

Umaming, M. G. (2005). *Ecotourism framework for the protection and preservation of the Sagada Caves*. (Unpublished master's thesis). Baguio City: University of the Cordilleras.

Physical location: University of the Cordilleras Library, Baguio City

ABSTRACT

This paper is a qualitative study of the Sagada Caves' present physical conditions; and the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and the threats in managing them. The research was focused on Sumaging, Crystal, Lumiyang and Matangkib Caves. The outcome is a framework for their protection and preservation.

The study was conducted from March to June 2004. It made use of actual visits to the caves, interviews and group discussions, and review of documents.

Findings

The finding revealed various strength and weaknesses on the present state of the caves:

Sumaging, has many writings on its walls. Many of the writings faded naturally or were cleaned off by the guides. Several litters were observed especially at the entrance.

In Crystal Cave, there were no litters and writings on the walls. Access to the caves started in 1985. It was closed in 1996 because of the destruction of stalactites and stalagmites.

In Matangkib Cave, the walls and ceiling were covered with writings. The 60 coffins inside the cave except for three (3) located on a very steepy portion had been opened. There used to be plenty of coffins outside the cave but many disappeared. The remaining 25 coffins outside were rotting. A pathway to the cave was cemented in 1978.

In Lumiyang Cave, there were no visible writings on walls. The number of coffins had dwindled to the 109 remaining today.

In the SWOT identification, the most repeated strengths were the intrinsic wonders of the caves which were generally preserved; the presence of organized guides, which were commissioned as environment police; the presence of policies on caving; and the widespread view in the community that altering the natural environment of the caves was not good.

There were many weaknesses identified, the core weakness was the lack of a protection plan, which in turn was caused by lack of fund and lack of networking with concerned agencies/institutions.

Opportunities came from media; good road and water system for household and irrigation use; development fund and technical assistance from agencies; ecotourism and recent laws and policies.

Threats were unregulated influx of tourists, commercialization of caves, and slow intervention by concerned agencies, ecotourism rhetoric, and competition by other caves.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were formulated:

In general, the caves remain a competitive tourist attraction.

In Sumaging, although vandalism and litters may disappoint visitors, they are not enough to dampen the excitement of caving. Littering remains a problem though writing on walls and chipping off of formation had been stopped through the guides and basic cave education.

Crystal Cave has very good potential because of the number of stalactites and stalagmites. Its arduous route may be more attractive to adventure travelers.

The cementing of Matangkib Cave led to its further desecration. Its accessibility and its location made it convenient for activities other than caving.

In Lumiyang Cave, almost all the coffins show stages of rotting and infestation by wood bugs (*bokbok*).

The strengths of the cave are their preserved natural environment and the adventures they provide to visitors. The people's opposition to the proposed cementing and electrification of Sumaging Cave in the late 70's has been proven correct.

Clear policies and organized groups are basics in the cave protection. They were responsible in at least controlling destructive behavior that used to pervade the caves. However, policies and their implementation must be regularly evaluated.

There are many weaknesses but they can be addressed through the core problem, which is the lack of a comprehensive cave protection and preservation plan.

