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The NIPAS Act of 1992

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The NIPAS Act of 1992

Republic Act 7586 provides for the establishment and management of a National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS).

Declaration of policy

It is the policy of the State to secure for the Filipino people of present and future generations the perpetual existence of all native plants and animals through the establishment of a comprehensive system of integrated protected areas within the classification of national park as provided for in the Constitution.

NIPAS is the classification and administration of all designated protected areas to maintain essential ecological processes and life-support systems, to preserve genetic diversity, to ensure sustainable use of resources found therein, and to maintain their natural conditions to the greatest extent possible.

NIPAS shall encompass outstanding remarkable areas and biologically important public lands that are habitats of rare and endangered species of plants and animals, biogeographic zones and related ecosystems, whether terrestrial, wetland or marine, all of which shall be designated as protected areas.

Categories and definitions

National park is a forest reservation, essentially of natural wilderness character, which has been withdrawn from settlement, occupancy or any form of exploitation except in conformity with an approved management plan, and set aside as such to conserve the area, or preserve the scenery, natural and historic objects, wild animals and plants therein, and to provide enjoyment of these features in such areas.

Protected area is an identified portion of land and water set aside by reason of their unique physical and biological significance, managed to enhance biological diversity, and protected against destructive human exploitation.

Protected areas are categorized as:

- **Strict nature reserve** - an area possessing some outstanding ecosystems, features, and species of flora and fauna of national scientific importance, established to protect nature and natural processes and maintain ecologically representative examples of the natural environment for scientific study, environmental monitoring, and education.
- **Natural park** - a relatively large area not materially altered by human activity, where extractive resource uses are not allowed and which is maintained to protect outstanding natural and scenic areas of national or international significance for scientific, educational and recreational use.
- **Natural monument** - a relatively small area focused on the protection of nationally significant natural features on account of their special interest or unique characteristics.
- **Wildlife sanctuary** - an area that assures the natural conditions necessary to protect nationally significant species, groups of species, biotic communities or physical features of the environment, where these may require specific human manipulation for perpetuation.
- **Protected landscapes and seascapes** - areas of national significance that provide opportunities for public enjoyment through recreation and tourism within the normal lifestyle and economic activity of the resident community.
- **Resource reserve** - an extensive and relatively isolated and uninhabited area normally with difficult access designated as such to protect the natural resources for future use, and prevent or control development that

Agusan Marsh: a biodiversity asset

There are three major marshes in the Philippines: the Candaba Swamp in central Luzon, the Liguasan Marsh in western Mindanao and the Agusan Marsh in east central Mindanao. Much of the first has been drained and converted into rice fields and fish ponds. The second contains significant crocodile populations and has been accorded partial protected area status; the peace and order situation there provides options for conservation.

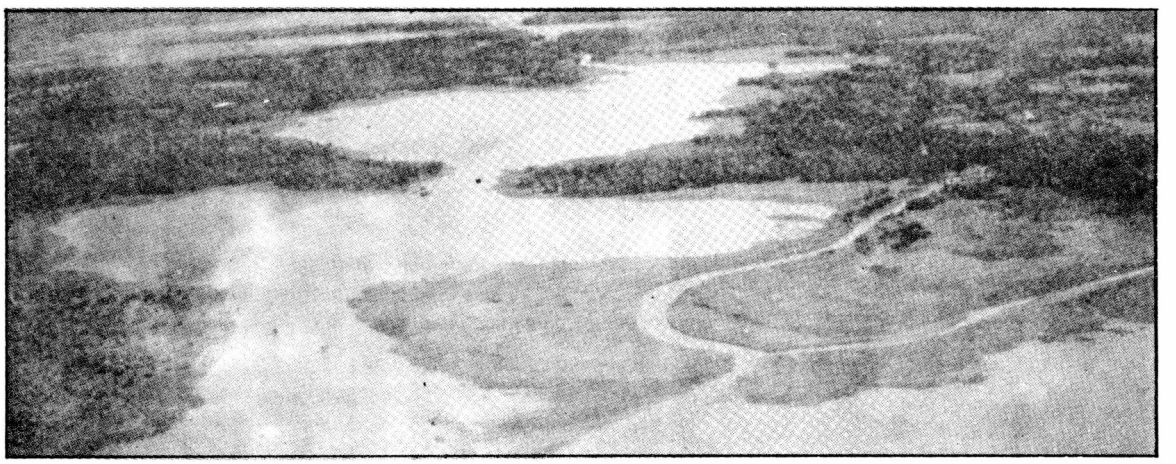
Included in the country's top ten sites under the protected areas system, the Agusan Marsh holds a great variety of wetland habitats. Besides numerous rivers and creeks, there are areas of floodplain lakes, herbaceous swamp, scrub swamp, freshwater swamp forest, peat swamp and mixed swamp forests with a thick closed canopy where disturbance has been minimal.

Agusan Marsh is a refuge for large populations of the crocodiles *Crocodylus porosus* and *C. mindorensis* whose numbers have been reduced drastically elsewhere in the country.

A major reason for the high biodiversity in Agusan Marsh is that it includes both true wetland and terrestrial species. The thick swamp forests hold a high diversity of typically terrestrial birds, and the open water areas and the herbaceous marshes hold true wetland birds. Already, even with limited surveys, 102 species have been recorded, of which at least 20 are endemic to the Philippines.

The people living around Agusan Marsh depend on it for food and livelihood. Attractive options for increasing the income of the local people include deep-water rice cultivation and fish culture at the periphery of the Marsh.

Reference: J. Davies, *Agusan Marsh in the Philippines*, **Asian Wetland News**, Vol. 6, No. 2, December 1993.



NIPAS ACT ...

could affect the resource pending the establishment of objectives based upon appropriate knowledge and planning.

- **Natural biotic areas** - areas set aside to allow the way of life of societies living in harmony with the environment to adapt to modern technology at their pace. These societies include the:
  - *Indigenous cultural community*, a group of people sharing common bonds of language, customs, traditions and other distinctive cultural traits, and who have, since time immemorial, occupied, possessed and utilized a territory.
  - *Tenured migrant communities*, those that have actually and continuously occupied a protected area for five years and who are solely dependent therein for subsistence.
- **Other categories** established by law, conventions or international agreements of which the Philippine Government is a signatory.