I. Introduction

The ASEAN Peatland Management Strategy (APMS) is the Regional Policy Framework and Strategy for the Sustainable Management of Peatlands for the ASEAN Region. The active engagement of the Government of the Philippines in the protection of peatlands started with its participation in the consultation workshop for the development of the APMS held in Malaysia in May 2005. In that particular workshop, the Philippines country report emphasized that while there are reports of presence of peatlands in the country, it needs help in identifying and verifying where exactly these peatlands are, and in building its capacity towards sustainable peatlands management.

Through the help of the ASEAN Secretariat and the Global Environment Centre, the field work and local level consultations to locate and confirm the peatlands in Agusan Marsh was undertaken in November 2005. The field validation led by Dr. Jonathan Davies, a wetland consultant who has worked extensively in Philippine Wetlands and commissioned by GEC and ASEAN Secretariat, confirmed the presence of an intact unique stunted peat swamp forest in San Francisco and Talacogon and a degraded peatlands in Bunawan, both in Agusan del Sur in Mindanao. Locals refer to the stunted forest as “Wonderland”.

In the same year, another peatland was confirmed in Leyte Sab-a in the Visayas, but much of the peat swamp forest has already been converted into agriculture by the defunct Leyte Sab-a Development Authority (LSDA). In the 1970’s the area was planned to become the “food basket” of Leyte Province by the Marcos Administration through the LSDA but the rice planted in the area did not grow hence, the project was abandoned.

In February 2006, the first ever national consultation-workshop on the APMS and the development of the National Action Plan (NAP) for the Sustainable Use and Protection of Philippine Peatlands was held. It was facilitated again by Dr. Jonathan Davies and Mr. David Lee from the Global Environment Center. This was followed by another multi-stakeholder validation workshop in January of 2008 where the draft NAP was finalized for implementation.
This paper intends to present the status report of the APMS and the NAP implementation since 2006, the significant achievements relative to NAP implementation and the prospect for the next five years.

II. Implementation status of the APMS from 2006 -2012

Despite its limited area of peatlands, the Philippines is one of the first ASEAN Member States (AMS) that immediately responded to the call for the urgent implementation of the APMS. The NAP was developed over a two year period and implementation of priority activities commenced in 2008.

There was no formal adoption of the NAP but it was subsumed under the Updated National Wetlands Action Plan for the Philippines which in turn now forms part of the Philippines Development Plan under the present Aquino Administration. The main goal of the Philippines NAP is to promote the sustainable management and wise use of peatlands through awareness raising, capacity building and enhanced inter-agency and multisectoral cooperation for the conservation of biodiversity, the benefit of the local community and climate change mitigation.

While much of the effort has been directed to the two confirmed peatlands in the country, the Agusan Marsh in Agusan del Sur, Mindanao and Leyte Sab-a in Leyte Province in the Visayas, there are a number of targeted national level activities to ensure that the 13 operational focal areas of the APMS are addressed.

In the Philippines’ context, the APMS implementation is also synonymous with the project development and implementation of the multi-country ASEAN project, entitled “Rehabilitation and Sustainable Use of Peatlands in South East Asia”. The Project is now popularly known as the ASEAN Peatland Forest Project (APFP) funded through the International Fund for Agriculture Development and Global Environment Facility (IFAD/GEF). The objectives of the APFP Philippine Component actually mirror that of APMS and the NAP. It aims to promote the sustainable management and rehabilitation of peatlands through awareness raising, capability building and enhanced inter-agency cooperation for the benefit of the local community, conservation of biodiversity and climate change mitigation.

The specific outcomes for the component are as follows:

- Capacity in relevant agencies /institutions and other concerned stakeholders on peatland management strengthened in the Philippines;
- Creating an enabling environment for the conservation and sustainable use of peatlands in the Philippines;
• Land-use planning, zoning and rehabilitation measures carried out in suitable peatland sites; and
• Community-led demonstration projects formulated and implemented in project sites.

The APFP Philippine Component has also triggered a number of country level support and activities by government and non-government instrumentalities which directly supported the implementation of the NAP on Peatlands, and consequently the 13 operational focal areas of the APMS as outlined in Section 3 of this report.

