

Republic of Congo

The Congo's northern forests are a stronghold for the critically endangered lowland gorilla and endangered forest elephant.



Left: *An elephant walks through a forest clearing in Congo.* Credit: Richard Ruggiero/USFWS.
Right: *Confiscation of ivory artifacts and jewelry in Congo.* Credit: PALF.



The Republic of Congo's dense equatorial forests represent the second largest contiguous tropical forest block in the world after the Amazon. The Congo Basin's forests are of global importance for the magnificent biodiversity it shelters. It also sequesters and stores carbon and serves as a buffer against global climate change. There are nearly 4.6 million people living in the Republic of Congo, and 70% of the population resides in Brazzaville and Point-Noire or along the railroads that connect these two cities. Since the majority of population lives in urban areas, the Republic of Congo still enjoys pristine equatorial forests. These forests connect to important wildlife habitat in Gabon and through the Sangha River Trinational protected area - the first three-country transboundary area to become a World Heritage Site - to biodiverse areas in Cameroon and the Central African Republic. Congo is home to nearly 400 mammal species, 1,000 bird species, and approximately 10,000 plant species, of which 3,000 are endemic, meaning that they do not exist anywhere else in the world. Congo's remote northern forests hold

the highest known densities in the world of the critically endangered western lowland gorilla, and large populations of the endangered forest elephant and the near threatened bongo. Congo's coastal waters provide important habitat to ocean giants such as whales, dolphins and marine turtles.

Current Threats to Biodiversity in the Republic of Congo

Elephant poaching

Poaching for ivory is now the number one driver behind elephant declines in Africa. Central Africa is being increasingly targeted in recent years. Forest elephant ivory is of high quality, and poachers are able to remain undetected in the dense forests. The problem is exacerbated by lack of law enforcement coupled with corruption and underlying poverty that remains a major problem in the region. With increasing demand for ivory, in particular from China's rising middle class, these factors led to a decline of more than 60% of forest elephants in Central Africa between 2002 and 2011.

Commercial bushmeat trade

The commercial bushmeat trade is exacerbated by urban consumers who associate the consumption of

bushmeat with status and culture. Representing the single greatest threat to the majority of animals in forests throughout Central Africa, the hunting and trade of bushmeat is often especially pronounced around logging concessions and other work camps, where new roads provide access into previously remote forests. In the absence of adequate laws and law enforcement, these new roads facilitate hunting and market access. In addition to mortality from poaching, the hunting and trade of bushmeat is a major cause of disease transfer between wildlife and humans. Ebola outbreaks in Central Africa killed up to 95% of the individuals in some western lowland gorilla populations, including in Odzala National Park in the Republic of Congo.

Extractive industries and Oil Palm

Oil palm plantations and extractive industries – including logging, mining, and oil exploration threaten Congo's wildlife directly by destroying and degrading habitat, and indirectly by establishing road access and attracting new human settlements with their associated agriculture, protein and income needs. This indirect impact in particular presents a major threat to wildlife in most Central African forests.

Since 2006, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has supported conservation in the Republic of Congo through the administration of 79 grants, totaling more than \$7.1 million and leveraged by more than \$4.8 million in additional public and private sector funds.

Sangha River Trinational

The Sangha River Trinational, or *Tri-National de la Sangha* (TNS) is comprised of three contiguous national parks: Lobéké National Park in Cameroon, Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park in Congo and Dzanga-Ndoki National Park in the Central African Republic. One of the largest blocks of pristine tropical lowland forest in the world, TNS contains a multitude of threatened species. Investing more than \$6.8 million, leveraged by more than \$7.6 million, USFWS has supported great ape habituation for ecotourism, Ebola virus disease monitoring, community awareness-raising, and monitoring elephants in “bais”, or forest openings. More recently, USFWS signed a 5-year, \$10 million cooperative agreement with the African Parks Foundation, the Wildlife Conservation Society, and the World Wildlife Fund.

