

1. Executive Summary

Context: WWF in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been present in Virunga since 1970 while starting conducting surveys inside the Park. WWF continued later to work with other stakeholders to enhance the value of the Park (1984, development of ecotourism, 1991 joint collaboration between WWF, Flora and Fauna International/FFI and African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) materialized to form the International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP), which was designed to deliver mountain gorilla conservation in light of increasing demands to more effectively meet conservation and development needs. The major driver in developing conscientious mountain gorilla tourism to benefit governments and local communities tasked with protecting them, IGCP's work continues to complement the work of WWF today by leading on mountain gorilla focused activities pertaining to tourism, research, etc.). A bigger Program about environmental education was launched in 1997. Its principal focus was the whole protection of Virunga National Park. Later, WWF expanded its efforts to address the root causes of deforestation and biodiversity degradation in the broader Virunga landscape. Virunga National Park is included within this landscape and is one of the world's most renowned Parks as it is the oldest one in Africa (90 years old) and has the highest biodiversity of any park in Africa. Virunga Park is also among the most recognized in Africa hosting various ecosystems ranging from the savannah adjacent to freshwater lakes and from lowland tropical forest to high-altitude humid montane forest. The landscape is also aesthetically unique offering a range of habitat extremes from snowy mountains (Rwenzoris) to inactive and active volcanoes (Nyiragongo), second largest lava lake in the world.

Unique habitats, diverse ecosystems and important fauna umbrella species including a diversity of large mammals comprise the primary conservation targets for WWF in the Virunga landscape. For tackling the deep roots of forest and biodiversity conservation within the landscape, WWF focuses on the main conservation targets: important species such as great apes (mountain gorillas, *Gorilla beringei beringei*, *Graueri*; eastern chimpanzees, *Pan troglodytes schweinfurthii*), and elephants (*Loxodonta cyclotis*), but also biodiversity rich and unique humid and bamboo forests.

Threats: Despite the fact that Virunga Park is the most well-known Park in the DRC, it is also one of the countries most threatened. Forest degradation and deforestation continue with the increase of human activities, largely due to the insecurity caused by the existence of internal and transboundary conflicts. Consequently, many conservation targets are vulnerable, and the main factors causing the threats are : slash and burn cultivation driving habitat degradation and habitat destruction; abusive illegal logging enabled by the poor application of laws; armed poaching driven by the existence of rebels in the Park and its associated illegal wildlife product (e.g. ivory) trafficking ; village and town expansions within the Park limits, driven by lack of good governance and political interference which creates confusion about the clarification of the Park limits. Lastly the authorization of oil exploration studies in Lake Edward encouraged the DRC government to engage in all the necessary procedures for changing the Virunga Park limits (excluding Lake Edward) for oil exploitation. In one side, it is known that the government is looking at these oil reserves as a potential opportunity to promote DRC economic development. At the other side, some parts of civil society and environmental NGOs see it as the beginning of the Park's destruction, as it will threaten both the biodiversity of the Park and importantly, the sustainable use of the lake's resources for hundreds of thousands of people living both sides of the lake (ie, in DRC and Uganda).

Opportunities: However, great opportunities exist to leverage important natural resource management efforts such as: (a) The Convention on Biological Diversity ratified by the DRC government which will serve as an umbrella for saving great apes, elephants and for preserving the rich diversity of critical habitat types; (b) The Prime Minister decree on community forest concessions establishment modalities 14/018, in August 2014, allowing communities to manage their own forests with respect to other existing laws governing the conservation of DRC natural resources; (c) The mobilization of civil society in the North Kivu Province where the Park is located to advocate and lobby for stopping the petrol exploitation in Lake Edward in DRC and in Uganda. The Virunga National Park is a World Heritage Site. The two countries (DRC and Uganda) are parties of the World Heritage Convention and are obligated “not to take any deliberate measures which might damage directly or indirectly the cultural and natural heritage situated on the territory of other states parties to this convention”

Vision and goals: The vision is stated as follows: “The exceptional value and the biological biodiversity of various habitats in Virunga landscape area are conserved in a participatory way with local communities for the pride of the nation and for future generation benefits”. It emphasizes the close relation between human development and their direct participation in order to help preserve the high biodiversity within all protected areas inside the Virunga landscape.

In alignment with all WWF DRC strategies, the WWF intervention within the landscape is focused on two strategic goals for the eastern DRC program:

- Goal 1: By 2025, zero net deforestation in Virunga NP
- Goal 2: By 2025, the number of great apes and other flagship species population increase (comparing to baseline of last flagship species census) by the protection of the priority habitat of species inside the Virunga Park.

