

THE NORDSON FOREST PARK: A Legacy to the Environment

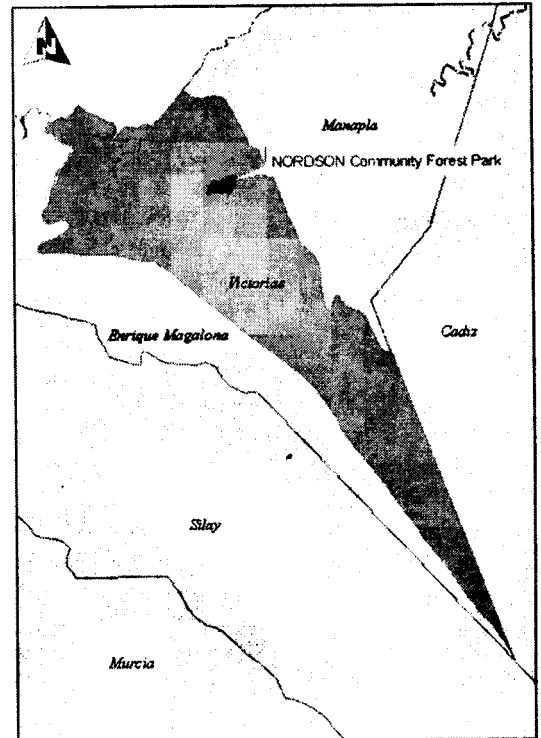
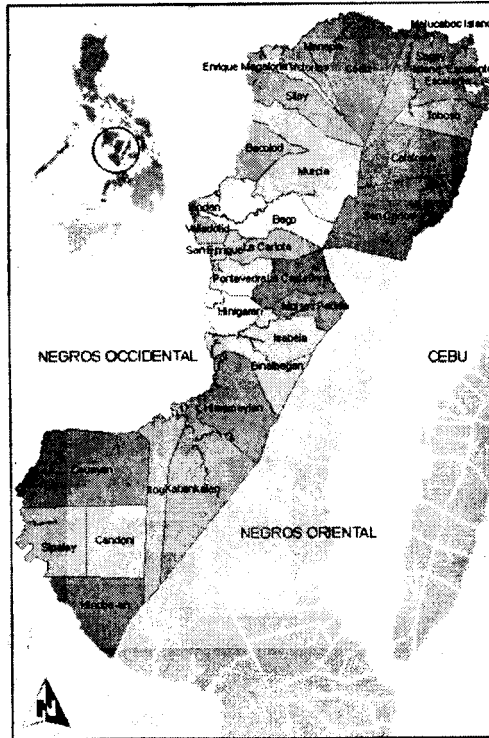
Catherine C. de Luna, Wilfredo M. Carandang, Roberto G. Visco, Cristino L. Tiburan, Jr., Rodel D. Lasco,
Jose K. Montalvo, JJJ and Alejo V. Mayoralgo

Today, most of the sugarcane plantations and haciendas can only be found in the Province of Negros Occidental. These haciendas employ workers called sakadas. For years, these sakadas have been engaged in the monocropping of sugarcane.

When the sugar industry collapsed in the mid-80s, the challenge that was posed then was how to transform an age-old practice of intensive monocropping to one that is environment-friendly, diverse and sustainable. As a response, Atty. Nordy P. Diploma, one of the hacenderos in the province, established a 40-hectare manmade forest park in Victorias City, Negros Occidental in 1996, with the aim of re-greening the area with trees. This initiative paved the way for the establishment of the NORDSON Green Earth Foundation (NGEF), a private organization that was formed to realize the vision of environmental conservation and sustainable development and management of natural resources in the province of Negros Occidental.

The NORDSON Forest Park Today

The NORDSON Forest Park, located in Brgy. San Jose (XIV), Victorias City, Negros Occidental presently occupies a total land area of 60 hectares after acquisition of an additional 20 hectares was made in 2005. The Forest Park is currently



stocked with big leaf mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*), bagras (*Eucalyptus deglupta*), camaldulensis (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), gmelina (*Gmelina arborea*) and other premium hardwood tree species like molave (*Vitex parviflora*) and white lauan (*Pentacme contorta*).

Ten-year old mahogany plantations are now being thinned, and sold to the Victorias Milling Company as wooden chips. A mango plantation, rice paddies and sugarcane plantation are also found within the Forest Park. In addition, a three-hectare settlement for workers was also established to serve as the support system to the community members. The Negros Occidental Science High School also occupies three hectares within the Forest Park.

