

Our country parks should be protected from all illegal acts

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The country parks and special areas account for about 43 per cent of Hong Kong's total area with approximately 2 per cent (about 48 hectares) of the country park areas being private sites.

For historical reasons, many private lots lack a clear indication of the land use in the lease or they are not covered by any outline zoning plan or development permission area plan. As a result, government departments would not be able to use these ordinances to regulate and stop development on these private sites.

Some of these private sites are adjacent to the geological, geomorphological and ecological areas. These are sensitive locations and they are as important as country parks and special areas. However, due to existing loopholes, development in these sites is not regulated. This has resulted in the devastation of parts of our countryside.

The unauthorised columbarium development of Ma Shi Chau is a prime case. Our association first reported it in September 2008 to various government departments and has been following it up.

There has been more recent devastation at Sam Tam Lo (Bride's Pool), Lui Kung Tin (Tai Lam) and Sai Wan (Sai Kung). These examples illustrate the seriousness of the problem.

The present penalties are too lenient and fail to act as a deterrent.

According to the Country Parks and Special Areas Regulations (Chapter 208A), any person who cuts any plant, digs or disturbs the soil, constructs any building, deposits any urn containing human remains and pollutes a river, commits an offence. They are liable to a fine of HK\$2,000 and to imprisonment for three months.

There is an additional fine of HK\$100 for each day during which the offence has continued. With such lenient and outdated penalties, how can we effectively deter eco-vandalism?

No wonder developers have no respect for the law, and continue their illegal land developments.

Things are out of control. To rectify this state of affairs, we must have a holistic approach covering aspects of conservation, planning and lands.

Our association wants the government to proactively set up a department to co-ordinate and review all these policies and ordinances and to increase penalties for offences.

All the loopholes must be closed. Our country parks must be protected from all illegal acts and developments.

The relevant government departments must act as gatekeepers to stop illegal developments in our country parks.

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Illegal dredging has caused pollution along Bride's Pool Nature Trail.