

Ulot Watershed Model Forest

From illegal logging site to model ecotourism destination

Member of the Regional Model Forest Network–Asia since 2000

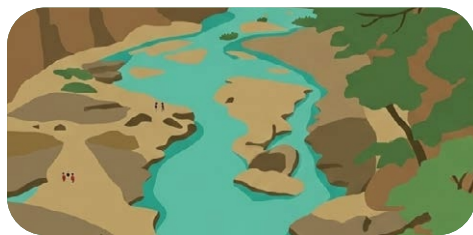
Landscape snapshot

The Model Forest features diverse topography, ranging from lowland rainforests to rugged terrain, with steep slopes covering 80 per cent of its area.

Landscape highlights



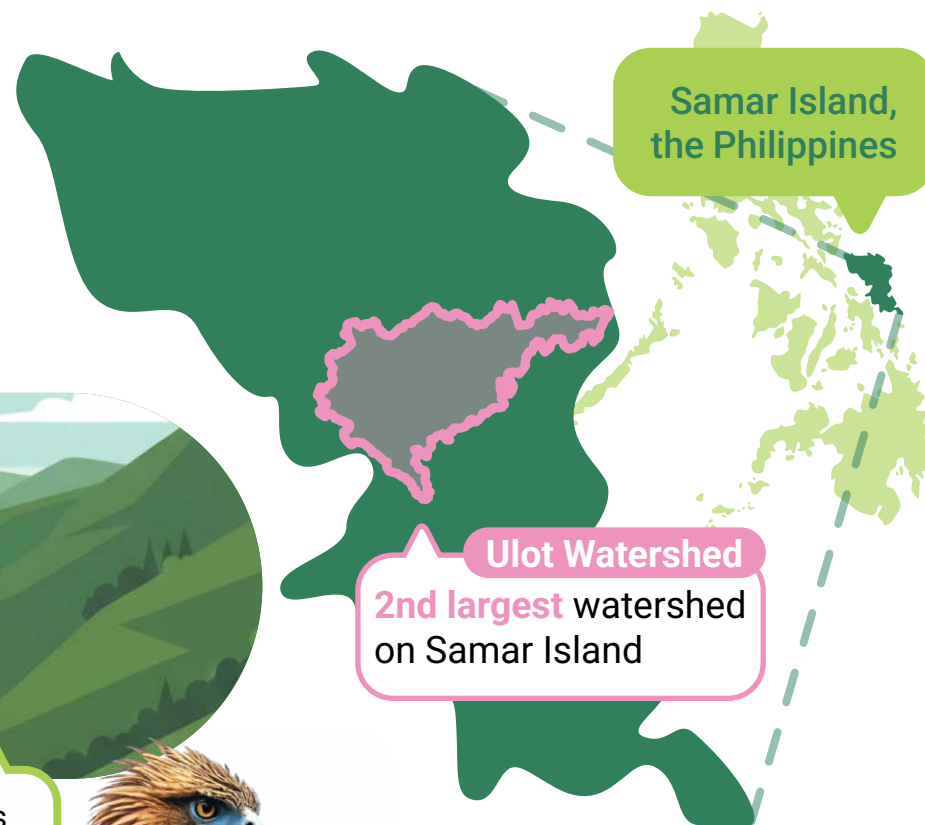
56,680 hectares of the Model Forest lie within the Samar Island Natural Park.



The Model Forest is the origin of the Ulot River, Samar's longest river and a vital hub for biodiversity and ecotourism.



Part of the Ulot Watershed forms the Taft Forest Philippine Eagle Sanctuary, where the Philippine eagle – the country's national bird and one of the world's largest eagles – was discovered in 1896.



