

SAVING THE CONGO BASIN FORESTS

**Testimony of
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**SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA AFFAIRS
HEARING ON CONGO BASIN**

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, what a privilege for “ the Tallest pygmy” to testify before you today. I am Tony Mokombo, Senior Program Officer for the West and Central Africa and Madagascar Endangered Spaces Program at the World Wildlife Fund. I am from Central African Republic located in the heart of central Africa between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Chad.

We are here to discuss the Congo Basin Partnership and hence the future of the people in Central Africa and particularly those of the Congo Basin. Before further development of the subject I would like first to seize this opportunity to thank the United States of America’s government for its constant effort to assist my fellow Central Africans and I to better conserve and save our wealth of biodiversity for the present and future generations through its governmental agencies such as USFWS, US FS, and USAID.

This said, Mr. Chairman, the charge for this Subcommittee hearing is to answer the questions, “ Why is the Congo Basin Partnership needed? What is WWF’s role in the partnership? And How will the grant be implemented?”

WHY IS THE CONGO BASIN FOREST PARTNERSHIP NEEDED?

Mr. Chairman, this partnership represents a defining moment for the Congo Basin. The stars are aligned and it’s vital that we seize this historic opportunity to save the Congo Basin Forests. This is a unique opportunity for all of us to match the Congo Basin Political will with the US political will to support the conservation of the biodiversity in the region. The U.S.’s timely show of financial and moral commitment helped tilt the balance in favor of conservation. For many years, conservation organizations, such as World Wildlife Fund, World Conservation Society, have struggled-- not always successfully-- to involve politicians, stakeholders, elite and the local populations into the region’s conservation efforts. Unfortunately each time they take one step forward, two steps are taken back.

OVERVIEW OF THE CONGO BASIN: ITS VALUES, THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Mr. Chairman, members of the subcommittee and honorable attendees,

The Congo Basin is the second largest tropical forest block in the world and contains some of the richest biodiversity in Africa. The biodiversity of the Central Africa region is immensely wealthy, richly endowed with species, habitats and landscapes.

In terms of vertebrate species diversity, the Congo Basin is rivaled only by South America and South East Asia, and is justly famous for its assemblage of savanna animal species and their predators. The forest bloc of Central Africa is a treasure house of over 10,000 unique plants; 1,000 birds and 400 mammals, among which we have 3,000 endemic plants, 42 endemic birds and 29 mammals. Many these endemic species are concentrated in the lowland forests and associated low hills at the eastern and western edges of the Basin. The Congo Basin Forests possess the most diverse assemblages of primates in Africa, including four species of Great Apes (two species of gorilla, bonobo and chimpanzee). The region's marine, freshwater and terrestrial biodiversity has the potential to provide significant – and sustainably managed – inexhaustible benefits for its people, the vast majority of whom still rely directly on natural resources.

What is the Current Situation?

Dear Mr. Chairman, I had to leave my home-country to get a better understanding of what is happening under the canopy of our forested areas.

In early 1990s, the international debate on global environmental problems led to the 1992 UN Conference on the Environment and Development. As the debate was defined by traditional North-South dynamics, we, Developing Countries suspected that the North was using the environment to impose further conditions on the terms of their economic development. We argued that much of the global environmental degradation was linked to Northern consumption patterns and the Northern countries had a historical responsibility to pay for mitigating environmentally destructive practices. Whereas the Developed countries believed that we in the South were interested in sustainable development only to leverage resource transfers from the developed world.

Even though we had committed ourselves at that period of time to contribute to the environment and development of our region, much of the requested funds from people of good faith from the North were used to address other economic issues rather than tackling the root causes of the biodiversity loss of our heritage. We did not have a clue of what the consequences of biodiversity loss could be. We did not understand the problem and respond to the underlying socioeconomic root causes of such loss.

