

News Release



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USFWS and *Agence Nationale des Parcs Nationaux (ANPN)* in Gabon Launch a Unique Training Program to Help Improve Forest Stewardship in the Congo Basin

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's *Wildlife Without Borders (WWB)* program entered into a new cooperative agreement with the *Agence Nationale des Parcs Nationaux (ANPN)* in Gabon to create a multi-disciplinary team-training program aimed at improving forest stewardship and wildlife conservation in Central Africa. **The program is being announced on November 21, 2011 and is set to launch in January 2012.** It will build conservation capacity by bringing together young professionals from a variety of disciplines to form teams and find solutions to conservation problems.

“The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service *WWB* program recognizes the critical need to develop the ability of African professionals to work in teams to strategically address the threats to forests and wildlife through direct activities, management, and policy development focused on local people and communities. This outstanding effort presents a new and vital paradigm for seeking sustainable partnerships and building the capacity of young conservation professionals in Central Africa,” said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe.

The fellowship program will examine the most pressing threats to Central Africa's forests and offer strategies to resolve these challenges both within and beyond protected area boundaries. This comprehensive team-training program combines coursework led by international and national experts; personal guidance from mentors; field

internships with conservation organizations, private businesses; and team projects directed toward the development of alternative forest use strategies with the support of Central African and U.S. government partners. Fellows will be citizens of Gabon and the Republic of Congo.

Timber extraction is by far the most extensive industry in the Congo Basin; timber concessions occupy 30 to 45 percent of all remaining tropical forests and over 70 percent in some countries. If inadequately planned and managed, regional expansion of the logging industry threatens to devastate these unique forest ecosystems by altering forest structure, composition, and the wildlife dependent on them. “The need for innovative training approaches is particularly true in countries where national capacity is low and conservation challenges often overwhelm conservation resources,” says Richard Ruggiero, Branch Chief for the Near East, South Asia and Africa at the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service. The MENTOR-FOREST program merges the USFWS-WWB MENTOR Fellowship Program with the FOREST (*Forest Research Ecology and Stewardship Training*) concept. MENTOR (*Mentoring for ENvironmental Training in Outreach and Resource conservation*) is a signature initiative of the *Wildlife Without Borders* program. MENTOR-FOREST is a research and training program developed for the conservation context in Central Africa. The program will also be implemented in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and Gabon's National School of Forestry.

To learn more about the *Wildlife Without Borders* Africa Regional Capacity Building Program, go to:

<http://www.fws.gov/international/dic/regionalprograms/africa/Africa.html>

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.

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