III. Significant Achievements

At the start of APMS implementation, the Philippines claims that it has practically zero knowledge on peatlands. However, it can now boast of a number of exemplary achievements in advancing the national assessment and validation process and protection of its peatlands, to wit:

A. Inventory and Assessment

a. An in-depth Floristic and Faunal Survey of Caimpugan Peat Swamp Forests was completed by the Conservation International-Philippines in the same year that the NAP was finalized. The group from CI Philippines included the late Botanist Leonardo Co who was also one of the active participants during the NAP preparation and validation workshop in 2006 and 2008, respectively.

b. The Peat Swamp Forest (PSF) is now considered a forest type in the country via the inclusion of the PSF as the newest forest type in the book “Forest Formation of the Philippines” produced in 2010 through the ASEAN Korea Environment Cooperation Project. The lead author from Philippines, Dr. Edwino Fernando, of the College of Forestry and Natural Resources, University of the Philippines at Los Baños represented the Academe during the National Action Planning for the Philippine Peatlands. It is considered the first book ever in the history of Philippine Forestry that extensively discusses the PSF. About 10 pages of the book is devoted to the description of the unique stunted Caimpugan Peat Swamp Forest in Agusan del Sur.

c. Assessment and validation of probable peatlands in the country was undertaken from 2010 to present. The Map of Probable Peatlands featured in the NAP can now be replaced by Map of Confirmed Peatlands in the Philippines as presented in Figure 1.
Figure 1. Map of probable vs. confirmed peatlands.
B. Research

Two important doctoral dissertations/researches were undertaken and completed in Caimpugan Peatlands and now form part of the body of knowledge on peatlands in the county, to wit:

- Research on the “Carbon Storage and the Role in Climate Change Mitigation of the Caimpugan Peatland” in Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary, Philippines was completed in June 2011 by Dr. Van Leelah Alibo of Caraga State University.
- Plant Diversity and Forest Structure of the Caimpugan Peat Swamp Forest in Mindanao Island, Philippines was recently completed by Dr. Lowell Aribal of Central Mindanao University.

C. Awareness and Capacity Building

Information and Education campaign through the development of communication plan for peatlands, made the following actions possible:

- Publication of the brochure on “Care for our Peatlands” in English, Bisaya and Waray versions with funding from the ASEAN-Australia Development Cooperation Program (AADCP) in 2008.
- Video on Saving and Protecting Philippine Peatlands and full colored comics entitled, “Juan Meets the Least Famous Forest” in 2011 and 2012.
- Lectures and presentations on peatlands protection and management to national government agencies, local government units and non-government organizations concerned from 2010 to present.
- Holding of continuing community dialogues with at least 12 barangays surrounding the confirmed peatlands in Agusan and Leyte designed to make them aware of the consequences of peatlands degradation and what the local communities can do to support peatland protection.
- Creation of Facebook account, entitled “Save Caimpugan Peatland of Agusan Marsh, Philippines”
- IEC materials containing laymanized information of what is peat, why manage peat and functions and uses of peatlands in English, Bisaya and Waray versions.
A series of trainings on Peatlands Assessment and Management for the national agencies, local government units and local communities concerned were undertaken from 2010 to present. This included study tours to Malaysia’s peatlands for 14 national and local government representatives and community peer learning where selected community members from Agusan and Leyte Sab-a visited and exchanged and shared experiences, success stories and lessons learned in peatlands management from fellow community members from Thailand.
Philippines can now safely say that there now exists a core group of peatland managers from the national down to the local level who can assist in awareness raising, capacity building and sustainable management of peatlands in the country.

D. Information Sharing

While this is a work in progress, Initial data generated for the last seven (7) years on APMS and NAP implementation in the country are linked via the www.aseanpeat.net.

E. Policies and Legislations

It was agreed that priority for the NAP is the development of more localized level policies to ensure local level protection to confirmed peatlands in the country. The Proposed Ordinance of Municipal Councilor Lerriza de Leon entitled, “Ordinance for the Protection of the Unique Stunted Peat Swamp Forest (PSF) in Caimpugan and New Visayas, San Francisco, Agusan del Sur and Providing Fines and Penalties for the Violators and Allocating Funds Thereof” is already on its third public hearing and is expected to be approved within the year. Similar undertakings are underway in other municipalities with confirmed peatlands in the country.

F. Fire Prevention, Control and Monitoring

Around eighty (80) local fire fighters took part in the pro-active action planning for the prevention of peatland fires during the Seminar Workshop on the Protection and Sustainable Use of Peatlands through the Prevention and Suppression of Wild land Fires conducted by the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) in March 2010 and April 2011. In addition, the municipalities with confirmed peatlands have been prioritized by the BFP for the provision of fires trucks, submersible pumps and other firefighting devices. Part of the priorities of the BFP for next year is to set up and or mobilize community based fire brigades to help in their fire prevention effort. It is also pro-actively involved in the National Greening Program of the Philippines Government via the proposed implementation of the “Buying Living Tree System” in conjunction with the Conditional Cash Transfer of the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

G. Conservation of Peatlands Biodiversity

Designation of important peatlands into conservation areas has been prioritized. Caimpugan peat swamp forest is now part of the proposed expansion area of the Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary under Republic Act 7586 or the National Integrated
Protected Area System (NIPAS Act) and the Leyte Sab-a Peatlands is proposed as Critical Habitat under the Republic Act 9147 or the Wildlife Act.

