

COURSE REPORT

OPTIONAL FIELD COURSE: TROPICAL FOREST LANDSCAPES ONLINE CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

Baybay City, Leyte, Philippines
January 12-18, 2020

A course organized by:
Environmental Leadership & Training Initiative (ELTI)
Institute of Tropical Ecology & Environmental Management of Visayas State University (VSU-ITEEM)



Group photo at the Cienda Rainforestation site

Background: The Philippines is considered one of the world's 17 megadiverse countries. Much of the country's forests, however, have been cleared for logging and conversion to agriculture. To address the resultant loss of ecosystem services, the government is using an array of strategies including protected areas, community-based forest management, and reforestation. The results, however, have generally been disappointing. ELTI works with VSU to change the dominant conservation and restoration paradigm through a strategy known as Rainforestation, which uses native trees species for restoration. Rainforestation aims to fundamentally change the relationship between people, their land, and natural ecosystems.

ELTI is an initiative of: **Yale SCHOOL OF FORESTRY & ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES**



Participants visiting the Catmon Rainforestation site

Over six days, participants from the Tropical Forest Landscapes online certificate program deepened their understanding of tropical forest ecology by visiting a Key Biodiversity Area, learning about the origins of Rainforestation, visiting demonstration sites, conducting a site assessment, propagating forest tree species, helping develop a Rainforestation site, and learning about ongoing research and applied conservation and restoration efforts. They learned how the Rainforestation process addresses complex land tenure and other governance challenges. Participants also interacted with local government officials, community members, and other stakeholders who have implemented Rainforestation to understand their motives and experiences.

This course was held at ELTI's training landscape in Leyte, Philippines. ELTI's training landscapes provided experiential, place-based learning opportunities designed to facilitate engagement and support the retention and application of knowledge.

Objectives:

1. To provide insights into the complexities of forest conservation, restoration, and sustainable use in the Philippines.
2. To teach participants through hands-on, experiential learning the process and practice of establishing a Rainforestation site and native species nursery.
3. To foster an exchange of ideas, experiences, lessons learned, and best practices in forest conservation, restoration, and sustainable use.



Discussing nursery management at Cienda



Discussing drivers of deforestation in the Mt. Nacolod Local Protected Area



Meeting with the Mayor of Silago

Program

Arrival Day - Welcome

Participants were picked up by organizers at the Tacloban airport and together made the two-hour journey to VSU. The course officially started with a short opening program consisting of welcome remarks by David Neidel (ELTI Asia Program Advisor), Paciencia Milan (the “Mother of Rainforestation”), and Edgardo Tulin (President of VSU). After participants and organizers introduced themselves, dinner was served, accompanied by performers playing local music.

Day 1 - Introduction to Philippine biodiversity, conservation, and restoration

The day started with a couple of short presentations. Lyra Chu (ELTI Philippines Program Coordinator) provided an introduction to biodiversity in the Philippines, different forest types, major land uses on Leyte, and problems with conventional reforestation. Angelita Orias (VSU-ITEEM Instructor) then gave an introduction and overview of the Rainforestation program. After the presentations, participants visited three Rainforestation sites: 1) Marcos, where they met with owner, Manuel Posas, and discussed the establishment and management of his Rainforestation site; 2) Cienda, where they had an introduction to the local Community-Based Forest Management area, met with the leadership of Cienda-San Vicente Farmers' Association that manages the site, and visited the community's Rainforestation site; and 3) VSU, where they visited the very first Rainforestation site ever developed. Participants were then provided time to do some bird watching and went back into the Rainforestation site to look for tarsiers after dinner.

Day 2 - Conservation Management & Using Indigenous Tree Species for Restoration

Participants departed early to Silago, a municipality located approximately two hours south of VSU. They first met with Pacita Almine (Mayor of Silago) and the Municipal Environment & Natural Resources Officer who gave a presentation about conservation issues



Preparing wildlings for transplant to polybags

surrounding Mt. Nacolod Local Conservation Area. One particularly important threat to the forest is the recent increase in extraction of Gaharu. The participants then visited Barangay Catmon, which is located in an area surrounded by the Local Conservation Area, and discussed management issues with Casiano Valerio (Barangay Captain) and other community leaders. Participants were then joined by members of the police and military for a hike in the Tres Marias area of Mt. Nacolod. During the walk, Jimmy Pogosa (VSU-ITEEM Instructor) provided some pointers on tree fruiting and flowering phenology—an important consideration when using native trees for reforestation.

Day 3 - Nursery Establishment, Seedling Production, & Site Establishment

Through hands-on learning, participants received an introduction to native species reforestation. Led by Jimmy Pogosa, Angelita Orias and Fedil Almeroda (VSU-ITEEM Research Aide), they learned how to mix potting media, collect wildlings from the forest, germinate seeds, prepare wildlings for planting in polybags, set up a recovery chamber, establish a temporary nursery, and lay out a planting site. They were also given an introduction to VSU-ITEEM's Agroecology Site, where they learned about integrating native trees into different production systems. One of those systems integrates native dipterocarps with abaca (i.e., Maniia hemp), the fiber of which participants tried extracting with traditional methods. Presentations on Reforestation site establishment were also given by two Reforestation trainers: Eufrazio Maratas, Jr. (Former Mayor of Pilar) and Restituto Piollo, Jr. (Bohol Environment Management Office).



Planting seedlings

Day 4 - Site assessment, assisted natural regeneration, and Reforestation research

The day's activities took place in Inopacan, a municipality located about one hour south of VSU where VSU-ITEEM has a research site. Marlito Bande (VSU-ITEEM Director) first introduced participants to the research projects being conducted on the site. Participants then conducted a site assessment exercise



Constructing a recovery chamber



Island hopping at Cuatro Islas

through which they determined the disturbance factors affecting the site and the number and diversity of seedlings on the site as a way to determine how much tree planting would be needed. Finally, they were introduced to Assisted Natural Regeneration and each participant had a turn at pressing grasses from around existing trees. Inopacan is an exceedingly hot location, so the reward for the participants' hard work was an island-hopping trip to Cuatro Islas, a marine protected area where they had the opportunity to swim, snorkel, and sunbathe. The boat ride back to the pier was blessed with a number of dolphins swimming alongside the bow of the boat.

Day 5 - Refining conservation/restoration plans

Participants spent the morning shopping for local foods and handicrafts and then had time to revise their management plans. The day's events started with a short presentation by Marlito Bande, which outlined some of the VSU-ITEEM's most important research results. After lunch, each participant was given an opportunity to present their management plan and discuss it with resource people and other participants. Participants then filled out a course evaluation. A short closing ceremony was then held with remarks by David Neidel and Othello Capuno (VSU Vice President for Research & Extension) followed by the awarding of certificates.

Departure Day – Farewells

Participants had breakfast and then were accompanied to Tacloban airport for their respective flights.

Participants

The course was attended by six participants from the Tropical Forest Landscapes online certificate program. These individuals came from four continents and represented a range of companies, organizations, and agencies.

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