

Project Update: June 2006

ESTABLISHMENT OF A MARINE RESERVE IN ST. PAUL BAY PUERTO PRINCESA CITY, PALAWAN, PHILIPPINES

The last report, submitted in October 2005, covered activities from initial community meetings regarding the establishment of a marine reserve to the community planning workshop on the establishment of the whole St. Paul Bay as a marine reserve. A grant was received for the creation of small reserves within the St. Paul Bay, but popular request from the local residents and leaders instead led to the creation of the entire bay as a marine reserve.

Although the funds received from Rufford Small Grants is inadequate for the establishment of the whole Bay as a reserve, support from partners and the local communities gave Saguda Palawan the confidence to pursue the now expanded project. The community planning workshop held in October was participated in by a total of 25 representatives elected from the four affected townships. In this workshop, it was determined with finality that the 7,455-hectare Bay will be protected for the exclusive use of resident fishers. Marine sanctuaries, or no-take zones were identified in each of the four communities. A total of 493 hectares of coral reefs lies within the marine sanctuaries in the whole bay. Considering that most of the Bay has sandy bottom, this area is a significant proportion of coral reefs in the bay.

In November, the agreements reached with the elected representatives were brought back to the villages for validation. Local residents who were unable to attend the community planning workshop clarified issues. These mostly relate to the marine sanctuaries and their loss of access to their vital fishing grounds. Their local leaders explained the value of the no-take zones, and eventually, in all four localities, the residents unanimously agreed to close-off their fishing grounds to serve as nurseries for marine life.

From November 2005 to March 2006, local ordinances endorsing the establishment of the marine reserve were prepared by the various townships, with the assistance of Saguda Palawan. Since the establishment of the reserve is through a joint resolution of all the townships, and due to the rough sea conditions at this time affecting access to two of the communities, securing the various endorsements was challenging.

From March to May 2006, the local ordinances that were submitted to the Office of the City Agriculturist were reviewed. Additional requirements were prepared by Saguda Palawan. A general management plan and management plans for the no-take zones of the individual villages were prepared, with the results of the previous community consultations and workshops and marine scientific surveys as guide.

The process for the establishment of marine reserves in the Philippines, requires the conduct of public hearings in the affected localities to be chaired by the Chairman of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources of the City Council. This has been scheduled for June 28, 2006, and is to take place in two separate venues. After the public hearings, the ordinance will go through three readings in the City Council.

This project by Saguda Palawan, which begun on June 29, 2006 has a project life of one year, thereby ending in June 29, 2006. However, an extension of three months is requested because the issuance of the actual ordinance establishing the reserve, which is the final output of this project, will surely not take place on the due date, considering the schedule of the public hearings and the subsequent readings in the City Council. However, Saguda Palawan has submitted all the required documentation and it is only a matter of following the legislative steps of the process that remain to be completed.



Photos by: Yasmin Arquiza

