

## **DENR taps military, says NPA a threat to tree-planting campaign**

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KORONADAL CITY—The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) here is tapping the military for security for its greening program in the Soccsksargen region after threats from communist rebels slowed the pace of its implementation in the past.

Felix Alicer, regional director of DENR, said efforts to boost and protect the forest cover in Soccsksargen had been hampered by security threats from the communist New People's Army (NPA), prompting his office to coordinate with the military in the implementation of its greening program in the region.

Alicer said at least 815 hectares had been set for its greening program in Cotabato province, identified as the priority area of the military's regional Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (ELCAC) in the fight against communist rebels.

"We have a convergence with the military and the police for the protection of our forests because DENR cannot do it on its own," he said.

Alicer said tree-planting programs in the area would also provide livelihood for the communities.

In December 2018, President Rodrigo Duterte issued Executive Order No. 70 creating the ELCAC, supposedly to employ a "whole of nation" approach to defeating communist rebels.

The DENR-led National Greening Program, which is supposed to last from 2011 to 2028, had projected the planting of 1.5 billion trees on 1.5 million hectares of public lands nationwide.

Former President Benigno Aquino III issued Executive Order No. 193 in November 2015 enhancing the NGP to rehabilitate an estimated 7.1 million hectares of unproductive, denuded and degraded forestlands from 2016 to 2028, according to a DENR project briefer posted on its website.

Mama Samaon, DENR regional technical services chief, said that of the country's 6.84 million remaining forest cover, four percent, or some 273,600 hectares, are in the Soccsksargen region.

He said the forest cover in the region grew by five to 10 percent from five years ago, when the national greening program was first implemented.

"We have seen forest trees growing in our forest lands in the last five to 10 years," Mamaon said.

He said that at least 996,000 hectares of forest lands straddled the region which is composed of the provinces of South Cotabato, North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat and Sarangani.

Alicer, a lawyer, cited the need to enhance the survival rate of trees under the NGP to boost the forest cover in the region.

"We are not satisfied with the rate of survival of trees planted under the NGP program," he told reporters.

Across the region, Alicer said that 129,000 hectares of land had been planted with various tree species since the NGP was rolled out in 2011.

Alicer said the DENR regional office had been currently maintaining at least 8,000 hectares of tree plantations under the NGP program.

He said the government had allocated P5,000 per hectare to maintain the greening program.

Source: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1316762/denr-taps-military-says-npa-a-threat-to-tree-planting-campaign>