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DENR ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER
NO. 2021- 34

SUBJECT : GUIDELINES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CAVE MANAGEMENT, PROTECTION, AND CONSERVATION PROGRAM (CMPCP)

Pursuant to Republic Act (RA) No. 9072 otherwise known as the “*National Caves and Cave Resources Management and Protection Act*” and its Implementing Rules and Regulations, RA No. 7586 “*National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS) Act*” as amended by RA No. 11038 “*Expanded NIPAS Act of 2018*”, and consistent with RA No. 8371 “*Indigenous Peoples Rights Act*”, RA No. 7942 “*Philippine Mining Act*”, the Philippine Development Plan (2017-2022), the Philippine Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2015-2028), the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, and other relevant laws, rules, and regulations, the guidelines for the establishment and implementation of the Cave Management, Protection, and Conservation Program (CMPCP) is hereby issued.

SECTION 1. Basic Policy. It is the policy of the State to protect, conserve and manage caves and cave resources, along with the surrounding karst landscape, as part of the country’s natural wealth and heritage and to promote the right to a healthful and balanced ecology in accord with the rhythm and harmony of nature.

SECTION 2. Objectives. The general objective of the CMPCP is to achieve the effective management of the country’s caves and their surrounding karst landscapes in order to maintain and conserve biodiversity, to promote sustainable resource use, and to enhance appreciation of their biological, natural, cultural, and historic values for the present and future generations.

Specifically, the Program aims to:

- a. Establish a registry of caves and their surrounding karst landscapes to ensure the effective and sustainable management of cave resources;
- b. Implement sustainable management of caves and their surrounding karst landscape ecosystems;
- c. Enhance the formation of positive values among all stakeholders including the youth through shared responsibilities in sustainable management of caves and their surrounding karst landscape ecosystems; and
- d. Develop and/or enhance skills of DENR staff as well as other stakeholders on caves and their surrounding karst landscape ecosystem management.

SECTION 3. Scope and Coverage. This Order shall apply to all caves, whether terrestrial or underwater, cave resources, and their surrounding karst landscape in the Philippines.

SECTION 4. Definition of Terms. For the purposes of this Order, the following terms shall be defined as follows:

- (a) **“Cave”** means any naturally occurring void, cavity, recess or system of interconnected passages beneath the surface of the earth or within a cliff or ledge and which is large enough to permit an individual to enter, whether or not the entrance, located either in private or public land, is naturally formed or man-made. It shall include any natural pit, sinkhole or other feature which is an extension of the entrance. The term also includes cave resources therein, but not any vug, mine tunnel, aqueduct or other manmade excavation¹.
- (b) **“Cave resources”** includes any material or substance occurring naturally in caves, such as animal life, plant life, including paleontological and archaeological deposits, cultural artifacts or products of human activities, sediments, minerals, speleogems and speleothems².
- (c) **“Karst”** is a type of landscape consisting of geologic features including a groundwater system formed from soluble bedrock, such as limestone³.
- (d) **“Terrestrial caves”** refer to caves that are located inland and with passages that are not submerged in water.
- (e) **“Underwater caves”** refer to caves that are totally or partially submerged in water and which are usually impassable to humans with no sufficient diving skills and proper scuba gear⁴.

SECTION 5. Cave Management, Protection, and Conservation Program. The Cave Management, Protection, and Conservation Program (CMPCP) is a national program which aims to comprehensively manage, address and effectively reduce the drivers and threats of degradation of caves, cave resources, and their surrounding karst landscape; to conserve their biological, aesthetic, archaeological, paleontological, historic, recreational, scientific, and educational value; and to promote the sustainability of caves and their surrounding karst landscape ecosystem services and climate change resiliency. Under the CMPCP, management, protection, and conservation shall be anchored on the following approaches:

- a. Integrated and Holistic Management
- b. Application of Gender Equity Principles
- c. Partnership Building
- d. Science-based Decision-making and Management Planning Process
- e. Application of Precautionary Principle

SECTION 6. Program Components. The Program shall consist of the following components:

- a. **Cave and Cave Resource Inventory and Assessment** — this shall include inventory, mapping, delineation, and marking of boundaries, and classification of caves as well as the documentation of biological, geological, hydrological,

¹ Republic Act No. 9072 “National Caves and Cave Resources Management and Protection Act” Section 3.

