



# Cleopatra's Needle Critical Habitat



CNCH Primer v1 prepared by Centre for Sustainability PH, Inc.



The **Cleopatra's Needle Critical Habitat (CNCH)** in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan, the Philippines, represents the largest watershed of the City. CNCH comprises three upland Indigenous Peoples (IP) communities and 7 lowlander coastal communities which directly depend on the ecosystem services and natural resources this forest area provides, especially its fresh water. It is the Philippines' biggest Critical Habitat by 7-fold, representing 41,350 hectares of some of the Philippines' last remaining primary forest, the City's highest mountain, home to countless endemic flora and fauna, and the ancestral domain of the last 200 members of the disappearing indigenous Batak tribe.

With its vast coverage, Cleopatra's Needle traverses seven different Barangays, namely, San Rafael, Tanabag, Concepcion, Binduyan, Langogan, Tagabinet, and New Panggangan. Furthermore, CNCH shares the eastern border of Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park (PPSRNP). PPSRNP is one of the New Seven Wonders of Nature and it is classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site as well as a Ramsar Wetland Site of International Importance. The northern boundary of the forest area is the Langogan River (north of this river, the forest continues but the river forms the municipal boundary). The eastern boundary of the area is located close to the eastern shoreline of Palawan and the southern boundary follows the outer foothills of Cleopatra's Needle, which reach Barangay Tagabinet in Southwest.

