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# USAID Sustainable Interventions for Biodiversity, Oceans and Landscapes

Newsletter #6 (January-March 2023)

## USAID, gov't partners discuss environmental law enforcement in Palawan



On March 2, Mission Director Ryan Washburn and USAID/Washington Asia Bureau Senior Advisor for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility Kathryn Booker-Veloz met with Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) Acting Executive Director Niño Rey Estoya and representatives from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Philippine National Police Maritime Group and the Philippine Coast Guard. The organizations collectively form the safety and security committee of PCSD, tasked to protect Palawan's environment including its areas within the West Philippine Seascape. Highlights of the meeting included a visit to the PCSD evidence compound, where confiscated items being held as evidence in environmental crimes are kept pending prosecution. SIBOL and its partners also talked about the importance of working together to comprehensively address challenges that threaten the natural resources and biodiversity of the province.





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## Palawan TWGs work on green recovery



SIBOL formed last January 6 an inter-agency technical working group (TWG) composed of representatives from government agencies and academic institutions in Palawan as part of the development of reconstruction and rehabilitation plans in Super Typhoon Odette-hit areas. Three groups were formed for the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park (PPSRNP), Cleopatra's Needle Critical Habitat (CNCH) and municipalities of San Vicente and Roxas.

Last February 21, 23 and 24, the three TWGs separately held their first meeting to validate the results of green assessment for each site specific TWG, recommend preliminary interventions and agree on next steps including socialization of results to barangays and communities in their respective areas. On March 17, San Vicente TWG presented the green assessment results in Barangay Caruray and Port Barton. The TWG members conducted a situational analysis by gathering insights from locals regarding the state of biodiversity and ecosystems in their area.

SIBOL also presented on February 24 the results to Palawan Council for Sustainable Development's Scientific Advisory Panel. They provided key recommendations for the improvement of the green assessment framework.

As a next step, SIBOL will support its local partners' development of comprehensive green recovery plans and help in the reconstruction of disaster-stricken areas in Palawan. In the next quarter, remaining TWGs are set to present and validate green assessment results in PPSRNP and CNCH.





## SIPLAS mangrove forest shines in World Wetlands Day celebration



On February 2-3, SIBOL joined Philippine government partners to mark World Wetlands Day in Siargao, Surigao del Norte. In line with the theme of “Wetlands Restoration,” the Philippine government declared the mangrove forest of Del Carmen, Surigao del Norte a wetland of international importance and nominated it as the 9th Ramsar site in the country.

SIBOL has been working with Siargao stakeholders to rehabilitate its natural resources following the damage caused by Super Typhoon Odette in 2021. Last year, the project conducted a mangrove and beach forest training course, conducted assessments and site mapping exercises, and developed seven local mangrove and beach forest rehabilitation plans.

## SIBOL teams up with PCSD for Wildlife Day



On World Wildlife Day on March 3, SIBOL joined the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development in celebrating and raising global awareness of the world’s wild flora and fauna.

Around 100 students from various schools in Puerto Princesa City joined an educational tour of the Palawan Biodiversity Resource Center where they learned about the province’s rich biodiversity. Afterwards, they were treated to a storytelling and film showing activity that focused on the critically endangered Philippine pangolin, an endemic species found only in Palawan.

Students also joined an on-the-spot poster making and jingle making competition, which creatively showcased their appreciation and respect for wildlife.





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## Masinloc CoMSCAs produce educational calendar



Around 500 members of the USAID-supported community-managed savings and credit associations (CoMSCA) in Masinloc, Zambales pooled their environmental funds to produce environmental calendars distributed on February 17 to their community. The calendars feature tidal charts and showcase Masinloc-Oyon Bay Protected Landscape and Seascape (MOBPLS) as a marine protected area; its abundant natural resources; and proper ways of planting mangroves.

Established by SIBOL in 2021, CoMSCA groups in MOBPLS provide savings and affordable credit to members. CoMSCA groups set aside environmental funds to conduct conservation initiatives, which included the development and distribution of this educational calendar.

## Waterbirds spotted in Masinloc during census



SIBOL last January 19-20 spotted migratory birds during a waterbird census in Masinloc, Zambales, indicating the suitability of the protected area as habitat for various bird species. Fifteen participants from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the local government unit of Masinloc joined the activity, where migratory birds such as sandpipers, little egret and Eurasian curlews were spotted. The team also identified resident waterbirds like the Philippine duck and great crested tern which are considered vulnerable in the country. There were around 200 Philippine ducks observed in Magalawa Island alone despite the increased threat to the species due to overhunting and habitat loss.





