



Program in Focus

## MT. MANTALINGAHAN PROTECTED LANDSCAPE

# PROTECTING MT. MANTALINGAHAN

Mount Mantalingahan, the highest peak in Palawan, Philippines, provides more than US\$ 5.5 billion in ecosystem services to people. It is a key biodiversity area where new species are still being discovered. It holds over half its original forest cover and provides an essential watershed for the 200,000 people that depend upon it.

This mountain is home to indigenous Palawans who have lived on this land for thousands of years. Some 3,000 families depend on the water that flows from it for their agriculture, drinking water and livelihoods. The mountain's substantial forest cover plays an important role in absorbing and storing carbon.

Like many forests in this region, it faces considerable threats — including illegal logging and wildlife poaching, conversion to agricultural land, mangrove loss and unsustainable mining. In response to these threats, in 2009, over 120,000 hectares of this range was declared the largest terrestrial protected area in Palawan through presidential proclamation — becoming Mount Mantalingahan Protected Landscape (MMPL).

Conservation International (CI) has supported the development and implementation of the MMPL's integrated management plan, which aims to achieve zero net loss of forest and ecosystem services. Built on several years of scientific studies, strong collaboration and consultation with stakeholders, the protected area incorporates effective sustainable management practices and creation of community-based conserved areas including the ancestral domains of indigenous peoples. CI is currently working to secure long-term financing for MMPL so that it may endure in perpetuity.



## Water for life

The watersheds in MMPL are critical to the survival of the mountain range's rich biological resources and the well-being of the people of Palawan. Within this landscape, the watersheds are extremely valuable to the lowland agricultural economy — they provide benefits for domestic, agriculture and fishery uses. Their protection also ensures the integrity and health of not only terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems, but marine ecosystems along the priority seascapes — the West Philippine Sea and Sulu Sea — where these watersheds drain.

## Supporting law enforcement

To support law enforcement efforts, CI collaborated with the local government and provided paralegal training and enforcement mentoring sessions to over 45 community volunteers selected to represent specific watersheds. These volunteers have been deputized by their local chief executives and are now conducting regular foot patrols in their designated areas. This has instilled a sense of responsibility to protect the community's natural resources while bolstering the local government's protection efforts.

To further boost surveillance efficiency, CI also provided two unmanned aerial vehicles and trained protected area staff in their operation.

## Encouraging community conservation

CI is enabling and encouraging local communities to protect their natural resources through conservation agreements. To date, hundreds of families have taken part in protection activities, and while being incentivized for this effort, they have learned the value of conservation along the way. This approach has transformed these communities from resource users into responsible — and sustainable — resource managers.

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