In order to achieve these goals, several objectives and accompanying strategies have been elaborated by the WWF DRC team in collaboration with the WWF international team in 2013 (while defining the priorities for the project: Conservation African Forest Ecosystem). The strategies were elaborated based on five year interventions. In early 2015 (February 15), the strategies and the activities to be developed under each strategy were revisited as an entire part to be inserted in the DRC conservation strategy. These strategies focus on:

- Strategy 1: Enhance law enforcement and prosecution
- Strategy 2: Promote sustainable agriculture, energy and livelihood
- Strategy 3: Strengthen protected area management capacity
- Strategy 4 : Strengthen the implementation of land use management
- Strategy 5: Promote (ecologically) sustainable use of natural resources
- Strategy 6: Promote activities as payment for ecosystem services (PES)
- Strategy 7: Integrate REDD⁺ on a landscape level

These seven strategies are implemented with mainly two programs (The Central African Forest Conservation Ecosystem and the Energy programs) splitted in seven projects in eastern DRC. The present project will focus its efforts mainly on the strategy number 3 : Strengthen protected area management capacity. Nevertheless, WWF is continuing to look for other sources of funding for reinforcing its intervention in some strategies which are also critical for biodiversity conservation and on which funding will end in December 16 (see also section 3 for an overview of all WWF projects in E-DRC, Map 3).

Main objectives are:

- 1) By 2018, at least 50 km are demarcated with the commission mix including local population and ICCN;
- 2) By 2018, recover 30 % of current encroached area based on 2016 baseline;
- 3) By 2018, zero poaching on flagship species;
- 4) By 2018, at least workforces of 1500 men are used for the rehabilitation of walls and clearing boundaries between signposts of the Park;

This project will be implemented jointly with ICCN and the local population. The efforts will be focused for the two years of project on the demarcation activities for 50 km in priority localities with ICCN. These priority localities will be defined together with ICCN team according the pressures in the fields and upon the emergency caused by high conflict in the Park.

This objective of demarcating 50 km seems so small for a two year project. But, per WWF experiences, the WWF started to conduct demarcation process since 2004 and until now, due to various issues, 472,5 km (see map 2) have been demarcated among 1011 km to be done. In brief the progression is approximately 43 km per year. The demarcation activities are costly; 1 km of demarcation cost 1000 USD (in what we qualified as not a red zone) for all fields activities (with mix commissions and hiring local population). The other connex activities and fees are not included in it (raising awarness of local population before the physical demarcation, the salary of WWF staff and other office running cost, and management fees).

The total cost to do the remaining demarcation (538, 5km) is roughly 538 500 USD (all other fees exclude eg; staff cost, management fees, communication, third party fees and/or grants if necessary). For this two years project with the available budget, the WWF planned to do 50 km (25 km per year).

For the general conservation of the Park and its long-term integrity, efforts on participative demarcation will continue. This continuation is the results of meeting between WWF and ICCN team in Goma. Later (December 15) the WWF regional conservation director had also an unformal meeting with the Virunga Park Director and this necessity for continuing the demanraction was raised and agreed. It should be acknowledged that the administrative authorities, the ICCN team, the traditional authorities and the majority of population recognized that the WWF expertise must be valorized and, to be continued, with the main team managing the Project from Goma. The project team is mainly composed of staff members from the GIS and demarcation project, supported by technical, administrative and financial staff both from Goma and from WWF DRC's Kinshasa offices, including the Conservation Director.

The main partners in the project will be the ICCN, the official agency in charge of the nation's protected areas, as well as the administration at provincial and national levels, including the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development and the Ministry of land affairs and, the Ministry of agriculture. These provincial Ministry are part of mixt commissions in charge of the participative demarcation. Collaboration with local communities will represent an important element of the project's approach to secure the demarcation. Apart from the above mentioned human resources, the project will be using a set of material resources, including computer, printing and scanning machines, GPS, operational equipment (boots, uniforms, binoculars, tents, sleeping bags, etc..) and other office equipment.

Other activities and strategies implemented by WWF-DRC in the Virunga Landscape, but not funded by the NL contract, are set in appendix 0.

WWF DRC is engaged through several commitments following the update of its conservation strategy which will be aligned with the various network strategic documents such as the Global Impact Goal for WWF International, the Africa Conservation strategy and the National DRC conservation strategy. This project will also maintain this alignment during implementation.