Since the colonial era, which lasted for over 60 years, Central Africa has been principally a supplier of raw materials to other countries, in particular in forms of oil, minerals, timber and agricultural products. These resources that are fundamental to the future prospects for development within the region face a number of significant threats. Among the multitude of forces that had and have been driving biodiversity loss are:

- unsustainable mining, mineral exploitation, and logging practices;
- clearing of forested land for subsistence agriculture and hunting resulting from increased access provided by roads for logging and mining;
- and macroeconomic policies which may reinforce and perpetuate unsustainable practices.

Added to these threats are:

- 1) The poorly managed Protected Areas;
- 2) Ineffective community based natural resource use;
- 3) Weak processes and institutions: Ministries with responsibility for planning, forest conservation and management, wildlife and protected areas are often different, poorly coordinated and their decisions may be over-ridden by hierarchically superior authorities and institutions.
- 4) Regional institutions are even weaker with poor cooperation between countries, a situation that is exploited by elements in the logging industry and those who regard wildlife as a commodity, such as ivory hunters and bush meat traders.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT OPPORTUNITIES IN THE REGION?

THE YAOUNDE SUMMIT

The Yaounde Summit created a unique opportunity for the governments of the Congo Basin countries to make commitments to forest conservation. This Summit

has elevated forest conservation and management to one of the most important issues in the sub-region and, as such, has marked a turning point in political commitment to forest conservation in Central Africa.

On March 17th, 1999, the Heads of State of six Central African countries, (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon) met to discuss, at the highest political level, the problems of forest exploitation and protection in the region. This groundbreaking Yaounde Summit was hosted and chaired by the President of the Republic of Cameroon and co-chaired by his Royal Highness, Prince Phillip, President Emeritus of WWF. At the conclusion of the summit, they signed the **Yaoundé Declaration**, which contains twelve specific commitments to forest conservation in the region. At the core of the Declaration is the recognition that protecting the region's forests requires a regional approach, coordinated policies and harmonized procedures, practices and legislation. The Democratic Republic of Congo subsequently ratified the Yaoundé Declaration in June 2002.

The Yaoundé Declaration was recognized by the United Nations 54th General Assembly (Resolution 54/214) as a mechanism to achieve sustainable forest management and conservation in Central Africa. The UN Resolution commends the Yaoundé Declaration as a framework for ensuring forest conservation and sustainable management for implementation both by the countries of the region and also by the international community.

CONGO BASIN FOREST PARTNERSHIP

Another opportunity is the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP), which we are discussing today, launched by the United States and South Africa along with 27 public and private partners at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in September 2002. To this Congo Basin Forest Partnership, the US through its USAID-Central Africa Regional Program for Environment will make a substantial contribution.

The goal of this partnership is to promote economic development, poverty alleviation, improved governance, and natural resources conservation in Congo Basin through support for a network of national parks and protected areas, well-managed forestry concessions, and assistance to communities who depend on the conservation of the outstanding forest and wildlife resources.

Developing a coherent conservation strategy for such a huge part of the African continent, inhabited by such diversity of people, cultures, traditions and political systems, is a challenge in itself. The challenge becomes even greater as we consider the socio-economic problems that plague Central Africa. A great number of people still live in abject poverty and, in some countries, wars, civil unrest and political instability have or continue to hinder economic progress. It is a very crowded place – 24 million people – and these factors, together with unfavorable trade and macro-economic policies, result in great pressures on the sub-region's forests, savannas, wetlands and marine ecosystems.

Successful conservation in the Congo Basin therefore still presents enormous challenges. There is, however, still time in many places to take a different development path that integrates economic growth and conservation of special places and respect for traditional cultures.

These places are the 11 landscapes that are the focus of the partners of the Congo Basin Forests, covering approximately 668,000 km² and containing 38 protected areas (see Annex: Congo Basin Forest Partnership Landscapes). Among the forests of Central Africa we can name the richly forested (but highly threatened) lands of Gabon, the unique sanctuary-like bai for elephants in Dzanga-Sangha (CAR), or the dramatically endemic forests of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Since the Congo Basin is not only the lungs of the world but supports globally significant biodiversity and maintains the global climate regime, hence mitigating global warming, there is a need for the world to invest in conserving this forested area.