Conkouati-Douli National Park

Conkouati-Douli National Park (CDNP) is located on the west coast of the Republic of Congo. Since established in 1999, CDNP is managed jointly by Congo’s Ministry of Durable Development, Forest Economy, and Environment and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). CDNP not only harbors forest elephants and great apes, but also provides critical nesting beaches for marine turtles. Since 2004, USFWS supported conservation efforts in CDNP by awarding more than \$860,000 to WCS, leveraged by \$435,876 in matching funds, to enhance law enforcement and community outreach efforts to increase the protection of great apes, forest elephants, and marine turtles in CDNP.

Project for the Application of Law for Fauna (PALF)

In 2008, the Project for the Application of Law for Fauna (PALF) was launched in the Republic of Congo as the first replicate of the successful Last Great Ape Organization (LAGA) law wildlife enforcement model based in Cameroon. Working in-country

in close collaboration with the Congolese Government, the Wildlife Conservation Society and the Aspinall Foundation, PALF strives to improve investigations, operations, all legal aspects of prosecutions and sentencing, media and outreach, and management to address crimes against wildlife in the Republic of Congo. USFWS began supporting PALF financially in 2013, awarding a total of \$49,610, which was leveraged by \$96,766.

Lac Tele Landscape

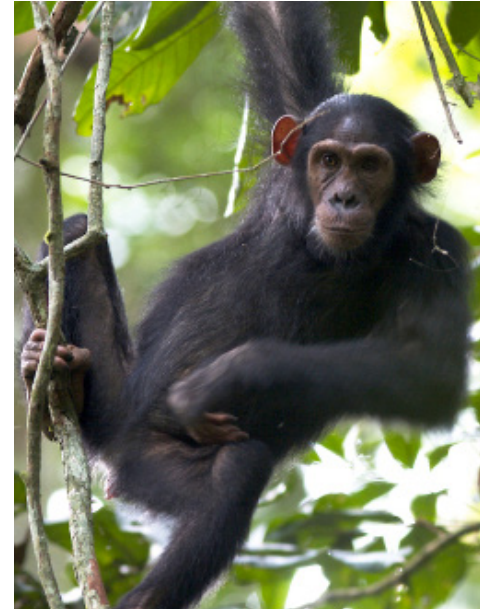
Since 2002, USFWS has funded WCS to conserve great apes and forest elephants in the Lac Tele landscape, awarding a total of \$727,273, and leveraged by \$534,426 in matching funds. Located in northeastern Congo, the Lac Tele landscape contains one of the largest populations of western lowland gorillas and central chimpanzees in the world. Lac Tele and its adjoining reserve in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lac Tumba, together encompass the largest wetland in Africa. WCS increases patrols and monitoring of Lac Tele to deter poaching within the landscape, and engages in environmental education to garner community involvement in Lac Tele conservation and management.

Ebola Virus Disease Monitoring

Since 2006, USFWS has been supporting efforts to monitor Ebola virus disease in Sangha Trinational landscape, which includes Nouabale-Ndoki National Park in the Republic of Congo, awarding WCS \$490,000, which was leveraged by an additional \$413,000. Having successfully established a comprehensive, multidisciplinary program to monitor and protect great apes against diseases such as Ebola virus disease, this project engages local professionals at all levels.

Goulougo Triangle Ape Project (GTAP)

USFWS has supported WCS’s conservation work in the Goulougo Triangle Ape Project of the Sangha Trinational landscape in the



Above: A chimpanzee in the Goulougo Triangle in Sangha River Trinational.
Credit: Ian Nichols/National Geographic

Congo for over a decade, awarding a total of \$705,000, which was leveraged by \$672,220 in matching funds. This project is helping to conserve chimpanzees and gorillas through practical conservation research, increased protection of important ape populations and their habitats, and increased protection of important ape populations and their habitats.

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USFWS Support to the Republic of Congo, FY2006-FY2013	
Grants Awarded	79
Amount Awarded	\$7,117,104
Amount Leveraged	\$4,833,559
Total Investment	\$11,950,663