**Region:**

Region IV-B MIMAROPA

**Province:**

Palawan

**City/Municipality:**

Puerto Princesa City

**Area:**

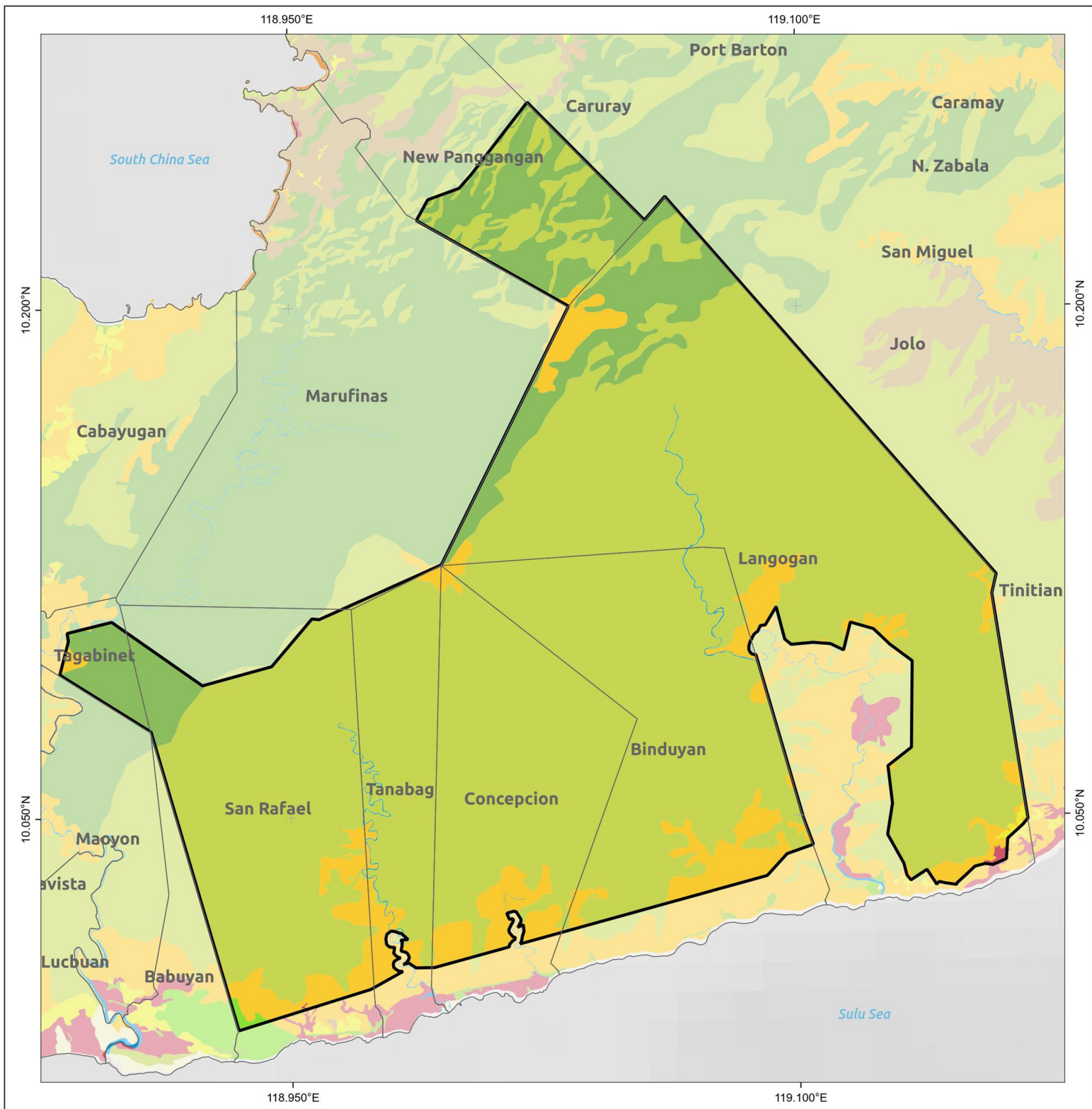
41,350 hectares

**Year of Establishment:**

2017

**Legal Instrument:**

RA 9147



**To get to the jump-off of Cleopatra's Needle Critical Habitat, visitors must take a private or public vehicle to the NE of Puerto Princesa for about an hour. Permissions should be secured ahead to relevant government agencies including the Puerto Princesa City-ENRO. Some of the activities that can be done there are:**

- **Summit Hike:** 4-5 days climbing the most remote and ancient mountain of Palawan for an incredible nature experience;
- **2-day overnight Kaysuka waterfalls tour:** This is a unique jungle experience to the one of the tallest waterfalls of Palawan;
- **1-day forest experience:** Walking tour with a visit to the Batak village and lunch at a scenic swimming place, Pulang Bato - a unique body of naturally red-stained rocks along the river. It provides a nice picnic area, numerous swimming spots to relax and do birding.

**Legend**

- Barangay boundary
- CNCH Proposed Area = 41,350 ha. (05/2017)

Land Cover (2010)

- Open broadleaved forest
- Closed broadleaved forest
- Shrubs
- Inland Water
- Cultivated land - annual crop
- Cultivated land - perennial crop
- Grassland

**Location map**

## BIODIVERSITY

Approximately 85% of the long list of Palawan's endemic mammals and birds can be found around Cleopatra's Needle and together with the PPSRNP it is their last and only safe haven. Endemics in these forests include Palawan Bearded Pig, Palawan Porcupine, Palawan Pangolin, Palawan Bearcat, Palawan Leopard Cat, Palawan Flying Squirrel, Palawan Hornbill, Palawan Peacock Fowl, Palawan Ground Warbler, Palawan Scops Owl, Palawan Tit, Palawan Flycatcher and many others.

Biodiversity assessments in the area resulted to a breakthrough the rediscovery of the Palawan Toadlet (*Pelophryne albinoetenata*), which before the research program at Cleopatra's Needle started, had not been observed by scientists for over 40 years. Additionally, the Malatgan River Caecilian (*Ichthyophis weberi*) which was originally discovered and described 1920 and known from 3 specimens only. After this, initial description the species was never seen again and its taxonomic status was questioned. The holotype of this species was lost during the second world war as the National Museum of the Philippines was bombed. Furthermore, the discovery of the second species of the ant genus *Romblonella* in the Philippines, and the mapping of the territorial range covered by three endemic and endangered amphibian species, namely the Palawan Toadlet (*Pelophryne albotaeniata*), Busuanga Warty Frog (*Barbourula busuangensis*) and Palawan Horned Frog (*Megophryse ligayae*).



Hoya species

### Recorded Wildlife of Cleopatra's Needle

65 species of Birds

26 species of Amphibians and Reptiles

12 species of Mammals

23 species of Odonata

87 taxa of Crustaceans and Aquatic Insects

Palawan Toadlet





## THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF CLEOPATRA'S NEEDLE CRITICAL HABITAT

CNCH is the ancestral domain of the last remaining 200 members of the diminishing indigenous Batak tribe, who have inhabited the area since time immemorial. Three communities namely, Sitio Kalakwasan, Sitio Tagnaya, and Sitio Manggaping exist in the area. This tribe of hunter-gatherers, who are the first inhabitants of the Philippines, still live in balance with the forest. They live in simple make-shift huts and travel around gathering resin and honey, while catching the occasional Palawan Bearded Pig. The forests around Cleopatra's Needle are of immense importance for the indigenous people since their main livelihood is gathering non-timber forest products.





## “Saving the Almaciga Tree”

The Almaciga tree is the primary non-timber forest product of the forests of Cleopatra’s Needle—it’s high-value resin represents approximately 80% of the income of the Indigenous Peoples (IPs) who have lived in this area since time immemorial. This ancient coniferous tree used to dominate the forests of northern Palawan—over harvesting, together with illegal activities, now threaten its existence. The indigenous communities in the area together with CS aim to ensure the future of the Almaciga tree, and thus livelihood and existence of the IPs, through research, reforestation, education & training, and enforcement.

To date, 10,484 seedlings have been successfully planted back to the forest of Cleopatra’s Needle in partnership with the 3 IP communities and 1 low-land Barangay. There is already 3 monitoring activities to determine the health and status of the seedlings and is continuously conducted every two months.