The joint efforts to conserve these 11 landscapes will create employment for park guards, tourism guides hence tourism development, community based conservation development. The sustainable forest management will lead to economic development.

WHAT IS WWF'S ROLE WITHIN THIS REGION AND PARTICULARLY IN CONGO BASIN PARTNERSHIP?

Mr. Chairman, the World Wildlife Fund played an unprecedented role in the region, influencing the political agenda to ensure that forest conservation is seen as a key policy issue for the governments of the Central Africa. During the Yaounde Summit, WWF called upon the Central African Governments to collaborate across boundaries and work in partnership with international aid agencies so that forest protection is implemented on the ground.

WWF has facilitated the Yaounde process by developing a plan for the conservation of the Congo Basin forests, starting at a biodiversity workshop in Libreville in March 2000. This workshop brought together over 200 scientists from the region and elsewhere, who defined areas of biological importance for different species groups. By a process of amalgamation and comparison with existing protected areas and intact forest habitats, 11 priority forest landscapes were identified that form the basis of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership. These landscapes aim to cover the species, habitats and ecological process values of the Congo Basin, such that effective conservation in these areas will ensure that these values persisted over the long term.

The main process for operationalizing the biodiversity vision and the conservation of the 11 landscapes has been the **Conference of Ministers in charge of Forests in Central Africa - COMIFAC**. The first of these (COMIFAC I) was held in Yaoundé in December 2000 and the second (COMIFAC II) in the same location in June 2002. At COMIFAC I, the Ministers adopted the WWF facilitated Biodiversity Vision for the Guinea-Congolian forests as the blueprint for conservation in the region; by this same act they committed themselves to the conservation of 10% of the forest habitat in protected areas. These commitments are expressed in the Conservation Convergence Plan, which outlines a need to achieve the following:

- Gazettement of 10% of the territories as protected areas;
- Transborder initiatives;
- Request for donor support to address bushmeat trade;
- Call to partnership with all stakeholders for sustainable management of the resources.

➤ **Overview of WWF and its Global Program**

Since its inception in 1961, WWF, as the largest privately supported international conservation network in the world, has invested in over 13,100 projects in 157 countries. WWF directs its conservation efforts toward three global goals: **protecting endangered spaces, saving endangered species and addressing global threats**. From working to save the giant panda, tiger, and rhino to helping establish and manage parks and reserves worldwide, WWF has been a conservation leader for 40 years.

In all, the WWF Network has offices and partners in over 40 countries around the world, working as a team toward an overall goal: **“to halt and reverse the destruction of our natural environment.”**

➤ **WWF's Global Program**

WWF's primary objective is to conserve globally important terrestrial, freshwater and marine habitats and their plant and animal communities. However, conservation resources are limited, and we cannot hope to save everything, everywhere. So we must set priorities while trying to ensure that examples of all the world's diverse ecosystems are conserved. These examples include areas especially rich in overall species diversity, areas with species found nowhere else, and areas that contain unique assemblages of animals and plants.

WWF has identified around two hundred priorities of these important regions across the globe. They are called the '**Global 200 Ecoregions**'. Ecologists consider that almost half of terrestrial ecoregions are endangered, some critically so, while a further 29% are vulnerable. More than 40 of the Global 200 ecoregions occur in Africa and around its shores. The WWF Africa & Madagascar Program (AMP) has for many years focused its attention on four broad habitat types: forests, savannas, freshwater wetlands, and coastal and marine habitats. As we enter the new millennium, the AMP is 'fine-tuning' its habitat conservation efforts to those ecoregions where action is most urgently needed. WWF has identified the Western Congo Basin Moist Forest and Congo Basin Forest ecoregions as conservation priorities.

➤ **WWF History in Central Africa**

For more than 20 years, WWF has been supporting the creation, development and management of conservation programs within Central Africa especially in Central African Republic (CAR), Gabon, Cameroon and DRC. WWF has signed a country agreement with the Governments of each of those countries, most recently in DRC in 2001, where we are in the process of reinforcing our presence.

