Another international recognition awarded to the Puerto Princesa Underground River (PPUR)

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Amidst warnings of the upcoming supertyphoon “Bopha” (with local name “Pablo”), the celebration for the inauguration ceremony of the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park (PPSRNP, or PPUR, as it was more commonly known) as the fifth Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar Site) in the Philippines, held on 4 December 2012, was a definite success. Even as “Pablo”, which was carrying maximum sustained winds of 175 km/h, and gusts of up to 210 km/h, threatened to come, the event was attended by more than a hundred guests from national and local government and non-government organizations, media, and tourists. It was highlighted with a motorcade, boat parade, unveiling of a marker on site and awarding of Ramsar certificates to the Management Board of the protected area.

The Honourable Chief Executive of the City Government of Puerto Princesa, Mayor Edward Hagedorn, graced the occasion to receive the Ramsar Certificate and led the unveiling of the Ramsar Marker. DENR Undersecretary for Staff Bureaus Ernesto Adobo Jr. presented the certificates and delivered a keynote address on behalf of the DENR Secretary Ramon JP Paje. Other members of the Protected Area Management Board were also present. They joined the unveiling and also received copies of the Certificates.
The recognition was conferred to the Park by the Ramsar Convention, an international treaty which promotes conservation and sustainable use of wetlands globally. Other Ramsar Sites in the country are: the Naujan Lake National Park in Mindoro; the Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary on Mindanao, the Olango Island Wildlife Sanctuary in Cebu; and the Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park in Cagayancillo, Palawan. This recognition is the fourth international award that the National Park has received, with its declaration as UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999, as a National Geological Site in 2003 and as a New Seven Wonders of Nature in 2011.

The video message by the Ramsar Secretary General Anada Tiega explained the benefits of designating a Ramsar Site. For PPUR, in particular, he mentioned the role that this designation would contribute to ensuring the protection of the nation’s rich wetlands.

In the speech by the Honorable Mayor, he emphasized the importance of the PPSRNP as a source of pride to the locals as well as to the Nation. He then noted that to protect the integrity of the Park, the Management Board decided to limit the number of tourists who could tour inside the underground river even though this could mean less revenue and more disappointed potential clients.
The DENR Undersecretary for Staff Bureaus Ernesto Adobo Jr. and Mayor Edward Hagedorn, Chair of the PPSRNP PAMB, led the unveiling of the PPSRNP Ramsar Site marker © Nelson Castillo, PAWB-DENR

Meanwhile, in the Secretary’s keynote address, Under-secretary Adobo pointed out that the “eco” in ecotourism should mean “more ecology” than simply “economy”. He also stressed the need for cooperation among all stakeholders to reduce the impacts of some of activities that could be incompatible with ecotourism in the PPUR.

To cap the event, some of the guests enjoyed a tour of the underground river then proceeded to a lunch buffet sponsored by the City Government of Puerto Princesa.

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