² *Ibid.*

³ DENR-BMB, 2017. Philippine Caves: Beneath the Earth’s Surface – Conservation and Management, Page 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Page 30.

paleontological, archaeological, historical, and other cave resources, including the identification, characterization and analysis of threats affecting them. The cave inventory and assessment shall be guided by the standards developed by the Biodiversity Management Bureau and other internationally accepted methods. Following the assessment is the selection of potential sites for establishing Protected Areas and/or World Heritage Sites based on a set of criteria, including biogeographical, ecological, spatial, social, socio-economic, and political considerations, among others.

- b. **Management Plan Development** — this shall include crafting of a sound Cave Management Plan for each cave and its surrounding karst landscape through full community involvement and multi-stakeholder participation in the development and implementation. This shall also include cave resource management and utilization, protection measures and monitoring schemes, visitor management, mainstreaming climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and business and financing mechanisms in each Cave Management Plan. For caves within a protected area, the cave management plan shall be anchored and consistent with the protected area management plan.
- c. **Maintenance and Protection** — this includes the development schemes to promote cooperation, coordination and partnerships among different stakeholders including the enhancement of caves in existing protected areas and to provide support in the protection of caves and their surrounding karst landscape ecosystems. It shall also include the restoration of damaged and disturbed caves and their surrounding karst landscape ecosystems by protecting and allowing ecosystems to recover naturally or use of applicable technologies grounded on science and consistent with the overall management goals.

The provisions of RA No. 7586 as amended by RA No. 11038, and its rules and regulations shall guide the DENR in the management of caves within protected areas.

The DENR shall engage LGUs in the maintenance and protection of caves in their areas. This may include but not limited to: i) entering into a Memorandum of Agreement with the concerned LGU; ii) training and deputizing LGU personnel as Cave Protection and Enforcement Officers pursuant to Section 9 of this Order; iii) coordinating with the concerned LGU on reporting and monitoring of violations committed within caves and to cave resources; and iv) providing technical advice and assistance as to maintaining the ecological and aesthetic integrity of caves opened for various purposes such as religious/cultural practices, eco-tourism, and spelunking.

- d. **Biodiversity-Friendly Enterprise (BDFE) Development** — this shall involve the conduct of economic activities and practices of micro, small and medium enterprises, LGUs and People's organizations that promote the sustainable use of caves, cave resources, and adjacent land for consumptive and non-consumptive use. The provision of these livelihood options shall help sustain the community support on all cave and surrounding karst landscape management efforts. This component shall follow DENR Administrative Order No. 2021-13 (Guidelines for the Development and Recognition of Biodiversity-Friendly Enterprises in Protected Areas under the National Integrated Protected Area System and Conservation Areas, Providing for Incentives and Supporting Mechanisms) as well as any additional guidelines or amendments regarding BDFEs.
- e. **Capacity-Building** — the concerned DENR staff at the national and regional/field offices and of the Regional and Provincial Cave Committees shall be trained to develop their skills and expertise on caves and their surrounding karst landscape management. The BMB shall develop training modules for capacity-building on cave

management and periodically conduct training-of-trainers to roll-out these modules. The capacity building received by the DENR personnel and of the members of the Regional and Provincial Cave Committees shall be cascaded to the LGUs, other stakeholders, and partners in the field. The DENR may engage the services of a third party such as consulting firms, caving groups, academe, etc. to assist concerned stakeholders in the conduct of capacity building activities.

