

CARPE PHASE IIA - FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT 2003-2006

Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest LANDSCAPE (REPUBLICS OF CONGO & GABON) (WCS LEAD)

1. INTRODUCTION

Landscape: Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest Landscape

Landscape leader: WCS

Funding: \$1,106,501

Cost share: \$1,558,114

1.1 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The overall goal of the Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest Landscape is:

“To conserve wildlife and their habitat in the Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest Landscape using a wildlife-focused approach to landscape planning and implementation, and by synthesizing and disseminating lessons learned to promote the adoption of best practices at WCS and within the conservation community”

Objective 1: Develop and adopt a participatory strategy to reduce threats to natural resources and human welfare within the Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest Landscape.

Objective 2: Develop and implement mechanisms to strategically address threats to natural resources and human welfare across the Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest Landscape.

Objective 3: Develop and implement locally appropriate tools to measure conservation effectiveness and adapt the conservation strategy as the context changes.

1.2 SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS

The Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest Landscape is dominated by a vast ancient sand dune system. The land is covered by large grass and wooded savanna patches separated by fine lines of dense gallery forest, a multitude of small lakes and river valleys. The gallery forests retain a rich compliment of Congo Basin species, including typical forest dwellers such as elephant, buffalo, bush pigs, duikers, gorillas, chimpanzees and several monkey

species. The interface between this Plateau savannah system and the surrounding forest block is a unique habitat supporting a variety of ecotone adapted species.

The Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest Landscape project has been working to convene a broad scale land use planning process in the CBFP-defined priority landscape covering 35,350 km² in the Republic of Congo and Gabon. The primary geographic focus has concentrated on the areas around the Lefini Reserve in the south and the Bambama-Lekana region in Congo, and in and around the Batéké Plateau National Park (BPNP) in Gabon, where the fauna and flora of the region are best preserved.

The Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest Landscape project endeavors to conserve the Batéké Plateau Forest Savanna Landscape using a National Park and managed buffer zone approach to landscape planning, and through the integration of the public and private sectors and local communities in the development of a locally integrated, sustainable structure for long-term conservation. Throughout the course of CARPE phase II, the Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest Landscape project has been instrumental in creating and maintaining a viable system of protected areas and buffer zones in target landscape zones where human impacts are currently limited. Substantial matching funds were mobilized by our Landscape partner the John Aspinall Foundation.

The project was successful in convening the land use planning processes in both of the protected areas that existed at the beginning of CARPE phase II. The project was also instrumental in the creation of a third protected area which is the final phase of becoming a new national park in Congo. The Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest Landscape project been working closely with government and local stakeholders and has convened the process of community based natural resource management in areas adjacent to the protected areas. These successes are due to the hard work of WCS team members, the Governments of Gabon and Congo, and the support of our Landscape partners, as well as the financial and technical support of CARPE.

2. MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND RESULTS

CARPE SO: Reduce the rate of forest degradation and loss of biodiversity through increased local, national, and regional natural resource management capacity.

Intermediate Result 1: Natural Resources Managed Sustainably

Indicator 1.1: Number of landscapes and other focal areas covered by integrated land use plans

The Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest Landscape project along with its partners have used the development of protected areas and buffer zones as a foundation for conservation and landscape level planning through the integration of local communities and public and private sectors. Our activities, while initially focused around three protected areas, are

designed to improve sustainable natural resource management, strengthen government capacity in these efforts and to institutionalize the monitoring of their natural resources. To this end, our project has made accomplishments through activities in the three protected areas and their peripheral zones in the Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest Landscape.

Indicator 1.2: Number of different use-zones within landscapes with sustainable management plans

Lefini Reserve (ROC):

The Lefini Reserve comprising 630,000 ha in southern Congo was created over 50 years ago as a wildlife reserve. Unfortunately, the Lefini Reserve has been largely neglected by the Congolese management authority for decades and wildlife is severely threatened by hunting pressures for commercial bushmeat trade, with 150 km of paved roads that are contiguous with the Reserve on the eastern and northern limits and links to the Brazzaville bushmeat markets. Today, the Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest Landscape project partners have made strong progress towards evaluating and restructuring the limits of the reserve to reduce human impact while protecting much of the remaining intact habitat. The JAF/PPG project has engaged local villages in support of Reserve activities and is participating long term eco-tourism development in the region. The Government of Congo with collaboration of China has embarked on the construction of a hydroelectric dam on the lower Lefini River. This will have a further negative impact on the already threatened eastern section of the Reserve, obliging its declassification. The Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest Landscape project partners are working closely with Government on the re-zoning of the Reserve limits and incorporating several western river courses and their incumbent gallery forest habitats which our ecological surveys show still support viable populations of elephant, buffalo and hippopotamus.

Bambama-Lekana Protected Area (ROC):

As part of a larger landscape management vision the Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest Landscape project has worked closely with the Congolese government to create the Oogoue-Leketi National Park adjoining the Gabonese Bateke Plateau National Park. Once created this combination of adjoining parks will protect the majority of the remaining intact habitat in the plateau. This crown jewel of the landscape will not only protect the remaining stronghold of elephants in the region but will maintain one of the last intact Chaillu forest stands in the landscape. The Minister of Forest Economy and Environment of the Government of Congo announced at the United Nations General Assembly in September the engagement of the Government to create this park in the near future (see success story below for more details).