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## SIBOL conducts HCVA field assessment in MMPL



On March 7-13, 2023, SIBOL began conducting a high conservation value area (HCVA) assessment at the Mt. Mantalingahan Protected Landscape (MMPL) in Palawan. Representatives from the MMPL Protected Area Management Office and the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office joined SIBOL field researchers and participated in a calibration workshop to learn about assessment methods of identifying high conservation values in MMPL. More than 80 indigenous people were also mobilized as field guides and porters during the activity.

The assessment included data collection on bird species, mammals (mainly bats and rodents), reptiles and amphibians, plant species and habitats. SIBOL identified various endemic species. Initial observations also revealed a decline in population of species such as birds.

An HCVA is an area with biological, ecological, social or cultural value that is of outstanding significance or critical importance. The HCVA assessment will help identify HCVs (their location and extent), inform the protected area management plan/policy-decisions and train local partners in conducting assessments and monitoring of biodiversity and landscapes in MMPL.





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## SIBOL joins CSO summit on WPS



SIBOL supported on March 2-3 the conduct of the first Civil Society Summit on the West Philippine Seascape (WPS) held in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan. With the theme “Harnessing the Power of Communities: A CSO Summit for the Conservation of the WPS,” the summit put together a coalition of CSOs in Northern Luzon, Mindoro and Palawan that will push for marine biodiversity conservation and protection in the WPS.

USAID Fish Right convened the summit while the Investing in Sustainability and Partnerships for Inclusive Growth and Regenerative Ecosystems (INSPIRE), another USAID project, also provided support.

The CSO Summit was attended by around 100 CSO participants representing universities and research institutions, non-government organizations, fishers’ communities, women’s groups, and indigenous peoples living along the seaboard facing the West Philippine Seascape within the South China Sea. Participants included the Western Philippines University, Palawan State University, Mariano Marcos State University, Katipunan ng mga Kilusang Artisanong Mangingisda ng Pilipinas, Tambuyog Development Center, Subic Commercial Fisherfolk Association Inc., Environmental Legal Assistance Center, Calawit Developmental and Innovative Women, the Calamianes Island Group Gender Network, and other CSOs who have stakes in finding solutions to pressing issues confronting fisheries resources in the seascape.

SIBOL facilitated the discussion on the capacity building of fisherfolk and local community to protect and sustain the value of WPS, and brought people’s organizations from its project sites in Palawan and Zambales to attend the summit.





## SIBOL leads blue carbon workshop



SIBOL conducted in late March a workshop on blue carbon quantification among 39 participants from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the Climate Change Commission. SIBOL engaged blue carbon experts to discuss proven methodologies and technologies in sampling and calculating carbon sequestration and existing studies on blue carbon quantification.

Blue carbon ecosystems are coastal habitats such as mangroves, seagrasses, and tidal marshes that sequester large quantities of carbon and provide important ecosystem services. Despite their importance in climate change mitigation, blue carbon ecosystems are not yet uniformly integrated in the national strategies for climate change impact mitigation. SIBOL aims to establish a protocol for blue carbon quantification in consultation with experts and government partners, which can be adopted in the national strategy for climate change impact mitigation.

## SIBOL gathers data on ecosystem services in Palawan, Siargao



In February, SIBOL simultaneously conducted data gathering at the Siargao Island Protected Landscape and Seascape and in Palawan to estimate the value of certain ecosystem services. The project gathered primary and secondary data on water provisioning and regulating services, coastal protection, crop provisioning and recreational services.

SIBOL worked with partner academic institutions in the valuation work and so that they can also conduct their own valuations in the future. The project will analyze data gathered to measure the monetary value of ecosystem services — natural processes that benefit communities and may be social, economic or cultural in nature (i.e., coastal protection through mangroves, soil erosion control, water and air filtration, food production).

By recognizing ecosystem services as part of the country's assets, national resources may be realigned in the protection of biodiversity conservation areas.





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## KEY EVENTS FOR NEXT QUARTER

- Month of the Ocean - May
- World Migratory Bird Day - May 8
- International Day of Biological Diversity - May 22
- Philippine Environment Month - June
- World Environment Day - June 5
- World Oceans Day - June 8
- National Arbor Day - June 25

## ABOUT SIBOL

*Launched in 2020, the Sustainable Interventions for Biodiversity, Oceans, and Landscapes (SIBOL) is a P1.35-billion natural resources management and biodiversity conservation project of the United States Agency for International Development in partnership with RTI International. SIBOL works closely with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development. The Center for Conservation Innovations, Forest Foundation Philippines, Zoological Society of London, and the Resources, Environment and Economics Center for Studies, comprise the consortium partnering with RTI.*

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