

**SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR LANDS AND NATURAL
RESOURCES,
HON. SAMUEL A. JINAPOR, MP,
AT THE LAUNCH OF THE ECOTOURISM HANDBOOK, HELD AT
THE SHAI HILLS RESOURCE RESERVE, ON FRIDAY, 28TH
JANUARY 2022**

Nene Chair and Representative of the Shai Traditional Council;
Deputy Minister for Lands and Natural Resources;
Board Chairman and Members of the Forestry Commission;
Chief Executive Officer and Staff Forestry Commission;
Deputy Chief Executive Officers of the Forestry Commission;
Executive Directors and Staff of the Forestry Commission;
Representative of the Ghana Tourism Authority,
Nenemei, Nanamei,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen

As we still find ourselves in the first month of the year, it is fitting that I wish all of you gathered here this morning a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in the course of last week, I launched two (2) important digital platforms of the Forestry Commission – the e-property mark registration platform, which allows loggers to register and renew their property marks online; and the electronic wood tracking system, which allows us to track wood from the time of harvesting till the time of final disposal.

Today, we are here, at the famous and serene environment of the Shai Hills Resource Reserve, to launch an Ecotourism Handbook, developed by the Forestry Commission to promote ecotourism in our country.

The International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as, and I quote, *"responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education."* In simple terms, it involves the touring of places where the natural environment and ecosystems are kept, protecting nature for our own survival, whilst, at the same time, serving as tourist attractions.

Distinguished Guests, the need to protect our natural environment is crucial. We are told by the experts that our social and economic development depend on the sustainable management of our natural environment and its resources. It is for this reason that Goal No.15 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), enjoins all of us, among others, to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, as well as sustainably manage forests.

Ecotourism provides an effective economic incentive for conservation and protecting the ecosystem and biodiversity, as it generates income that contributes to the growth of the national economy. Indeed, in recent years, it has become a major boost to the economies of countries like Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Rwanda, and Zambia. In 2020 for example, ecotourism contributed about four point two billion United States dollars (US\$4.2 billion) to the Kenyan economy. In our country, where we not fully developed in this sector, ecotourism contributes some one point two billion United States dollars (US\$1.2 billion), representing some five-point five percent (5.5%) of our GDP in 2020. This clearly shows that, with the right investments and policies, we have the potential to develop this sector to contribute significantly to the economy.

Government, through the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, is, therefore, committed to the conservation and preservation of our natural ecosystem, and developing it to contribute to the growth and development of the economy. We have, thus, laid before Parliament a Wildlife Resources Management Bill to provide a new legal framework for the management of our wildlife resources. When passed, which I am confident will be done in this First Meeting of the current Session of Parliament, it will provide the Forestry Commission with a lot more authority to be able to manage effectively our national Parks and Resource Reserves. It will also promote private sector participation and community engagements in wildlife management, and improve law enforcement in our protected areas.

Already, we have commenced engagements for the establishment or upgrading of three (3) Regional Zoos in Accra, Takoradi and Tamale to international standards. Our target is to have, in all the sixteen (16) regions of our country, at least one zoo which is of international standard.

Nene Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen, we cannot do all these without making a conscious effort to promote ecotourism.

It is for this reason that the Forestry Commission has developed this Ecotourism Handbook, which we are launching today. This book will serve as a marketing tool for ecotourism within and outside of our country, and will provide some basic information on nature-based tourism in Ghana. It contains information on all the ecotourism areas in the country, and how to access them. It also outlines the Forestry Commission's plans and projects in ecotourism development and promotion.

In accordance with international best practices, and in line with Government's digitisation agenda, each tourist site listed in the Handbook has a Quick Response (QR) Code, which, when scanned on the phone, takes one directly to the tourist destination website. An additional QR code is placed at the back of the Handbook, which links one directly to the website of the Forestry Commission for more information on ecotourism.

Ladies and gentlemen, permit me to commend the Chief Executive Officer of the Forestry Commission, Mr. John Allotey, and all the staff of the Commission, for tirelessly working to make this possible. I am confident, that this will go a long way to promote ecotourism in Ghana.

Whilst commending the Forestry Commission, I call on Ghanaians, in the country and in the diaspora, as well as foreigners, to patronise ecotourism in Ghana. Our country is blessed with many nature-based tourist sites, with a peaceful and calm atmosphere to reconnect with nature, and de-stress from the daily challenges of life in the cities and towns. Spending a day or two at an ecotourism site, according to experts, refreshes the entire being of a person. And, certainly, I must add that doing so at Mole National Park, in my beloved constituency of Damongo, will refresh you even more. So, I urge all of you to try and make it a point to visit Mole National Park, where we have the luxurious and captivating Zaina Lodge, which is ready to host you. As you grab copies of the Handbook, I am hopeful and, indeed, expectant that you will patronise these sites, and encourage others to do same.

I call on local and foreign investors, to consider investments in ecotourism in Ghana. The non-consumptive nature of ecotourism makes investment in this area viable and lucrative.

Nene Chair, ladies and gentlemen, let me reiterate that the Government of President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, who is the co-Chair of the United Nations Secretary-General's Eminent Group of Advocates on the

SDGs, is fully committed to the preservation of the natural resources of this country, in view of the significant ecosystem services they provide. And the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, as the Ministry responsible for the sector, will do everything possible to ensure that we protect, preserve and conserve our ecosystem and biodiversity for current and future generations.

Accordingly, ladies and gentlemen, I have the honour to declare the Ecotourism Handbook duly launched.

May God bless us all, and our homeland Ghana, and make her great and strong.

I thank you for your attention.