

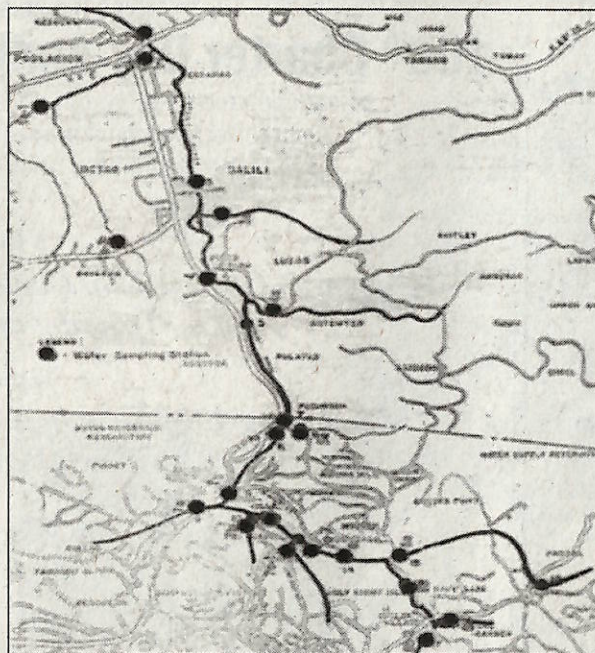


Saving the Balili River: Count me in

The Cordillera Administrative Region is host to major rivers supplying different areas of the region as well as lowland communities. One of these rivers is the Balili River which has its headwaters in Baguio City through the Sagudin River. From here, the river flows downstream to La Trinidad, Sablan, and Tublay, Benguet.

It is considered the major river system of La Trinidad, spanning about 23.81 kilometers from the Sagudin River to Sablan, excluding its different tributaries. It has been an important water source for residents of Baguio City and La Trinidad, serving domestic, agricultural, and economic purposes. It was once a fishing area especially in the '70s and '80s; a source of irrigation; drinking area for animals; and a place for swimming.

The river had been classified as a Class A river under Department of Environment Natural Resources water standards. Increasing human population, housing, and commercial establishments and the lack of supervision by the local government units contributed to the river's alarming state of pollution to a point that some parts of the river have been considered biologically dead. Monthly monitoring activities of the biophysico-



Balili River as a Water Quality Management Area may be used as a model for other stakeholders to focus their attention to other bodies of water that need revival. -- Photos by Aurea Marie Sandoval

the Balili River and which carry solid and liquid wastes, have worsened the problem.

Efforts to rehabilitate and protect the Balili River date back to the late 1980s but up to now, revitalization of the river and its tributaries remains an aspiration.

The alarming state of the Balili River has caught the attention of government, non-government organizations, the academe, and other civil society groups. For a considerable period of time, these groups initiated activities in response to



for the river's rehabilitation.

Multi-sectoral workshop

In 2011, the BSU and EMB came together through a series of meetings, after which a multi-sectoral workshop was conducted to address the problem on the increasing degradation of the Balili River. The workshop was conducted to update stakeholders on the status of the Balili River, present results of researches and other activities undertaken on the Balili River by various agencies, and to develop a logical framework focusing on

effects of these problems to stakeholders and to the environment; and formulation of plans and possible solutions for rehabilitation.

Among the identified problems causing the river's degradation are constriction of the river; erosions; siltation; destruction of flora and fauna; increasing commercial activities; pollution due to indiscriminate dumping of solid, liquid, and agricultural wastes; lack of discipline; and indifference of people.

These problems have been bringing about destruction of farmlands leading to economic displacement, poor aesthetic view, scouring of river banks, declaration of the river as unfit for habitation of aquatic organisms creating ecological imbalance and loss of biodiversity, flooding, loss of life and property, decreased hydro electric power production, compromised natural resource, poor health, and poor water quality.

Among the solutions sought to address the problems are planting more trees like bamboos and other plants along the river banks, placing permanent delineation of metes and bounds, targeting community compliance with laws on sewage disposal and solid waste management, conducting regular clean-up and monitoring to reduce pollutants along the river, removing illegal structures and stabilizing river banks and beds, conducting studies to improve the physical formation of the river, prioritizing flood control projects by de-silting the river, developing mitigating measures to decrease biodiversity loss, and establishing a recreational park by practicing green space management to make Balili River a potential eco-tourism area.

The workshop participants emphasized the need for leaders to review existing laws and ordinances and to have stronger political will to implement these. Continuous gathering of data was also suggested until such time that the BOD would be maintained at 5 mg/L. Emphasis was placed on the necessity of raising