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ITURI-EPULU-ARU LANDSCAPE



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO – 2007: “Edo” or rocky outcrops in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve in the Ituri landscape. Photo by © Reto Kuster for USAID

THE LANDSCAPE

Ituri-Epulu-Aru, the northernmost landscape of USAID’s Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE) nine landscapes, is situated in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and spans a large portion of the upper basin of the Ituri River watershed. Covered by a dense network of streams and rivers, with gently rolling forested uplands climbing to savanna hills and the mountains of the Albertine Rift, the landscape contains some of the largest intact tracts of lowland rainforest in the Congo Basin.

Ituri-Epulu-Aru is dominated by the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, a mix of dense evergreen and semi-evergreen forests and swamp forests located in the western half of the landscape. This large, 1.37 million hectare protected area, which is about the size of Connecticut, was recognized for its outstanding biodiversity as early as the first biological explorations in the region at the beginning of the 20th century. The Reserve was designated as a World Heritage Site in 1996. It is home to numerous endemic and threatened species, including one-sixth of the world’s okapi (*Okapia johnstoni*) population.

In addition to the reserve, Ituri-Epulu-Aru has the most intact faunal assemblage of any landscape in DRC. It is home to the world’s largest remaining populations of okapi, forest elephant and eastern chimpanzee. It has 17 species of primate, 10 species of forest antelope, forest pig and buffalo, more than 300 bird species and 500 butterfly species of. The landscape is also rich in plant diversity, including many valuable timber tree species, ~~maintaining~~ some of Africa’s densest carbon stocks. It is also home to the Mbuti and the Efe, hunter-gatherers who are some of Africa’s most ancient indigenous peoples, who have depended on the forest for their daily subsistence for at least 40,000 years.

Area: 40,068 km²

Protected areas:

- Okapi Wildlife Reserve
- Mai-Tatu Community Reserve (proposed)

Main biodiversity threats:

- Growing population pressure (immigration)
- Elephant poaching and ivory trafficking
- Unsustainable commercial bushmeat hunting
- Deforestation and degradation due to unsustainable agriculture practices and illegal logging

Intervention strategies:

- Strengthening the management of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve
- Supporting law enforcement activities
- Creating incentives for the communities in the reserve and other protected areas to support conservation
- Implementing a pilot REDD+* project

Partners:

Wildlife Conservation Society (lead),
World Conservation Global,
local non-governmental organizations,
government partners

*Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, plus conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks

THREATS

Although human population density is relatively low in most of the landscape, the southeastern sections are adjacent to some of the most densely populated and conflict-prone regions of Central Africa.

Deforestation and forest degradation are increasing due to slash and burn agriculture, growing demand for charcoal, and small scale logging and mining. Elephants, chimpanzees, okapi and other animals are targeted by Well-organized, heavily armed poachers for bushmeat and ivory. Several gold mining companies have been awarded overlapping concessions within the landscape, raising the potential for additional ivory and bushmeat poaching with the influx of people and economic activity.

The lack of secure land tenure or local indigenous community control over land creates problems. Without a legal definition of land uses, controls on immigration and regulations protecting traditional hunting, the Mbuti and the Efe, who share the landscape with steadily increasing numbers of small-scale farmer-foragers, are quickly becoming a minority in their own lands.

