

Boonthavy Douangphosy 2010: Participatory Assessment of Ecotourism Potential at Phou Khao Khouay National Protected Area: A Case Study of Hatkai Village, Thapabad District, Bolikhamxai Province, Lao People's Democratic Republic. Master of Science (Social Forestry), Major Field: Social Forestry, Interdisciplinary Graduate Program. Thesis Advisor: Assistant Professor Monton Jamroenprucksa, Ph.D. 121 pages.

This study of Participatory Assessment of Ecotourism Potential at Phou Khao Khouay National Protected Area (PNPA) uses an area assessment technique and community interviews as the key tools to achieve the study objectives: to assess the potential of the area for ecotourism establishment; to examine the local needs and readiness of community to participate in this ecotourism management; and to examine factors affecting the opinions of community participation in ecotourism plan. To assess the potential for ecotourism, community readiness of 75 respondents were obtained by interview. The responses were then analyzed statistically, using maximum, minimum, percentage, and mean values. In addition, hypotheses were developed and tested using the Chi-square analysis technique in order to determine relationships between variables.

The site assessment using four ecotourism criteria showed 61% suitability, which was considered to be relatively positive regarding the decision for development. In addition, the interviews to promote community participation in the ecotourism plan were also used to assess the local needs and readiness. The results for local needs and readiness respectively, were 3.44 (highest level) and 2.69 (high level) for lodging facilities, such as home stays, 3.51 (highest level) and 3.03 (high level) for tour guides and 3.19 (high level) and 2.05 (medium level) for event services for tourists, such as the provision of souvenirs and cultural gifts.

Furthermore, the study determined that the need for government support in four activities was at the medium level, but the values were different. The results showed an average of 2.00 for accommodation (home stays), 2.00 for tour guides, 2.01 for infrastructure development, and 2.00 for the provision of goods and services. Finally, the results of hypothesis testing on statistical significance at the 0.05 level indicated no significant difference in responses based on gender and readiness of tour guides service.

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Thesis Advisor's signature

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