H. Integrated Management of Peatlands

a. Land-use planning and zoning for peatlands area on-going. The objective is to include peatlands concerns in the updating of the Comprehensive Land Use Plans and Comprehensive Development Plan for Local Government Units concerned.

b. Community led rehabilitation and demonstration projects on peatlands.
   - Pre-feasibility study on ecotourism for peatlands has made possible the preparation of ecotourism plan for peatlands with the following as the main vision
     - For Agusan Peatlands: “Agusan peatland is a sustainable, world class and unique ecotourism destination managed by responsible, empowered and peace loving community working together for the benefit of the future generation without sacrificing the cultural heritage nor the environment.”
     - Theme: It’s More fun in the peatlands and Possible Ecotourism Project: Peatlands Ecosystems Awareness Tour (PEAT)

I. Promotion of Demonstration Site for Peatland

a. Land suitability assessment was conducted in Agusan Marsh through the Bureau of Soils and Water Management. Sustainable agriculture through raised bed method and floating agriculture in degraded peatlands are being supervised by the BSWM.

b. A diversified farming system, the Sorjan Farming, is currently being tried in areas around the degraded peatlands of Leyte Sab-a Pilot through the assistance of Agricultural Training Institute.

c. The Human Ecological and Economic Development (HEED) Foundation, a local NGO in Agusan Marsh empowers local communities to protect and sustainably use peatland resources to contribute to their livelihood and environmental security principally via community organizing activities.

J. Establishment and Promotion of Demonstration Sites for Peatland Management

a. The proposed demo guided farm of BSWM was already initiated in the Agusan Marsh Pilot Site. Floating vegetable garden was constructed through the
community efforts. The original plan and design of the BSWM was enhanced by the indigenous knowledge systems and practices of the local communities.

b. The Buying Living Tree System of Palangkaraya, Central Kalimantan was adopted by the Bureau of Fire Protection to test new sustainable management and fire prevention approaches for peatlands. Signing of Memorandum of Agreement between DENR, DSWD, and DILG-BFP is scheduled on 30 September 2012.

K. Peatlands and Climate Change

a. The above and below ground carbon content of Caimpugan peatlands and its role in mitigating climate change was studied by Dr. Van Leelah Alibo and subject to pre-review. According to her study, the C content of the Caimpugan Peatland is 22.99 Mt/ha.

b. Concerned stakeholders from Agusan Marsh pilot sites participated in the Philippine Roadshow on REDD-PLUS and the Philippine National REDD-PLUS Strategy “PANGANGALAGA NG KAGUBATAN NANG MAY PANANAGUTAN” in Butuan City. The roadshow was conducted by the CoDeREDD in collaboration with DENR Region 13. Zane define what is Code REDD.

c. A Memorandum of Agreement between the Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau and Non-Timber Forest Products Exchange Programme for South and Southeast Asia was approved and signed by both parties to develop project proposal in relation to REDD-Plus under the Philippine National Redd-Plus Strategy.

d. Discussion with the stakeholders was conducted to brief the community leaders and members of the People’s Organization about the activities of the CODE-REDD in the area and in the process of securing their cooperation and support for the activity.

L. Regional Cooperation

Philippine component participated in various regional workshops and organized cross visit to strengthen cooperation and exchange of experience with other ASEAN countries.

- Cross Visit/ Study tour at Raja Musa Forest Reserve in North Selangor Peat Swamp Forest and Klias Peat Swamp Forest Reserve in Malaysia last 3-7
October 2011. Fourteen (14) participants from various government agencies, local government units, and academe participated the cross visit.

- Technical Workshop on the Development of the ASEAN Peatland Fire Prediction and Early Warning System
- International Conference of Wetland Forests
- Workshop on Enhancing Sustainability of Forestry Practices on Peatlands

M. Financing of the Initiative

The BFP has set aside specific budgets and proposals for funding of peatland related activities. BFP allocated USD 13,525.57 for the training for firefighters of Ligawasan Marsh and Agusan Marsh. Fire trucks worth of USD 30,232.56 was awarded to the local government of San Francisco, Agusan del Sur in support to the implementation of the project.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources continuously provide in-kind and cash counterparts for the Philippine Component of the ASEAN Peatlands Projects.

The various achievements presented above were sourced out from a number of funding organizations.

IV. Review and recommendations for existing APMS

A meeting for the national review of the APMS and NAP implementation in the country was held on September 14, 2012. It was participated by the key agencies involved in peatlands in the country and are also members of the National Technical Working Group for the Philippine Component of the APFP. The meeting noted that the APMS has adequately guided the implementation of the NAP and has produced significant achievements as outlined in section III of this report.