Samar Island, the Philippines

Ulot Watershed
2nd largest watershed on Samar Island



HUMAN POPULATION

91,872 inhabitants across 116 'barangays' (villages)
Home of the Waray people, native to Samar

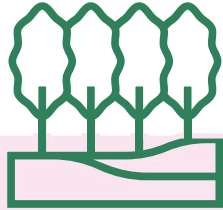


AREA
87,536 hectares



Forest profile

4 community-managed forests



Forest types

50% semi-closed secondary forests

20% protected lowland dipterocarp forests

The forest landscape is collectively **managed by**



local communities



government agencies



civil society organizations



academic institutions



people's organizations



Biodiversity highlights

The Model Forest is home to over



13
amphibians species



108
birds species



27
mammals species



296
plants species



Threatened species in the Model Forest

flora



samar gisok



red lauan

fauna



Philippine eagle



Philippine hanging-parrot



pink-bellied imperial pigeon



amethyst brown dove



Notable achievements

Ulot River TORPEDO boat ride adventure, Tenani village



Illegal logging vessels repurposed into river tour boats with former loggers now operating as tour guides

2011



2024 ▶ **24,073** visitors **~USD 173,055** in income



Accolades include



2017 National Award
– best community-based ecotourism enterprise



2021 UN Best Tourism Villages nominee
– Tenani village

Ulot Watershed: Ecotourism as a path away from illegal logging



The Ulot Watershed Model Forest is located on Samar Island, a region known for its rich biodiversity. The name Ulot originates from a local expression meaning 'to navigate along the river'. In the local dialect, 'nag-uulot' refers to the effort of paddling upstream against strong rapids. Both the Ulot River and Ulot Watershed are also believed to have been named after the local word for monkey, which is 'ulot'.

For many years, the exploitation of natural resources, from commercial logging to dynamite fishing, was a go-to means for local communities to sustain their livelihoods amid economic hardship. In 1996, Samar's rainforests were declared a forest reserve to curb persistent destructive practices and safeguard biodiversity. To support the shift from unsustainable to sustainable livelihoods, local communities, government and stakeholders worked together to develop ecotourism as a new cornerstone of the local economy. One of the standout successes of these collaborative efforts is the Ulot River torpedo extreme adventure boat ride.

In 2010, the village of Tenani and Model Forest partners launched the Tenani Boat Operators for River Protection and Environmental Development Organization (TORPEDO), which operates the extreme adventure ride. The organization turned logging vessels into river tour boats, and former loggers into tour guides. Between 2011 and 2024, over 24,073 visitors took the boat ride, generating approximately USD 173,055 in income. In 2019, the village opened the Paranas eco-trail and birding site, which is managed by local women. It was launched by the Tenani Association for Women and Development, offering an additional source of income and economic empowerment.

Over the years, these efforts have gained wide recognition. The Philippines Association of Tourism Offices awarded TORPEDO the national award for best community-based ecotourism enterprise in 2017. And in 2021, Tenani village was a runner-up in the United Nations World Tourism Organization's best tourism villages.

Current work

Sustained ecotourism has been the Model Forest's greatest achievement, helping maintain 70 percent forest cover in the watershed between 2010 and 2024, as confirmed by satellite imagery.

Future priorities

- **Landscape governance**
 Strengthen the Ulot Model Forest Stakeholders Federation and build lasting partnerships for collaborative management of the landscape.
- **Livelihoods**
 Support communities by developing and expanding ecotourism opportunities and sustainable non-timber forest products.
- **Climate and restoration**
 Promote organic forestry and restore degraded areas through agroforestry, reforestation, rainforestation and fuelwood plantations.
- **Natural resources and climate resilience**
 Improve forest land use planning and strengthen disaster risk reduction efforts to make the landscape more resilient to climate change.

IMFN Climate Contribution Agreement 2025-2026

Through collaboration and funding support from the International Model Forest Network (IMFN), the Model Forest is promoting sustainable alternatives to non-renewable resources by developing innovative, forest-based products. This includes providing holistic livelihood opportunities for local communities and supporting the shift from unsustainable practices to eco-tourism.



Vision

A sustainable, biodiverse forest with empowered communities, inclusive governance and sustainable livelihood systems, where people live in harmony with nature, now and for future generations.

Contact information

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