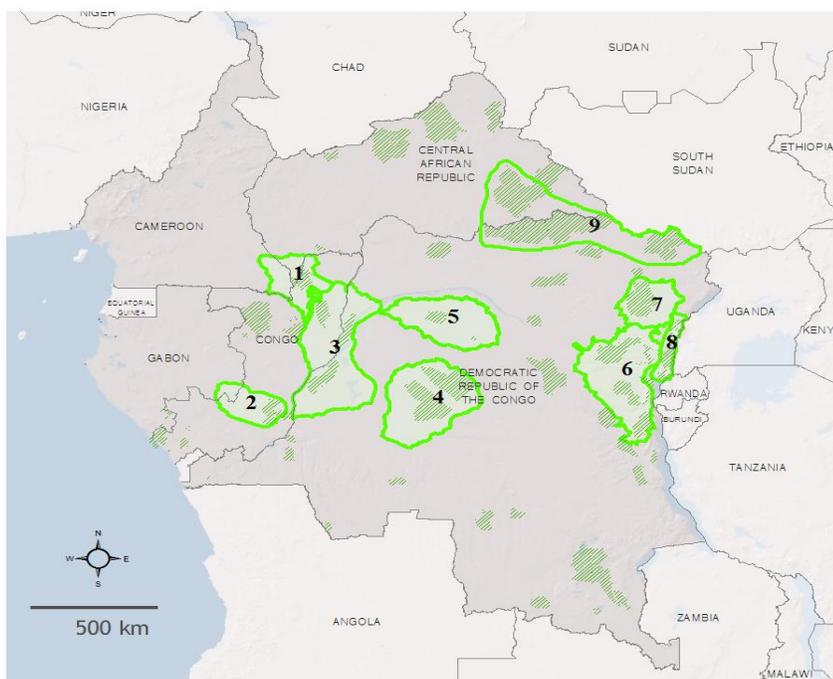
Armed conflict in eastern DRC remains a real threat. In June 2012, the Epulu Station, the headquarters of Okapi Wildlife Reserve and the location of the Conservation and Research Center, was attacked, looted and burned by Mai-Mai rebels, elephant poachers and illegal miners. Six people, including two wildlife rangers, and all of the 14 okapis, which were

CAFEC at a glance

USAID's Central Africa Forest Ecosystems Conservation (CAFEC) program focuses on sustainable forest management, wildlife conservation and REDD+ activities in nine carbon-rich, biologically sensitive and diverse natural forest landscapes covering 32 million hectares of land; spread of covering four countries, notably the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of Congo, the Central Africa Republic and the Rwanda.

CAFEC and the Environmental Monitoring and Policy Support (EMAPS) program, which improves environmental policies and regulations, builds capacity of public and private institutions to support conservation of forest and biodiversity, and boosts the quality and scope of conservation management, climate change mitigation efforts, and data collection to maintain the ecological integrity of the humid forest ecosystem of the Congo Basin.

The CAFEC and EMAPS program are interdependent. The information collected and shared through the local efforts of CAFEC informs national and regional policy work, while improved policies supported under EMAPS allows for better conservation efforts and land use management at the local landscape level. These programs align and contribute to the US National Strategy for Combatting Wildlife Trafficking (CWT).



MAP KEY

- Protected Area
- CARPE Priority Area

USAID Supported Landscapes

- 1 - Tri-National Sangha
- 2 - Léconi-Batéké-Léfini
- 3 - Lac Télé-Lac Tumba
- 4 - Salonga-Lukenie-Sankuru
- 5 - Maringa-Lopori-Wamba
- 6 - Maiko-Tayna-Kahuzi-Biega
- 7 - Ituri-Epulu-Aru
- 8 - Virunga
- 9 - Garamba-Chinko

part of a captive breeding program at the center, died as a result of the attack. The Okapi Wildlife Reserve sustained another armed attack in October 2015, during which a wildlife ranger died. In July 2017, Mai-Mai rebels attacked the park ranger's position killed five people including four Park rangers.



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO – 2007: African Grey Parrots in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve. Photo by © Reto Kuster for USAID