WWF has worked in the forests of Central Africa with a focus on the Sangha Trinational area of contiguous forests including northern Congo-Brazzaville, southwest CAR, and southeast Cameroon. WWF has supported the creation, development, and management of the Dzanga-Sangha Dense Forest Special Reserve and the Dzanga-Ndoki National Park in the CAR, and of the Lobeke National park in southeastern Cameroon. WWF has a strong national program in Gabon focusing on Protected Areas Management and has worked with the Government on Gabon on the Minkebe Reserve in northeastern Gabon and the Gamba Complex for over 15 years. WWF has led the process of developing a

trans-border landscape program centered on the Minkebe National Park, linking it to Dja, Boumba Bek and Nki Reserves in Cameroon and Odzala National Park in Congo (cf. Annex Table 2: WWF's presence in Landscapes). The WWF Ecoregion Program has collaborated with WCS to carry out the background surveys and studies that have led to the 13 new National Parks recently announced by the President of Gabon. WWF was instrumental in the development of the Central Africa World Heritage Forest Initiative (CAWHFI), supported by the United Nations Foundation and UNESCO, which seeks to increase the management effectiveness within three landscapes in the Congo Basin. These three landscapes, overlapping with CARPE/CBFP landscapes, are the Sangha Trinational, the Gamba-Conckouati, and the Minkebe-Dja-Odzala landscapes. WWF, WCS, CI and the Jane Goodall Institute will jointly implement this program. Finally, WWF has played an instrumental role in the process leading to the adoption of the Plan de Convergence adopted by COMIFAC in December 2000, which includes a series of actions to be undertaken to achieve the Yaoundé Declaration.

➤ **Current WWF Presence in Central Africa**

WWF has a Central Africa Regional Program Office (CARPO) in Yaoundé, Cameroon, an Ecoregional and Program Office in Libreville, Gabon, and Program Offices in DRC and in the CAR, reporting to WWF-International in Switzerland. WWF-US initiated the program in Central Africa and provides the principal technical and financial support to it, including all initiatives involving support from the United States, in particular, USAID. WWF Network funding for the region also comes from WWF-Netherlands, WWF-Belgium, WWF-International, WWF-UK, WWF-Denmark and WWF-Germany.

The WWF program for CARPE II is firmly rooting in the institutional context of the countries where it will operate. As such WWF has traditionally placed emphasis on working within the relevant institutional structures and on understanding their mechanisms of operation and weaknesses.

Mr. Chairman, there is a saying in our Bantu language that says: **“One finger can not pick up lice inside the hair”**, which means here that one organization alone can not achieve the goal of conservation in Central Africa.

WWF's widespread partners and program activities in Central Africa are a reflection of this saying, along with the US government commitment to the conservation of Congo Basin forests. Over 20 years, WWF has established a network of regional program, and project offices in Gabon, Cameroon, and CAR to

address conservation issues from the field. Such a field presence has allowed us to raise awareness of the important biodiversity in the Congo Basin, promote sustainable forest management and independent timber certification, and work towards establishing a network of protected areas which effectively protect forests as well as the people and animals which depend upon them. WWF's partners in these initiatives include governments, NGOs, local communities, international aid agencies and foundations, and the private sector.

Despite all the scaling-up of the conservation approaches and central African governments' commitment, biodiversity loss is still increasing. If we want to win the race against biodiversity loss we need a new approach that more effectively not only integrates socioeconomic policies with environmental concerns but a partnership among the Conservation communities and northern and southern governments.

Conservation is a truly complex undertaking that requires a wide range of people and organizations working together to achieve common goals.

The most strategic relationship to have in order to achieve conservation is this consortium (which includes WWF, CI and WCS) built up on what USAID has set up through its CARPE program in the Central Africa region.

GRANT PROCEEDING IMPLEMENTATION:

The question that one would ask is how are these conservation organizations going to administer the Grants and sub-contract with this complex partnership within a complex region?