- f. **Research and Development** — the Ecosystem Research and Development Bureau (ERDB) of the DENR shall conduct research and policy studies on caves and cave resources as part of the Bureau's Research and Development Program. The BMB shall provide logistical support and coordinate with academic and research institutions for cave research and development programs and speleological field studies, as well as recommend to ERDB research actions in aid of developing cave management guidelines.
- g. **Knowledge Management System** — a knowledge management system shall be developed to serve as a repository of all data and information on caves and their surrounding karst landscape, including the results of the assessments. This system shall be used to generate useful information for the management of caves and their surrounding karst landscape biodiversity. It shall also be used to monitor and assess the impact of the CMPCP.
- h. **Communication, Education, and Public Awareness (CEPA)** — a well-designed communication framework, strategies, and approaches shall be developed to promote public awareness, instill social and environmental consciousness, and affect behavior change regarding caves and their surrounding karst landscape ecosystems. This shall include establishment of linkages among all stakeholders, and conduct of Knowledge, Attitude and Practices (KAP) surveys, among others.
- i. **Monitoring and Evaluation** — the BMB, in collaboration with the DENR Policy and Planning Service shall conduct annual monitoring and assessment of the CMPCP. The BMB shall also conduct an analysis and evaluation of the results of the program.

SECTION 7. Program Management and Supervision. The DENR shall exercise overall management and supervision of the CMPCP. The DENR Regional Offices shall take the lead in the implementation of the Program, with the technical assistance and guidance from the BMB. They shall initiate partnership with the Department of Tourism, the National Museum, the National Historical Commission of the Philippines, other National Government Agencies, local government units, the academe, civil society organizations, and/or other stakeholders in the implementation of the Program.

SECTION 8. Institutional Mechanism for Advisory Bodies. The National, Regional, and Provincial Cave Committees shall have the following functions:

- a. The National Cave Committee (NCC) shall recommend policies/plans and programs for the CMPCP. It shall also act as an advisory body to the Secretary on matters relating to the effective implementation of the CMPCP and to address issues on caves as deemed necessary.
- b. The Regional Cave Committee (RCC), created by the Regional Directors in their respective region, shall be chaired by the Assistant Regional Director for Technical Services and co-chaired by the Regional Director of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau with members coming from different local coordinating agencies/offices, academe, and non-government organizations. The RCC shall assist the NCC in the implementation of CMPCP, and other cave-related plans, programs, and policies. Decisions of the RCC shall be affirmed by the Regional Director. When the cave is

located within a protected area, the RCC shall be constituted as a Special Committee within the PAMB to give advice to PAMB for matters relating to caves and cave resources.

- c. The DENR Regional Director may create a Provincial Cave Committee (PCC) for island provinces as appropriate. It shall be chaired by the DENR PENRO with members coming from different local agencies, academe, and non-government organizations. The PCC shall assume the duties and responsibilities of the RCC. Decisions of the PCC shall be affirmed by the Regional Director. In the Province of Palawan, the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development shall serve as the PCC for Palawan for purposes of monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the CMPCP.

SECTION 9. Appointment of Cave Protection Enforcement Officers. The concerned DENR Regional Office shall deputize Cave Protection Enforcement Officers (CPEOs) from locally-based non-government organizations (NGOs) peoples' organizations (POs), LGUs and other volunteers in accordance with existing rules and regulations.

SECTION 10. Reporting. The Regional Offices shall prepare and submit annual reports on the progress and status of Program implementation to the Director of BMB for consolidation. The Director of the BMB shall then submit a consolidated report to the Undersecretary for Policy, Planning and International Affairs.

The NCC, through the BMB, shall submit to the DENR Secretary an annual report on the progress of the CMPCP.

SECTION 11. Funding and Budgetary Requirements. The DENR shall allocate funds to support the full implementation of the CMPCP. The DENR Regional Offices shall include this in their annual budget plan.

SECTION 12. Separability Clause. If any clause, sentence or provision of this Order is held invalid, or unconstitutional, the remaining parts which are not affected shall remain valid and enforceable.

SECTION 13. Repealing Clause. This Order shall supersede DENR Administrative Order No. 1994-04 and Section 11 of DENR Administrative Order No. 2003-29. All rules, regulations, circulars, instructions, memoranda, orders, or portions thereof which are inconsistent herewith are hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

SECTION 14. Effectivity Clause. This Order shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in a newspaper of general circulation and upon acknowledgement of receipt of a copy thereof by the Office of the National Administrative Register (ONAR) of UP Law Center.


ROY A. CIMATU
Secretary

