangay*. Instead, they proposed the declaration of the entire bay as a marine reserve, and the designation of one no-take zone in each of the four communities. With the pledge of support from the City Government of Puerto Princesa and local leaders, Saguda Palawan Inc. agreed to widen the scope of the project and adhere to the popular petition to put a much larger area under protection. Among the organizations that assisted Saguda Palawan in the consultations are the local NGO Haribon Foundation, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the city government, and park personnel.
- B. In collaboration with marine biologists from the Western Philippines University, a marine assessment training was conducted inside the park headquarters in Sabang, one of the coastal villages in *barangay* Cabayugan. A total of 20 park personnel, community leaders, and representatives of fishers' organisations attended the three-day training. Among the topics were fish and invertebrate identification, coral and seagrass survey, and obtaining sedimentation samples.
- C. After the training, park personnel and community representatives joined the marine biologists in participatory marine assessments in selected areas of St. Paul Bay. Six permanent monitoring sites for coral cover, fish biomass and macro invertebrates were established. These sites and the mouth of four rivers emptying out into St. Paul Bay were used as a monitoring site for siltation rate. Seagrass assessment was conducted in five stations. The marine survey team produced a report on the status of the resources in the selected sites in St. Paul Bay (a copy shall be mailed to Rufford).
- D. Results of the marine assessment were presented in a planning workshop attended by elected representatives from the four communities. With a clearer picture of their marine resources in mind, the workshop participants came up with concrete steps for incorporation in the management plan for St. Paul Bay. A Management Council composed of local government leaders and representatives from the park personnel, City Government, academe and NGO was established.
- E. The proposed management plan and marine assessment results were presented to the four communities in another round of consultations as part of validation activities that are required in the legislative process. Concerns and issues were discussed and threshed out, especially with the expected regulatory measures on fishing activities within the bay as an offshoot of its marine protected area

- status. The outcome of this second series of community consultations was the strong support from the affected communities on the designation of four no-take zones and participatory monitoring of the marine resources in St. Paul Bay.
- F. Community leaders prepared the *barangay* resolutions that would be submitted to the city council as part of the process for the legislation of the marine reserve. The Tagbanua community also gave its “free and prior informed consent” for the project, a requirement under the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of the Philippines. This took some time, as two of the *barangays* are located in remote areas that can only be reached by boat, while the Tagbanua community is accessible only through a rigorous uphill hike. Inclement weather and spotty communication facilities hampered coordination with the local leaders concerned, resulting in some delays in the submission of documentary requirements.
- G. Saguda Palawan commissioned a GIS consultant to prepare a map of the proposed St. Paul Bay Marine Reserve, including the no-take zones. The map forms part of the requirements for the legislation, along with a management plan that Saguda Palawan prepared in coordination with local community leaders, park personnel, and city government staff.
- H. After submitting all the necessary requirements to the Committee on Environment, Saguda Palawan staff followed up the status of the proposed legislation with the city council. Due to delays in the conduct of a public hearing, which is required of every legislation, Saguda Palawan was unable to complete the activities within the three-month extension requested from Rufford for this 12-month project. The city council cancelled the public hearing three times as some of its members were unavailable and could not attend the activity. Another problem that cropped up was the venue for the public hearing, considering the large area covered by the proposed marine reserve. Initially, the city council wanted to hold two hearings in order to allow more people to attend the important assembly. In the end, the city council decided to hold one public hearing in a location accessible to all concerned. This was finally conducted on Sept. 16, 2006, in sitio Sabang in Bgy. Cabayugan, the commercial center in St. Paul Bay. The city council approved the ordinance for the establishment of the St. Paul Bay Marine Reserve two months later. However, it was not until late December 2006 that Saguda Palawan Inc. obtained a copy of the ordinance from the city government, due to preparations for the city festival and the holiday season.

Timeline

The following are the highlights of the project activities:

- June 29, 2005 – Funds received from Rufford
- July 29-30, 2005 – Initial community consultations
- Sept. 1-3, 2005 – Marine assessment training
- Sept. 9-11 and Sept. 26-30, 2005 – Participatory marine resource assessment
- Oct. 18-19, 2005 – Community planning workshop
- Nov. 14-16, 2005 - Validation of plans and presentation of marine assessment results
- December 2005 to May 2006 - Preparation and submission of *barangay* resolutions and other requirements to Committee on Environment of Puerto Princesa City Council
- January to March 2006 - Preparation of GIS map

- Sept. 16, 2006 – Public hearing conducted by city council
- Nov. 29, 2006 – City council approves legislation for the St. Paul Bay Marine Reserve

Next Steps

Section 12 of City Ordinance No. 325 establishing the St. Paul Bay Marine Reserve requires the completion of the following activities prior to the effectivity of the legislation:

- a. Guidelines and regulations for the Marine Reserve have to be formulated and approved by the City Council.
- b. Boundary markings and buoys have to be set up in the no-take zones.

Through collaboration with project partners, Saguda Palawan is striving to complete the above requirements. The management of the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park & World Heritage Site has agreed to include the formulation of marine reserve guidelines in their planning workshops. The Rotary Club of Puerto Princesa, a local civic organization, has expressed willingness to donate marker buoys for the designated no-take zones.

Saguda Palawan Inc. is currently assisting the local communities in mobilizing resources to implement the management plan for the St. Paul Bay Marine Reserve. A project proposal was submitted to Whitley Fund for Nature for this purpose but unfortunately, it was not approved. Saguda Palawan has submitted a proposal to the UNDP Small Grants Program for the completion of the city council's requirements, as well as other activities specified in the management plan.

It is expected that activities related to the marine reserve shall be resumed after the conduct of the national and local elections, which are scheduled on May 11, 2007. In order to avoid having these conservation activities tainted by partisan politics, Saguda Palawan shall continue its marine reserve activities in June 2007.