Firstly team arrangements have been carefully worked out over the last few months through a series of meetings in USA, and in the region (see Annex Table 1:CBFP Overall Teaming and Sub-contract in landscapes). The teams are based on competitive advantage and real field experience. These arrangements represent the best way to direct the functioning of the landscape conservation approach in these different landscapes. Close coordination will be needed to ensure that parallel methodologies are being used for the different parts of the program, and to allow reporting on the progress of the implementation of the programs at different landscapes. In all cases a landscape structure will be created to deliver components of the program in a way that they relate to the entire landscape and also to deliver the required reports to USAID. At a number of landscapes, WWF will issue sub-contracts to other USA-based NGOs such as Zoological Society of Milwaukee,

Bonobo Conservation initiative, Innovation Resources Management. WWF also hopes to work with US government agencies in the same landscapes, such as the Smithsonian Institution, USFWS, or USFS. These collaborators will complete specialist studies, such as surveys, measuring the area of remaining forest cover, etc, which are needed to deliver the different aspects of the program. Memorandum of Understanding will be written between WWF and the various agencies.

Secondly, making grants to partners is not something new to the International NGOs that are the backbones of this Congo Basin Partnership. WWF and WCS have administered in Cameroon, Central African Republic and the Republic of Congo, NGO Action Grants with funding support from CARPE and the MacArthur Foundation. They sub-contracted and provided selected and motivated NGOs with resources to test and develop their capacity in field conservation. In each country selection criteria was established and a committee of local conservation and development experts was formed to review proposals and award grants.

WWF is a founding member of the **African Forest Action Network (AFAN)**, a multi-country network of African NGOs created in 1994. AFAN's purpose is to promote the conservation of forests and the sustainable use of forest resources, particularly for the well-being of the people. The network's activities focus on information exchange, advocacy, training, and facilitating cooperation among member NGOs. The MacArthur Foundation provided funding to support AFAN to develop and disseminate a quarterly newsletter and to provide training and technical assistance to its NGO members in advocacy and organizational development matters.

Together, AFAN and the NGO Action Grants program contributed to the foundation necessary to develop NGOs as a relevant force in local and regional conservation in Central Africa. These programs also provide a vehicle through which to identify potential partners for WWF initiatives.

Mr. Chairman, guests of honor,

The last three years have seen years of dramatic change in Central African's perception of the importance of biodiversity conservation. With the technical assistance of conservation organizations such as WWF, WCS, CI and AWF, just to name these few, the countries in Central Africa have come up with a conservation strategy for this huge part of the African continent, inhabited by such diversity of people, cultures, traditions and political systems.

This is an unprecedented moment for the Congo Basin. While the stars are aligned and along the US government's will to foster this partnership and bring in other partners, it is vital that we seize this opportunity to save the Congo Basin Forest. The Congo Basin Forest Partnership and the United States contribution came in at the right time, supporting the Central African governments' conservation strategy and their convergence plan. I believe that funds should be in support of all the countries across the entire region. This will keep all the countries encouraged to work together for the good cause of the biodiversity conservation.

The only concern that I have and I have been asking myself is as follows: Is the three-year program enough to achieve the goals of the CBF? When I consider the socio-economic problems that have hampered Central Africa and the greater number of people who still live in abject poverty, I say to myself if only potential partners could extend this program over a period of ten years, this will be very much appreciated. Since this is another education process that we are embarking on to bring the entire community to change their way of living and thinking, and adopt a new behavior.

Mr. Chairman, NGO Representatives and guests of Honor, thank you very much for your attention.

ANNEXES

Figure 1. Congo Basin Forest Partnership Landscapes.

