

DENR conducts inventory of tourist sites

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The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is coming up with an inventory of emerging tourist sites nationwide to prevent the problems in Boracay from being replicated in other areas.

Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu said yesterday he ordered the agency's regional directors to make the inventory in their respective areas of jurisdiction and formulate management plans.

Cimatu, who was in his home province of Ilocos Norte, also took time to inspect two popular beach resorts in Pagudpud town, saying he was serious in ensuring that the problem in Boracay will not be repeated in beaches nationwide.

"We will make sure that there is proper sewerage treatment facilities in the tourist sites, the easement zones are followed and that there will be no encroaching in forestlands," Cimatu said.

"The revenue that tourists bring to a municipality is very significant, especially if it is situated in a third class municipality. If they focus only on development of the tourist destination and the projected revenues and fail to comply with environmental laws, then we will have another problem in the future," he added.

Apart from Boracay, inspections on compliance with sewage treatment process, among other requirements, are now being done in tourist spots all over the country, particularly in El Nido in Palawan, Puerto Galera in Mindoro, Panglao in Bohol, Siargao Island in Surigao del Norte, Aurora and Cebu.

The interagency task force, comprised of the DENR, and the tourism and the interior and local government departments, had jointly recommended to Malacañang the total closure of Boracay for six months effective April 26.

This is to give way to efficient implementation of restoration measures in one of the country's top tourist destinations.

"We are doing everything to rehabilitate Boracay from the environmental damage it has incurred over the years. Our regional directors are working overtime to ensure that other tourist destinations will not suffer the same problems," Cimatu said.

The DENR is also studying the impact of tourism on wildlife and marine resources in order to formulate restrictions in the interest of protecting their natural habitat.

Violations in Pagudpud

Renelita AVECILLA-SANTOS, DENR-Region 1 information officer, said there were possible violations observed by the secretary and instructed regional officials to investigate.

Some of the violations were encroachment on easement and danger zones, Santos said, adding indigenous trees were cut.

Santos said officials must also ensure the legitimacy of land titles and permits from those claiming they own portion of the timberland and those occupying the alienable and disposable areas.

Cimatu also pointed to the existence of a drainage canal that comes out on the beach and the water quality of the creek that flows from the resort areas.

The secretary warned those violating environmental laws that they will face charges if they continue to refuse to comply with existing regulations.

Cimatu instructed Reynulfo Juan, DENR-Region 1 director, to create a task force to ensure that the coast of the Ilocos region meets water quality parameters.

* TOURISM

* DENR - DEPT. OF ENVIRONMENT &
NATURAL RESOURCES

* DOT - DEPT. OF TOURISM