



WWF *for a living planet*

WWF position statement: CONGO BASIN FORESTS

May 2011

The forests of the Congo Basin account for about a sixth of the world's remaining tropical forest cover and are among the most biodiverse places on earth. The subregion's forests also provide food, materials and shelter to some 40 million people. Yet close to 0.5 million hectares of these forests are being lost each year, due mainly to illegal and destructive logging activities that benefit from – and reinforce – widespread corruption and weak governance in the subregion.

WWF has been working in the Congo Basin for four decades and has adopted a landscape conservation approach that recognizes the rights and needs of indigenous peoples and local communities. This approach aims to ensure the integration of protected area management, species conservation, sustainable forest management and attention to local livelihood needs into national and subregional development strategies. WWF's approach aligns with the vision shared by the heads of state of the subregion, the partners of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership and recognised by the United Nations. The landscape conservation approach also takes into account the realities of changing global trade patterns and the challenges these pose to forest conservation in the Congo Basin.

WWF's position on the Congo Basin forests is that:

- There is an unquestionable need for formal protection of the subregion's most socially and environmentally important forests – the landscapes with high conservation values;
- At the same time, we recognize that the majority of the sub-region's forests will remain outside of protected areas, and that commercially logged forests can support healthy populations of rare or endangered species and benefit local communities;
- We therefore believe that responsible forestry, including both intensive commercial management and community forests, is key to helping conserve the subregion's biodiversity, tackle illegal logging and provide economic and social benefits for the businesses and people that depend on forests.

WWF acknowledges progress made by the governments of the Congo Basin countries to establish enabling legal, policy and institutional frameworks for responsible forest management. We are also pleased to acknowledge the 5.3 million hectares of Forest Stewardship Council-certified forest in the Congo Basin, which are the result of joint efforts by various stakeholders. However, WWF has become increasingly concerned about "empty forest syndrome", that is, forests devoid of wildlife due to unregulated, uncontrolled and illegal hunting. The growing link between logging and corruption along with weak governance, poor law enforcement, unreliable infrastructure, violent conflicts and the uneven allocation of forest revenues are all hampering efforts to conserve the environment and promote economic and social development.

To address these challenges, WWF will:

- Continue to support the national governments of the Congo Basin to meet or surpass their protected area coverage targets under the Yaoundé Declaration and strengthen the long-term management of these areas.
- Identify and test innovative financial mechanisms for forest conservation (conservation concessions, payment for environmental services, including watershed and carbon sequestration functions).
- Intensify work with governments, civil society and other partners in the subregion to secure high-level political commitment, and transparent and participative processes to support forest conservation and fight corruption. As part of this work, WWF will continue to support processes and initiatives such as the Forest

Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade and African Forest Law Enforcement and Governance, and promote effective and transparent voluntary partnership agreements to promote responsible forest management and good governance.

- Increase support to the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) in the Congo Basin, including the FSC process for developing regional and national standards, surveillance of performance and transparency of certificate holders and certification bodies, as well as promotion of best practice in high conservation value forests (HCVF) and wildlife management. WWF believes FSC certification is critical in the context of the Congo Basin, where there are few other effective means to improve and monitor the performance of logging companies and the transparency of the timber trade.
- Support, through our Global Forest & Trade Network, the credible certification of well-managed logging companies in order to influence the global timber market and reduce the access of non-certified companies to logging concessions.
- Encourage progressive industrial logging companies to improve their social and environmental performance, while exposing companies with poor track records (including concessions associated with the illegal bushmeat trade) and exert pressure for higher industry-wide standards. WWF will pay particular attention to the protection and management of biodiversity in logging concessions with a focus on HCVF and wildlife management, and to the rights of local communities and indigenous peoples to access rights and benefit sharing.
- Uphold the customary resource and land rights of communities and indigenous peoples, including the adoption of the principle of free, prior and informed consent; and promote development of new financial mechanism and innovative initiatives for community-based forest management enterprises.

WWF is convinced that our strategy of supporting both protected areas and sustainable forest management provides the right balance to promote a more prosperous and sustainable future for the people of the Congo Basin, and the long-term conservation of the region's biological diversity.

For more information contact:

Bruno Perodeau ing.f. M.Sc.
*Forest Program Manager WWF
Responsable du Programme Forêt
14, Avenue Sergent Moke, B.P. 2847
Commune de Ngaliema, Kinshasa
République Démocratique du Congo
Tel: +243 998 91 37 86
Email: bperodeau@wwf.panda.org*