Enhancing Collaborative Efforts: A Challenge to the NGEF

The realization of the NGEF's vision for the Forest Park as an ecotourism destination and a model for environmental conservation and sustainable management of natural resources, requires the technical expertise in the said fields. Thus, the NGEF has tapped the University of the Philippines Los Baños-Institute of Agroforestry to provide technical assistance in crafting the land-use plan of the 60-hectare Forest Park, with emphasis on agroforestry development operations.

The team members from the UPLB-IAF include Dr. Wilfredo M. Carandang, IAF Director, Dr. Roberto G. Visco,

Prof. Cristino L. Tiburan, Jr. and Ms. Catherine C. de Luna. Meanwhile, Dr. Rodel D. Lasco, Coordinator of the World Agroforestry Centre in the Philippines, serves as the Technical Reviewer.

A series of site reconnaissance was made by the team to capture the biophysical, social and economic information that are relevant to the expansion and further development of the Forest Park. The development planning included the forest park characterization, land-use identification and allocation using GIS.

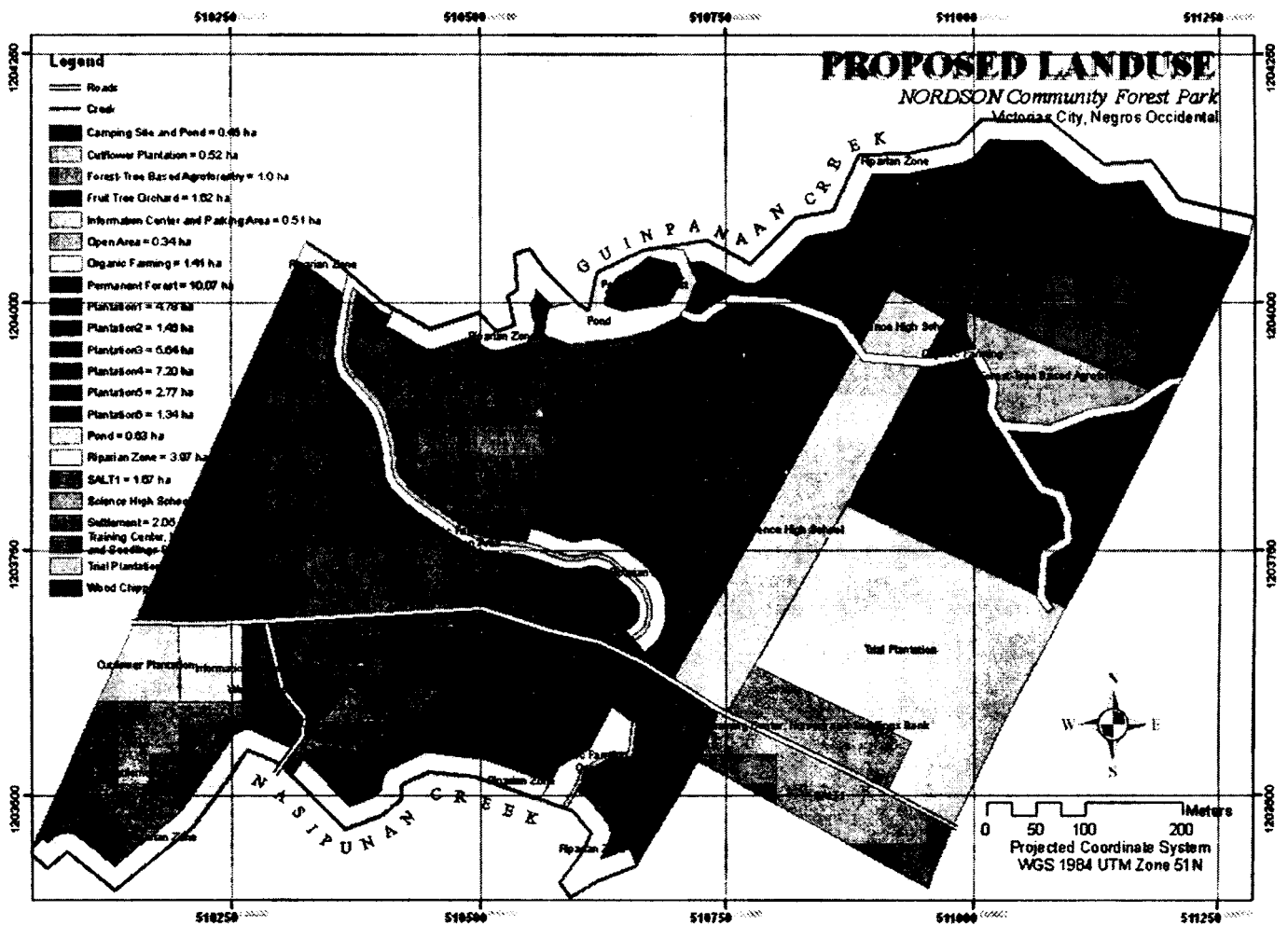
Other experts were also tapped to extend their knowledge in the development of settlement areas,

and establishment and operation of an ecological park.