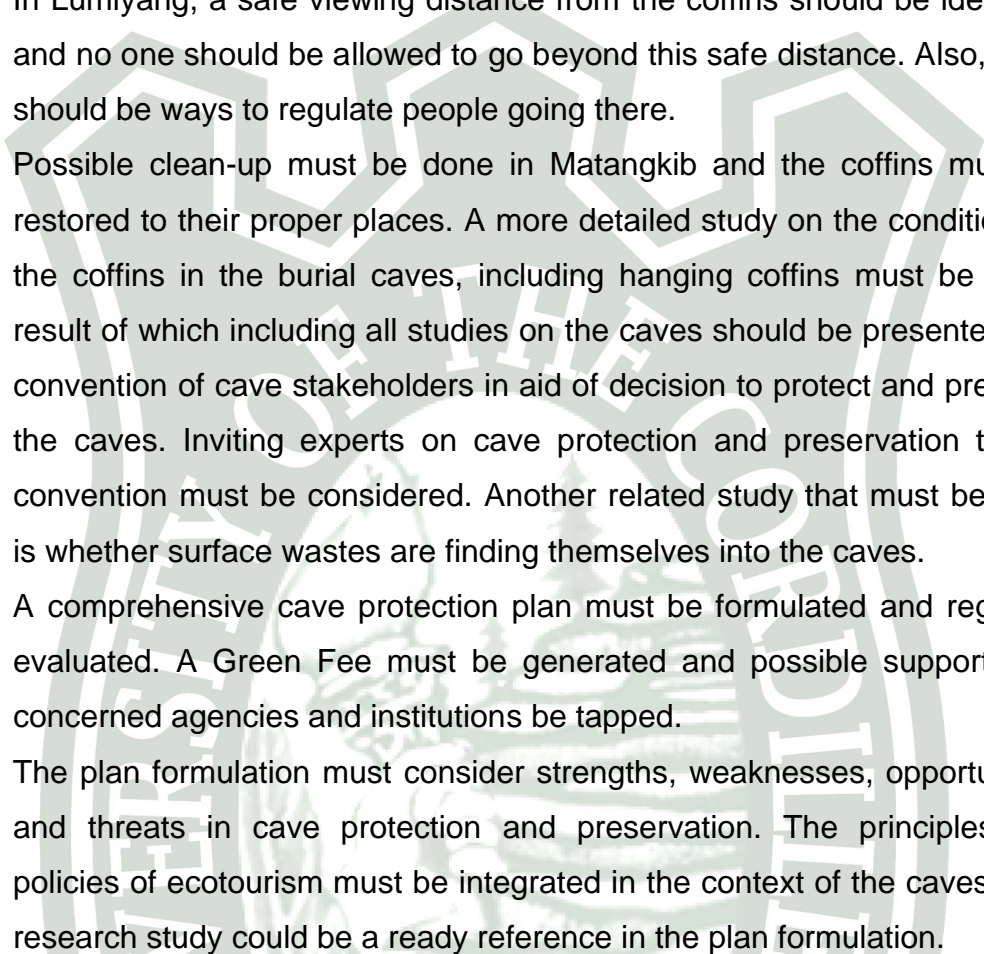
Sagada has not maximized the existence of laws and policies related to cave protection. It has not tapped institutions that could assist to address community felt needs.

Threats include the influx of tourist beyond what Sagada can handle; the pollution of the caves, and the opening of other caves to tourist in more accessible areas.

Recommendations

In correspondence with the conclusion, the study formulated the following recommendations.

1. In Sumaging, guides must emphasize the policy against littering by providing visitors waste bags. Educational activities among guides as commissioned environment police must be sustained. The guides' organization, SEGA, must be strengthened to ensure discipline and collective activities among the guides.
2. Crystal cave must be opened after specific policies on fees, behavior inside the cave, and regulating the number of visitors had been formulated.

- 
- The background of the page features a large, light green watermark of the University of Santo Tomas seal. The seal is circular with a gear-like border. Inside the border, the words "UNIVERSITY OF SANTO TOMAS" are written in a circular path. At the bottom of the seal, the year "1946" is prominently displayed. The seal is centered behind the list of recommendations.
3. In Lumiyang, a safe viewing distance from the coffins should be identified and no one should be allowed to go beyond this safe distance. Also, there should be ways to regulate people going there.
 4. Possible clean-up must be done in Matangkib and the coffins must be restored to their proper places. A more detailed study on the conditions of the coffins in the burial caves, including hanging coffins must be done, result of which including all studies on the caves should be presented to a convention of cave stakeholders in aid of decision to protect and preserve the caves. Inviting experts on cave protection and preservation to this convention must be considered. Another related study that must be done is whether surface wastes are finding themselves into the caves.
 5. A comprehensive cave protection plan must be formulated and regularly evaluated. A Green Fee must be generated and possible support from concerned agencies and institutions be tapped.
 6. The plan formulation must consider strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in cave protection and preservation. The principles and policies of ecotourism must be integrated in the context of the caves. This research study could be a ready reference in the plan formulation.