



Abatan River Development Management Council (ARDMC)

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THE ABATAN RIVER COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

BACKGROUND

The Abatan Watershed

The Abatan Watershed is the third largest of the 11 major watershed networks that support water needs and other requirements of the island province of Bohol. It covers some 38,628 hectares or close to 9% of the province's total land area. It has three distinct land divisions, coastal, lowland and upland.

The watershed occupies all or parts of 115 barangays in thirteen (13) municipalities, namely, Antequera, Balilihan, Calape, Catigbian, Clarin, Corella, Cortes, Loon, Maribojoc, Sagbayan, San Isidro, Sikatuna, and Tubigon. Four (4) of these municipalities, namely: Antequera, Balilihan, Catigbian and San Isidro are considered major as most of their land area is located inside the watershed boundaries. The combination of these big four municipalities accounts 63% of the total watershed area or approximately 24,224 hectares.

The watershed consists largely of alienable and disposable lands (about 85.5% of total area or 33,032 hectares), thus are privately owned. However, the land still has a good vegetative cover of forests, wooded lands, shrubs, and mangroves that cover more than half of the area. This makes for a biologically diverse watershed. About 40% of the watershed (16,094 has) is devoted to the production of agricultural products as almost 60% of the watershed (22,946 has) is on level to undulating to rolling topography with slopes ranging from 0 to 18%. Basically, these areas support the economy of their component municipalities in varying degree according to the area of each municipality within the watershed.

The watershed has a population of 93,987 inhabitants (2007 census), who are generally agriculture dependent. However, the watershed is gifted with several tourist attractions and natural endowments that can be tapped for ecotourism purposes.

The Abatan Watershed is the nearest major watershed to the capital City of Tagbilaran, thus making its natural resources prone to pressure from aggressive urbanization and development. Therefore, in order to enhance and protect its value to people the area should be managed well

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by the local stakeholders as well as by outsiders who come to enjoy the bounties of nature that are available in the watershed.

In the early 1999, initial conservation efforts within Abatan Watershed particularly along Abatan River was undertaken by PROCESS-Bohol, a social development NGO operating in the province of Bohol. A convergence of six (6) municipalities was facilitated that led to the formation of the Abatan Technical Working Group (TWG) which is multi-sectoral in composition and tasked to heighten the environmental consciousness among the people living in the watershed and the LGUs. These municipalities were Antequera, Balilihan, Catigbian, Cortes, Maribojoc and San Isidro. The TWG was able to engage with the LGUs making them aware of their primary responsibility in protecting the environment.

HISTORY

The Initiative of Ecotourism Development

In early 2000, Bohol was one of the so-called “Club 20” provinces. The “Club 20” means the top 20 poorest provinces in the Philippines. Hence, in 2004, the Bohol Convergence Support Initiative (BoCSI) led by Cong. Edgar M. Chatto with the active involvement of national government agencies (NGAs) with program on poverty alleviation was launched in Abatan.

In 2005, Cong. Edgar M. Chatto with the 5 LGUs of Maribojoc, Cortes, Antequera, Balilihan and Catigbian agreed to utilize the untapped assets of Abatan River for tourism purposes. The concept was initiated by a people’s organization based in Cortes, the Abatan River Development Association (ARDA).

The primary aim of the project is to develop Abatan River as an ecotourism destination to benefit directly the people, especially the poor and to encourage community participation in the protection, conservation and management of environment, preservation of cultural heritage as well as the development of existing resources. The project covers 13.5 kilometers of the river that stretches from barangay Salvador in Cortes to Kawasan Falls in Balilihan. Also included is the Dagook Falls in Catigbian. However, 2 major calamities experienced by the Abatan River areas

To formalize the partnership, Gov. Erico B. Aumentado issued Executive Order 19 on November 18, 2005 creating the Abatan River Development Management Council (ARDMC) to give mandate to its existence.

The ecotourism development strategy of ARDMC is basically to support projects with strong environmental protection regulations, establish village centers in the identified sites of the five (5) towns. The Abatan River Community Life Tour is the primary activity and the main village center in Cortes serves as the main entry point and docking area. The other four municipalities have their respective satellite village centers.

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The Abatan River is being developed as one of the major eco-tourism destinations in the province by the ARDMC thru the Project Management Office (PMO) originally handled by PROCESS-Bohol. The ARDMC issued a Resolution designating PROCESS-Bohol as PMO. Currently, the PMO under the direct management of ARDMC is handling the operation after the term of PROCESS-Bohol ended.

Through the effort of Cong. Edgar M. Chatto, a Conceptual Tourism Plan was formulated with funding assistance from the Department of Tourism (DOT) including the construction of village centers and other support facilities through the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA). The Provincial Government of Bohol and the 5 LGUs provided their respective counterparts while PROCESS-Bohol took the initiative of accessing funds from UNDP-SGP, Seacology, Philippine Travel Agencies Association (PTAA), among others.

The ARDMC is currently chaired by Mayor Pureza V. Chatto, Municipal Mayor of Balilihan with Mayor Lynn Iven P. Lim of the municipality of Cortes as Vice Chair.

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

The tour products are the Abatan River Community Life Tour (packaged and flexi tours) and the Amazing Abatan Firefly Tour using bandong boat, outrigger boat and/or kayak boats.

Just recently, the ARDMC entered into a partnership with The Buzzz Café and Franchising Corp. to open a restaurant at the Abatan Main Village Center. The restaurant was formally opened last April 26, 2023.

EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES INVOLVED

Hosted series of local and international events

- ✓ The Philippine Kayaking Series 2009
 - Kayak Explore Cebu-Bohol Crossing
- ✓ Wedding and other events
 - Pre-Nup Shooting
- ✓ Cultural Performances of local and international cultural groups
 - Performers from Indonesia and Thailand for Lihok Asya Cultural Show
 - Hudyaka sa Abatan for local cultural groups
- ✓ Regular hosting of cruise ship tourists and dignitaries, e.g. Ambassadors from Australian, Czech Republic, USA, Laos, China, Indonesia and from other Southeast Asian Countries and visitors from UNESCO being part of the Global GeoPark destinations.
- ✓ Regular hosting of MS Europa Cruise Ship and other cruise ship guests
 - More than 250 European tourists experienced the ARCLT
 - CMV Vasco De Gama of Nicko Cruises Germany early this year

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- ✓ Regular participation in Philippine Travel Mart from 2013 -2018 and Sandugo Trade Fairs
- ✓ Fund accessing for facility maintenance and additional bandong boat including PMO cash investment

RESEARCH

- ✓ Research on Mangroves and Fireflies in Abatan River by a former student from the Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences (VHL), Marcel J. Middeljans, a BSc Tropical Forestry and Nature Management, as his thesis.
- ✓ Periodic research on the Updated Status of the Maribojoc Bay Mangrove Forest, Bohol, of which Abatan is part of it by Dr. Hilconida P. Calumpong, et al from the Institute of Environmental and Marine Sciences, Silliman University Dumaguete City.

Abatan River: A Living Eco-museum

- Museum without walls
- Emphasis on the link with history, landscape, natural resources and agricultural practices with active participation of local communities
- Inclusion of Abatan River in the world eco-museum map
- The first eco-museum in the country
- Signages of mangroves and directions were installed.

Environmental Protection and Management

- Regular river clean up
- Mangrove monitoring and management
- Installation of signages on the creeks/channels as well as mangrove names and communities

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