The meeting agreed that there is no need to change any of the operational objectives and focal areas for APMS, except to add the following:

Suggestion on Table 1: Table Showing Focal Areas and the Respective Operational Objectives (page 10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOCUS AREAS</th>
<th>OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Inventory and Assessment</td>
<td>Establishment of permanent ecological monitoring plots</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Suggestion on Table 2: ASEAN Peatland Management Strategy Action Plan (pp.12-21)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES</th>
<th>ACTION</th>
<th>PROPOSED LEVEL OF ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>TIMES CALE</th>
<th>PRIORITY</th>
<th>INDICATIVE SUPPORT REQ.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>2.1.2</td>
<td>C,R</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>AT, ET, F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undertake basic research on peatland ecosystems and species and hydrological processes to better understand peatland functions (instead of M priority, it should be H priority because of high utilization there is need to document as early as possible otherwise species might disappear)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Awareness and Capacity Building</td>
<td>3.1.1</td>
<td>C,R</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>AT, ET, F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop and implement a communication strategy for peatland management, including use of video, TV, media, schools, extension services, workshops, information exchange programmes and networks such as SEA-Peat Network, including social networking e.g. Facebook, twitter, youtube, etc.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2: Build institutional capacity on management of peatlands</td>
<td>Suggestions: 1. Integration of peatland concerns in school curriculum at Tertiary levels 2. Encourage academic institutions to offer and prioritize graduate program (MS AND PHD) to focus on peatland conservation and management</td>
<td>C,R</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>AT, ET, F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2 Promote integrated water resources and peatland mgt. using a</td>
<td>8.2.3 Develop guidelines to assist the process to restrict the opening up and drainage of deep peat, peat domes and undisturbed peatlands.</td>
<td>C,R</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>AT, ET, F</td>
</tr>
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</table>
V. FUTURE PLANS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE APMS

Except for adjustments in timing and priority settings, the APMS still provides a complete menu of regional strategy for the sustainable management and protection of peatlands in the Region. Some of the targeted priorities are the following:

- In view of new information about the presence of peat in other parts of the country, assessment and validation of peatlands in the country. Once completed, the DENR will prepare technical reports on validated peatlands and this will be published and distributed to guide proper development and conservation planning in these areas.

- More focus is needed on generating sustainable financing for the initiatives started by the APFP and European Community Assisted “Sustainable Management of Peatlands in Southeast Asia “SEApeat”.

- A MOA has been forged with the CODE-REDD, a partnership/coalition organization designed to advance the cause of the Philippine National ReDDPlus Strategy for the Philippines. The intact Caimpugan Peat Swamp forest has already been enrolled as the demonstration site for Peat Swamp Forest in the Philippines. A carbon financing proposal will also be produced and explored out of this partnership.

- Partnership with GIZ COSERAM and National Council for Indigenous P to document and promote indigenous knowledge and methodologies, and to enhance local community knowledge

- Business planning for ecotourism and eventual implementation of the Ecotourism Development Plan. Agusan Marsh is already part of ecotourism convergence effort of the National Tourism Development Plan of the Department of Tourism and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Representation will be made so that development activities will

<table>
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<th>basin-wide approach and avoiding fragmentation</th>
<th>Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) should be enforced</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. Financing of the initiative</td>
<td>Tap Corporate Social Responsibilities of companies dependent on peatlands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
commence by CY 2013. Ecotourism is seen as a viable way to deflect pressures away from the peatlands, especially the intact ones.

- The Philippine Astronomical and Geo-physical Administration (PAGASA) of the Department of Science and Technology has signified its willingness to help in development of Peat Fire Early Warning System for the country.

- Preparations are also already underway for production of “Handbook of Flora of Agusan Peatlands” with the Philippines National Museum. Funding will also be sourced from the incoming “SEApeat” project.

- Development and issuance of Unified Ordinance for the protection and sustainable use of peatlands will be pursued to ensure uniform implementation of rules and regulations for peatlands in close coordination with the local government units concerned.

- Replication of successful community based initiatives on sustainable peatlands management will also be continued with the local communities concerned.

The APFP Philippine Component played and will continually play a critical role in the aforementioned achievements and projected activities, along with the SEApeat project. The participatory and multi-stakeholder approaches are also expected to continuously guide the successful implementation of the APMS and the Peatlands NAP in the country.
VI. References:

1. ASEAN Peatland Management Strategy (APMS) Booklet
3. Edwino Fernando, Min Hwan Suh, Jaeho Lee, Don Koo Lee, Forest Formations of the Philippines, ASEAN-KOREA Environmental Cooperation Unit