

Best Friends of the Forest

The Philippines is losing forest cover at an alarming rate. From 27 million hectares, the country's forest cover is down to as little as seven million hectares. According to the Forest Management Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the country is losing approximately 47,000 hectares of forest cover every year due to the combined threats of logging activities, population growth, increased agricultural activities, and mining in biodiversity-rich areas. Such areas include Sierra Madre, Palawan, Samar and Leyte, and Bukidnon and Misamis Oriental.



#BFFMOVEMENT: BEST FRIENDS OF THE FOREST MOVEMENT

In 2018, during the International Day of Forests, Forest Foundation Philippines issued a call to action for students, conservationists, environmentalists, and nature lovers when it launched its youth advocacy campaign, the Best Friends of the Forest Movement (#BFFMovement). The #BFFMovement's mission is to engage and empower the young generation to take up the mantle of forest protection and conservation. You only need one thing to be a BFF: the passion to take action and champion our forests.

PASSION POINTS

To achieve its goal of promoting forest protection and conservation, and building a community of advocates, the #BFFMovement taps into youth passion points, such as Ecotourism, Arts and Culture, Social Entrepreneurship, and Environmental Conservation. Through activities, such as nature trails, talks, and workshops, the Foundation engages the BFFs to openly share their passion, and take them right into the heart of the action to help raise awareness and inspire their friends to champion forest protection and conservation.



Jen Horn, Niccolo Jose, UP Mountaineers, and Pinoy Mountaineer were the ambassadors of the Best Friends of the Movement when it was launched in 2018.

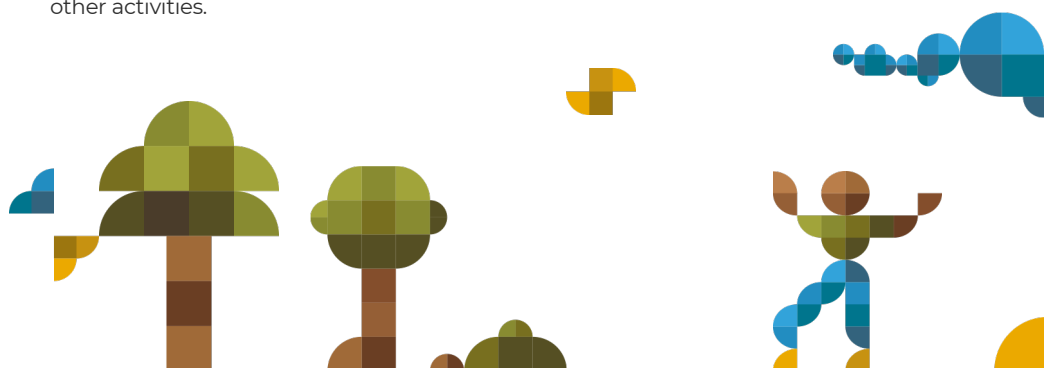
#BFFMOVEMENT: YEAR ONE

During its first year, the Foundation gathered the support of many outspoken conservation advocates and got the attention of young people looking for ways to make the world a better place.

The first BFF talk was held on July 28, 2018, entitled "Creation, Conservation, and Communities", with forest advocates and certified BFFs Jen Horn and Niccolo Jose. They expounded on the power of social entrepreneurship and arts in raising awareness on environmental issues, and stirring people into taking action for forest protection and conservation. Partner organizations, such as Bambike, Woven Crafts, Philippine Coffee Alliance, and the National Museum of the Philippines, were also there to lend their expertise and passion.

Then there was the BFF Trail Event that took a group of young environmentalists, travel enthusiasts, artists, and nature lovers on a hike through the La Mesa EcoPark, where guides from BFF UP Mountaineers helped them appreciate the biodiversity of our forests. They also learned the nuances of conservation, the danger of invasive species, and the role of birds in forest conservation from University of the Philippines Professor Gerry de Villa.

In 2019, the #BFFMovement celebrated its first anniversary by organizing a "Treevia" Night — a fun and informative activity advocating for the forests with BFFs and fellow nature lovers. They expressed their love for the forest by bonding over games and other activities.



