



## **MENTOR-FOREST: Sustaining Forests**

### **Building conservation capacity in the Congo Basin:**

A multi-disciplinary team training program to improve forest stewardship and wildlife conservation

#### **Innovative Conservation Capacity Building Approaches Needed**

The most complex conservation challenges demand a more profound and comprehensive approach to enhancing stakeholder capacity if these challenges are to be addressed. Traditionally, researchers and managers are trained to develop a deep, disciplinary understanding of a specific set of skills or body of knowledge. There is growing recognition, however, that when collaborating professionals from diverse disciplines work together, they can provide more comprehensive, holistic assessments of a problem and create more durable long term solutions. Through the collaborative application of knowledge and skills, multi-disciplinary teams can accomplish more than any single individual or discipline. But, diverse individuals with varied skills do not always work together effectively and conservation capacity building efforts that emphasize the necessary skills for effective teamwork are needed.

The need for a more sustainable approach is particularly true in countries where national capacity is low and conservation challenges often overwhelm conservation resources. For impacts to be durable and sustaining in these countries, conservation efforts must address the need for enhanced local capacity, whereby well-trained nationals have the ability, motivation, awareness, techniques, and skills to effectively engage in multi-disciplinary teams to address complex conservation problems. Such capacity will, in turn, lead to more productive partnerships between governments, conservation and development non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society, local communities and the private sector, thus resulting in more collaboration and effective solutions.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Wildlife Without Borders program recognizes the critical need to develop the ability of teams of African professionals to strategically address the threats to forests and wildlife through direct activities, management, and policy development. The USFWS MENTOR program presents a new paradigm for seeking sustainable partnerships and building the capacity of the world's conservation professionals.

#### **Forest Stewardship Challenges in the Congo Basin**

Until this decade, the Congo Basin remained relatively intact as the second largest expanse of tropical forest on Earth. The Congo Basin forest is globally important as a reservoir for biodiversity and a sink for atmospheric carbon, but national development needs have led to growing resource exploitation by extractive industries. If uncontrolled exploitation of the Congo Basin's forests continues, resource extraction will be followed by widespread forest destruction: an avoidable catastrophe for millions of forest-dependent people and the countless plant and animals at risk of extinction.



#### **Threats to Sustainable Forest Stewardship**

Timber extraction is the most extensive industry in the Congo Basin: timber concessions occupy 30-45% of all remaining tropical forests and over 70% in some countries. If poorly planned and managed, the regional expansion of the logging industry threatens to vastly modify these unique forest ecosystems by altering forest structure, composition, and faunal communities. Weak governance and limited knowledge compromise the ability of governments to promote sustainable logging practices.

*The roots of the problem are: (1) shortage of information for decision makers to act upon; (2) lack of innovative models that link development and conservation strategies; (e.g. protection needs of endangered species like elephants and great apes); (3) low capacity to study and manage forests - universities are underfunded and understaffed, and researchers, managers and government officials often do not have access to training and resources; and (4) lack of multi-disciplinary teams and partnerships and/or management tools to facilitate the implementation of effective forest stewardship.*

## **MENTOR-FOREST Approach**

To overcome these challenges, USFWS and partners at home and abroad are developing an innovative new program to build a multi-disciplinary team of ten Central African forest resource professionals. The team will work together to improve upon current forestry practices, identify new forest stewardship strategies and methods, mitigate impacts to wildlife and ultimately enhance the sustainable management of forests.

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 WWB and selected partners to build the capacity of multidisciplinary teams of African conservationists who can work together to address complex conservation challenges. In FY08-09, the MENTOR Program built the capacity of a team of Eastern African conservationists to address illegal bushmeat exploitation in Kenya, Southern Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

## **Next Steps**

The MENTOR-FOREST 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 holistic team training program will include a combination of coursework with international and national experts, personal guidance from mentors, field internships with conservation organizations, private businesses and national government collaborators, and team projects directed toward the development of alternative forest use strategies.

The program will provide a team of emerging Central African leaders with skills and expertise including: (1) improving management in production forests through reduced impact logging (RIL) and private-sector partnerships for conservation (PSPCs); (2) designing and implementing innovative pilot forestry programs; (3) reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation (REDD +); (4) addressing emerging diseases associated with non-sustainable forest stewardship; (5) understanding forest ecology, biodiversity monitoring, and wildlife management; and (6) managing projects.



Credit: USFWS

## **For more information, contact:**

Connie J. Clark, Ph.D.  
MENTOR-FOREST Coordinator  
Agence Nationale des Parcs Nationaux (ANPN)  
BP 20379  
Libreville  
GABON  
US Cell: +1-508-566-5421  
ANPN Tel: +241- 44-67-46  
Email: [clark.forestgabon@gmail.com](mailto:clark.forestgabon@gmail.com)

Richard G. Ruggiero, Ph.D.  
Chief--Branch of the Near East, South Asia and Africa  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Division of International Conservation  
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Room 100H  
Arlington, VA 22203-1622 USA  
Tel: +1-703-358-2460, Fax: +1-703-358-2115  
Email: [Richard\\_Ruggiero@fws.gov](mailto:Richard_Ruggiero@fws.gov)  
Website: [www.fws.gov/international](http://www.fws.gov/international)