Delineating the NORDSON Forest Park

The technical team identified two land uses for the 60-hectare Forest Park. The production/protection area which covers 85.85% of the total land area includes the Permanent Forest Zone, Plantation Forest Zone, Agroforestry Zone, and Organic Farming Zone. Meanwhile, the built-up area covering around 14.15% of the total land area consists of the Camping Site and Pond, Information Center and Parking Lot, Settlement, Science High School, Training Center, Nursery, Seedling Bank and the area intended for the wood chipping operations.

Specifically, the **Permanent Forest Zone** is designed to fulfill the protection-cum-recreation functions of the NORDSON Forest Park. In this setting, the role of trees to improve the soil, maintain the water yield, temper the local climate, purify the air, provide habitats and nesting for reproduction of wildlife species, and provide opportunities for recreation and other amenities will be demonstrated. Of the 25-hectare Permanent Forest Zone, 13 hectares will be devoted to enrichment planting, riparian zone, Palmetum, Bambusetum, Philippinensis row, endemic trees and plants of Mts. Kanlaon and Gawahon and other mountains in the island of Negros.



Meanwhile, the **Plantation Forest Zone**, covering an area of 28.24 hectares, will feature a trial plantation of fast-growing indigenous species for growth and yield determination, plantation development of fast growing species for wood chips production and trial plantation for biofuel production.

The 4.3-hectare **Agroforestry Zone**, will showcase three types of agroforestry systems. These are the Sloping Agricultural Land Technology (SALT-1) or Alley Cropping, Sustainable Agro-Livestock Technology (SALT-2), and the Forest-tree based Agroforestry System. Comprising an area of 2.8 hectares, the **Organic Farming Zone** will be devoted to rice paddy production. Organic fertilizers produced from the SALT-1 and SALT-2 systems will be utilized in the paddy rice production. Meanwhile the **Seed Bank and Forest Nursery** shall primarily provide the planting stock requirements of the production plantation of the Forest Park.

In addition, the **Leisure Park and Camping Areas** shall be established to serve as the ecotourism area of the Forest Park. Outdoor activities and camping shall be done in designated areas following environmentally sound criteria.

The **Training Center** cum farmers' booth will be put up adjacent to the forest nursery. The center shall be used as a technology transfer area displaying miniature modules of the Forest Park including the products from the different zones of the park. On the other hand, the **Settlement Zone** will be established in collaboration with the Gawad Kalinga Foundation to be able to provide affordable housing to the

community members, particularly to the *sakadas* that reside within the Park.

Anticipating the Environmental Impacts of the Forest Park

The implementation of development activities and operation within the Forest Park will surely bring about beneficial and adverse impacts to the environment. For instance, noise is likely to occur during the construction period, which may cause unnecessary disturbances particularly to the Science High School and the settlement zones. The influx of visitors and the accompanying increased vehicular traffic are also expected. Correspondingly, disposal of solid wastes and other sanitary problems may become a problem. Finally, once operational, the forest park will also attract ambulant vendors and illegal establishments of small business stalls.

But, on the brighter side, positive impacts expected are in the form of better housing accommodations for the community within the forest park and the additional income that they will be getting from their participation in the different park's visitors' programs and production endeavors. Their increased knowledge and experience somehow will be shared even informally to people close to them. Visitors' experiences will be shared and the parks vision of enhancing environmental



consciousness and awareness on sustainable natural resources development and management shall have been achieved.

In this context, the conduct of an Environmental Impact Assessment becomes necessary.

Looking Ahead

Today, we can see a lush greenery amidst sugarcane plantations in Victorias City. Not many years from now, an ecotourism destination complete with outdoor facilities for camping, will soon rise in the area. This will be an area where environmental stewardship is practiced with utmost genuineness, empowering the local people and regenerating degraded natural resources.

The Nordson Forest Park is a manifestation of how a sugarcane plantation can be turned into something that can be sustainable and diverse. What is the most important impetus for such? *A man with a big heart to leave a legacy for the improvement of environment, and a bigger heart to implement this vision, against all odds.☾*