#BFFMOVEMENT IN THE FOCAL LANDSCAPES

In 2021, amid the pandemic, the Foundation saw the growth of the #BFFMovement in the various parts of the country. Forest Foundation awarded a grant to Edukasyon.ph to cascade the #BFFMovement: Online Fellowship Program in its focal landscapes, or the country's most critical forest landscapes. Edukasyon.ph is the leading educational technology platform in the Philippines that aims to empower more than 20 million Filipino Gen Z youth to make self-aware education decisions that lead to a fulfilling life.

A free asynchronous online course was developed for young students to improve their knowledge on forests. More than a hundred BFFs were invited to join a series of online talks to inspire students to start and pursue their own conservation journeys by tapping into their passion points. Featured speakers include Forest Foundation grantees Bayan Academy, Cynthia Bauzon-Arre, Philippine Parks and Biodiversity Conservation, and The Ateneo Wild.

Aside from these, a mentorship program with the Foundation's grantees was also staged. In this program, young students received mentorship from Forest Foundation grantees on crafting their own forest protection and conservation projects with the Foundation's support.

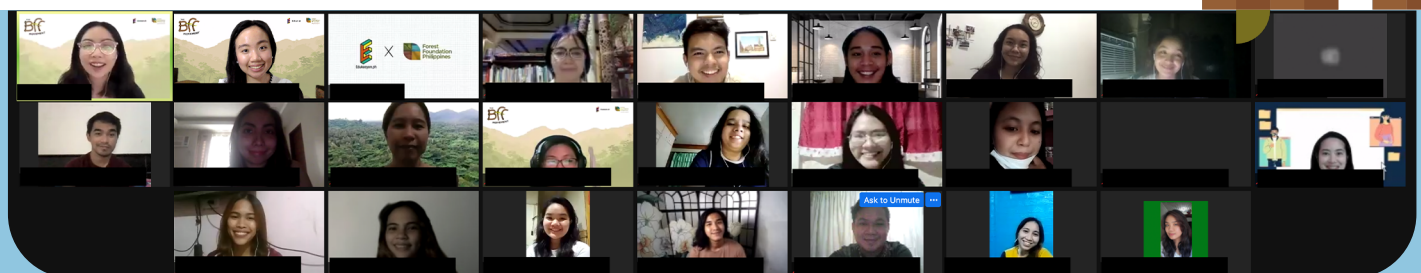
The more BFFs, the bigger the difference that the group can affect. The #BFFMovement aims to continue growing a community of young forest protection and conservation advocates, who support the cause beyond special events and activities, making it a natural part of their lives.

Participating schools per landscape included:

- Sierra Madre:** Bulacan State University and Nueva Vizcaya State University
- Palawan:** Western Philippines University
- Samar and Leyte:** Eastern Samar State University, University of Eastern Philippines, and University of the Philippines Visayas Tacloban College
- Bukidnon and Misamis Oriental:** University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines, Central Mindanao University, and Xavier University

Participating mentors included:

- Atty. Grizelda Mayo-Anda** of the Environmental Legal Assistance Center
- Mark Raquino** of Daluhay Daloy ng Buhay
- Juvilyn Salazar** of the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction
- Val Amiel Vestil** of the Association of Young Environmental Journalists



Selected students and mentors pose for a group photo in one of the online workshops for the #BFFMovement: Online Fellowship Program.

There are many ways to help protect and conserve the forests. You can do this by helping:

GROW FORESTS

You can participate in tree-growing activities, and report incidents of illegal logging and poaching to the proper authorities. You can also empower yourself to become an advocate by learning more about forests.

GROW LIVELIHOODS

It is important to strike a balance between development and conservation. Using wood and other non-timber forest products meaningfully and responsibly from sustainable sources enables us to meet our current needs, while conserving our forests for the future generations. This also enables the continuity of economic opportunities for forest-dependent communities.

GROW PARTNERSHIPS

We can't do it all. It's important to work with other people and groups in this endeavor. You can support other efforts or even organize your own activities to help protect and conserve our forests.

GROW ADVOCATES

Simply living the advocacy and sharing your passion for the forests can go a long way. By doing this, you can already help spread awareness and bring new advocates into the fold.

What part will you play to protect and conserve the forests? Take action now with the BFF Movement! For more information, please visit: <https://www.forestfoundation.ph>.

If you have a conservation project in mind, apply for a grant here: <https://grants.forestfoundation.ph>.

For other queries, please send us an e-mail at info@forestfoundation.ph.

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