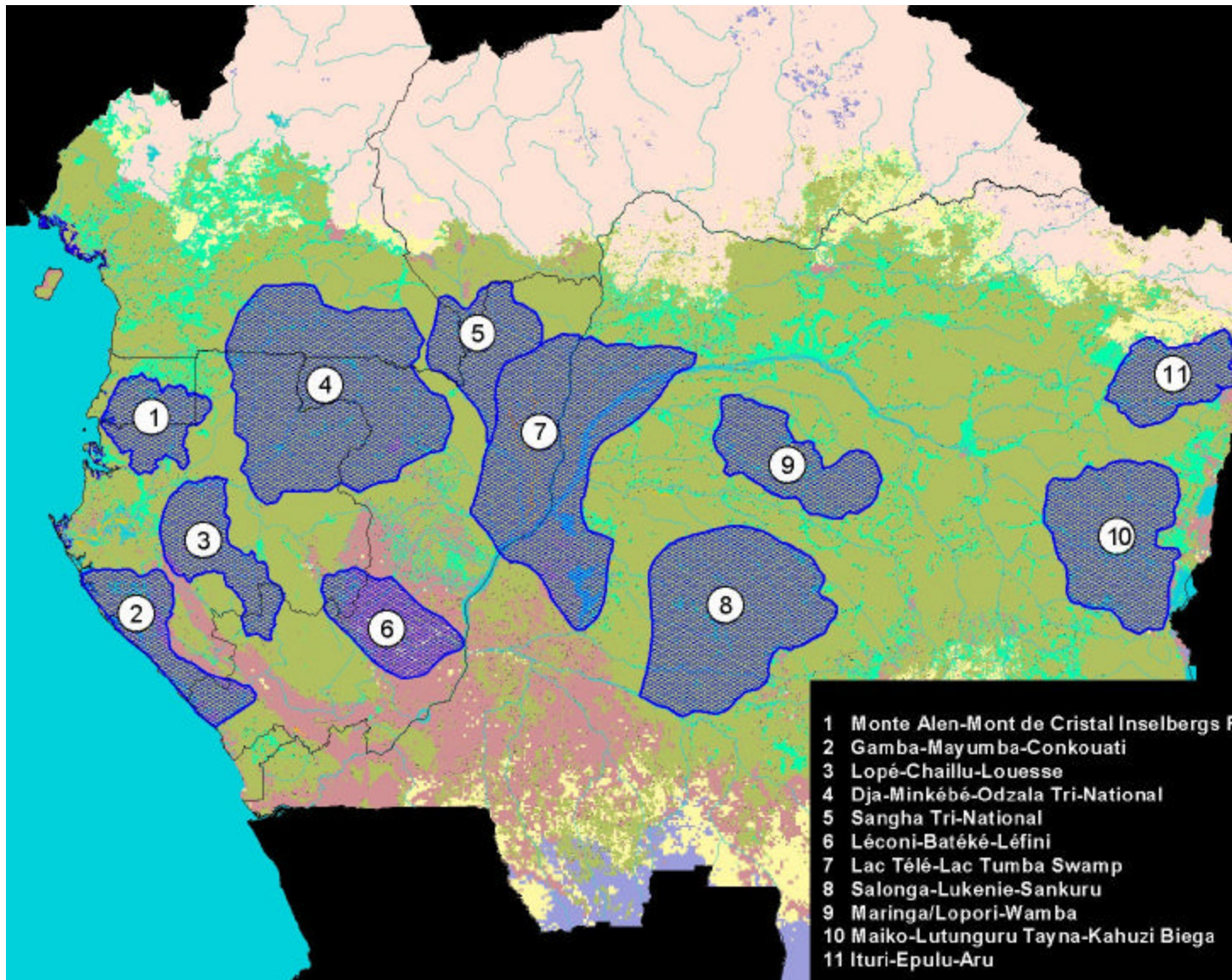


Table 1: WWF presence in landscapes

Landscape Name	Current activities and presence
Gamba – Conkouati	WWF has an established field presence at this landscape for over 15 years. This is an established and mature program and considerable further progress can be expected during the coming 3 years.
Dja – Minkebe – Odzala (TRIDOM)	WWF has an established field presence in Minkebe and Dja, built up over a number of years. For the past 2 years WWF has also been working with GEF, ECOFAC and COMIFAC on cross-border issues. Considerable landscape work can be expected in this area over the coming 3 years, including the development of a shared management structure across national borders.
Sangha Tri-national (TNS)	WWF has maintained a strong field presence in Cameroon and CAR for more than two decades and first conceived this trans-border program. For the past 2-3 years, WWF has been working with WCS in Congo to implement a shared management structure for the entire area and considerable landscape level progress can be expected during the coming 3 years.
Lac Tele-Lac Tumba	WWF will establish a program at this site and will work with <i>Bonobo Conservation Initiative</i> and <i>Innovative Resources Management</i> to deliver aspects of the proposed work. WWF will carry out community based fisheries and fish surveys in this landscape, and will also assist WCS with the overall landscape measurement components of the program.
Salonga - Lukenie – Sankur	WWF will work with WCS to operationalize a large program at this important landscape, building on past work and field reconnaissance over the past months. Parts of the program will also be implemented by the <i>Zoological Society of Milwaukee</i> , who is present in the field, partially supported by WWF. WWF will collaborate with the UNESCO World Heritage Program.
Monte Alen – Mont de Cristal	Mont de Cristal is close to the Minkebe Forest and WWF will reinforce its current operation in the area, in particular for bushmeat control and anti-poaching.