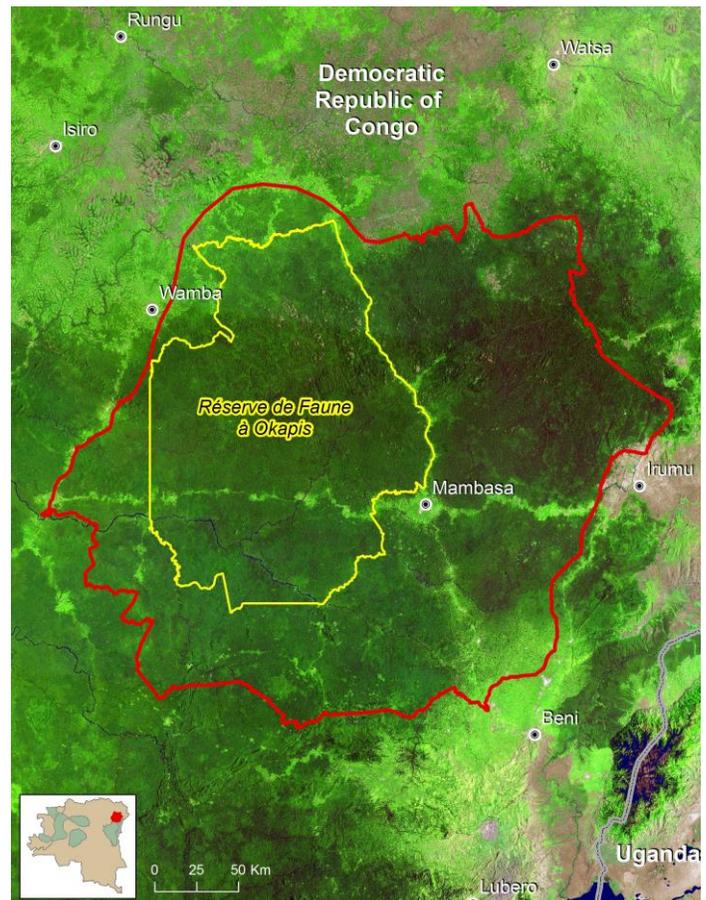
INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

USAID's CARPE implementing partners are working with local communities, including the Mbuti and Efe, and local authorities to balance community and conservation needs, strengthen infrastructure and land tenure security and improve natural resource management. This work includes finalizing and implementing land use plans, setting a foundation of the public private partnership, developing community forest concessions around the reserve, conducting educational outreach and community awareness projects about forest laws and regulations, the use of natural resources and the value of biodiversity.

Deforestation is reduced by ensuring that local people have access to more sustainable food and fuel sources and environmentally-friendly economic options, such as sustainable cocoa production and improved logging practices.

Establishing clear tenure rights for communities living in the forest is also helping to preserve the landscape's rich biodiversity by directly engaging them in the conservation of the resources they need to survive.

CARPE activities are having an impact on armed poaching and unsustainable commercial hunting by strengthening law enforcement using SMART¹ technology, which allows better monitoring and use of resources, particularly along known trafficking routes. Additional and better trained and equipped eco-guards and increased forest patrols are already starting to secure larger areas of the reserve.



Landsat composite image courtesy of the University of Maryland

¹ Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool

² Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, plus conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO – 2014: Discussing cocoa production, introduced to reduce deforestation, in Ituri landscape. Photo by Alastair McNeilage for USAID

Select FY 2017 Accomplishments

- 2588 people trained in natural resource management and/or biodiversity conservation including 682 women in 2017.
- 1309 people trained in global climate change including 235 women in 2017.
- 3,336 farmers received an incentive scheme through cocoa production to help reduce forest cover loss.
- 440 farmers (122 women and 318 men, including 23 native Mbuti pygmies) received improved seeds (peanut, rice and maize).
- 16,636.76 km, representing 66% of the reserves, patrolled, 5119 snares were dismantled and 85 mining and illegal hunting camps were burnt.
- Protected Area surveillance has increased by 60% due to the use of SMART
- Wildlife surveys completed in the Mai Tatu to the East of the Okapi Faunal Reserve revealed that there are about 3,500 chimpanzees in this forest, and that okapi remain there
- An agreement signed between ICCN, local government and local communities' representatives recognized the core conservation area (3296 sq.km) of the Reserve.



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO – 2014: Woman attending literacy class in Ituri landscape. Photo by Alastair McNeilage for USAID



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO: The rare okapi is protected in Okapi Wildlife Reserve situated in the Ituri-Epulu-Aru Landscape. Photo by Jean-Remy Makana for USAID

For more information:

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