Maringa-Lopori-Wamba	WWF supported bonobo research and conservation in this area for many years and will re-launch this effort partnering with <i>Zoological Society of Milwaukee</i> to deliver the proposed work at the Lomako landscape component.
Maiko-Lutunguru Tayna-Kahuzi Biega	Building on the past work that it has conducted in the area, WWF will collaborate with GTZ and UNESCO/WHP to deliver the Kahuzi Biega landscape component.

Table 2: Partnership overall teaming and sub-contract arrangements in the landscapes.

	Landscape	Lead Organization	Countries in Landscape	Landscape Component	Lead Organization in Landscape Component	Secondary/ Terciary Involvement	WWF Sub-Contracts with
1	Monte Alen - Mont de Cristal Inselbergs	CI					
			Equatorial Guinea	Monte Alen	CI		
			Gabon	Mont de Cristal	WCS	WWF/CI	
2	Gamba - Conckouati	WWF					
			Gabon	Gamba - Mayomba	WWF	WCS/CI	
			Congo	Conckouati	WCS		
3	Lope- Chaillu - Louesse	WCS					
			Gabon	Lope Chaillu	WCS		
			Congo	Louesse	WCS		
4	Dja - Minkebe - Odzala Tri-National	WWF					
			Cameroon	Dja	WWF		
			Congo	Odzala	WCS	WWF/CI	
			Gabon	Minkebe	WWF		
			Gabon	Mwagne	WWF		
			Gabon	Ivindo	WCS		
5	Sangha Tri-National	WWF					
			Cameroon	Lobeke	WWF		
			CAR	Dzanga Sangha	WWF	WCS	
			Congo	Nouabale Ndoki	WCS		
6	Bateke Plateau	WCS					
			Gabon	Bateke	WCS		
			Congo	Lefini	WCS		
7	Lac Tele - Lac Tumba	WWF					
			Congo	Lac Tele	WCS		
			DRC	Lac Tumba	WWF		BCI, IRM
8	Salonga - Lukenie - Sankur	WWF					
			DRC	Salonga	WWF	WCS	ZSM
9	Maringa/Lopori - Wamba	AWF					

			DRC	Maringa/Lopori	AWF	CI	
			DRC	Wamba	AWF		
			DRC	Lomako	WWF		ZSM
10	Maiko - Lutunguru Tayna -Kahuzi Biega	CI					
			DRC	Itwombe	CI	WCS	
			DRC	Maiko	CI	WCS	
			DRC	Kahuzi Biega	WWF	WCS	
			DRC	Taina			
11	Ituru - Epulu - Aru	WCS					
			DRC	Ituri Epulu Aru	WCS		

Notes: ZSM = Zoological Society of Milwaukee, BCI = Bonobo Conservation Initiative; IRM = Innovative Resources Management