Batéké Plateau National Park (Gabon):

While high levels of human pressure are exerted from urban Brazzaville and have negatively impacted the Lefini reserve, the remote northwest of the Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest Landscape remains relatively intact. The Gabonese government created the Batéké Plateau National Park in 2002 as part of a new born national park system. This ambitious

undertaking is still in its development stage with the government relying heavily on NGO financing as well as technical and logistic support. The Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest Landscape program invested heavily in jumpstarting the management of this protected area through a series of ecological and social-economic survey and monitoring programs aimed at deepening our understanding of the threats and activities important to the development of a park management plan. Through our work with partners, a basic functional management infrastructure has been put in place with operational monitoring teams active in the field. These activities not only serve to gather information essential to the planning process but act as deterrents to illegal hunting activities in the area.

Our government partners have worked steadily with us to develop a long term management strategy consistent with conservation and other political goals. Together the Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest Landscape partners and Government have worked on participative strategies which produced adapted conceptual models as well as short, medium and long term work plans aimed at sustainable managing this protected area.

Success stories

Government of Congo announcement of the creation of the Oogoue-Leketi National Park forming a transboundary protected area contiguous with the Bateke Plateau National Park in Gabon

Aside from the wide ranging success in achieving project objectives for CARPE phase II, the crowning accomplishment of the Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest Landscape project is the creation of the new Ogooué-Leketi National Park in the Republic of Congo. The Government of Congo's commitment to the imminent creation of the Oogoue-Leketi National Park was announced on September 18th, 2006 at the United Nations General Assembly in New York by Congo's Minister of Forestry Economy Henri Djombo. The creation of the new Park will protect a critical ecotone zone, a block of intact Chaillu forest, and a mix of savanna and forest wildlife. It will adjoin the Batéké National Park in Gabon, which was established by the Government of Gabon with WCS's assistance in 2002. Together this transboundary protected area will safeguard some 600,000 hectares (2,300 square miles). The northern half of Ogooué-Leketi contains a vast and ancient sand dune system, and is covered by large grass and wooded savannah patches separated by fine lines of dense gallery forest, along with a multitude of small lakes and river valleys. The south and west of the new park supports an intact block of Chaillu forest and the Oogue River basin along which a series of important natural forest clearings are used by forest elephants and other large mammals.

WCS project leadership has been working toward the creation of this park since 2003 when the Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest Landscape project undertook ecological and socio-economic surveys in the Bambama-Lékana area of southern Congo. Socio-economic surveys in the peripheral zone around the proposed Bambama-Lékana protected area indicated significant potential to create local community based natural resource management zones with the Lékana, Bambama, and Zanaga communities. Communities in all three areas have expressed strong support for the creation of a national park.

Communities in Bambama hope that a secondary effect of the creation of the park will be that the elephants which are currently causing damage to their crops will return to the protected area as poachers are pushed out. These same elephants also present the potential of becoming a cornerstone in an ecotourism circuit that would offer local and international tourists an easy opportunity to view these magnificent creatures at the many baïa and mineral rich water points that are present in the region.

The project and CNIAF completed a feasibility study for the creation of this park and presented it to the Ministry of Forest Economy and the Environment. The results were encouraging and the Congolese Government subsequently determined that a park at this location was desirable not only for the protection of valuable natural resources but also for the long term development of the region. Over the coming years the project will work with communities and government in this region and will collaborate in the future to develop management capacity and the elaboration of a strategy for the sustainable funding of this key area of the landscape.

See National Geographic Website for More Information:

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2006/09/060925-congo-parks.html>

3. CONCLUSIONS

The WCS led Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest Landscape program has largely been successful in implementing activities and achieving the goals established by CARPE. Early in this phase it was necessary to develop substantial physical infrastructure and acquire human resources to develop the initiative to meet the requirements established by CARPE's strategic objectives. Considerable conservation effort must continue in order to protect this unique landscape. And at the same time, as conservation practices are put into operation, the persistent need of natural resource management capacity building will continue as a high priority.

In reality, the SO of CARPE once achieved will have a wide ranging positive impact not only on the conservation of the Congo Basin Forests but economic development of many parts of rural Central Africa. This ambitious program however will require the long term commitment of all partners as well as the political will from sometimes indifferent and often unstable governments. It is necessary to bring together skill sets on 1) natural resource management and planning and 2) institutional capacity building in order to achieve CARPE's objectives. The consortium platform is one way of doing this. The limitation of this approach lies in the cost of funding both of these components at the same time. This approach requires a substantial commitment of significant financial support to perform both of these activities in parallel.

Limited financial resources spread between the two components, will result in neither component being adequately funded, or one of the activities succeeding at the expense of the other. Additionally, practical experience in central Africa has shown that during the time it takes to develop the local and national capacity to manage natural resources sustainably, the resources continue to be degraded. This degradation is often so

widespread and pervasive that it creates conflicts which may destabilize the governments in which capacity building is ostensibly taking place.

Therefore for the CARPE SO to be achieved, a strong emphasis should be placed on stabilizing and protecting natural resources as a priority while developing a capacity building program with combined support from other CBFP partners. If this is not done then we run the serious risk of creating management capacity without having anything left to manage.

4. LESSONS LEARNED

The lessons learned are many-fold. First, endeavoring to establish regional/landscape wide land use plans requires an extensive set of flexible tools. These tools do not exist all in one place and assembling them into a functional program requires considerable effort and time. Although the Leconi-Batéké-Lefini Forest Landscape program started without any existing infrastructure or trained personal on the ground, the project made significant advancements toward CARPE's SO. The acquisition of basic material, structures and logistics was an essential priority which proved more time consuming than anticipated. Additionally, the relatively lacking local human resource capacity in Gabon necessitated the establishment of previously non-existent training centers and programs. Again, these factors contributed to slow implementation of several activities. In such situations, the development of basic infrastructure and human resources needs to be explicitly accepted as a priority activity.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the case of Gabon, the CARPE objectives were never clearly understood by many Government officials. This resulted in substantial misunderstandings regarding use of equipment and dispersal of funds. While the consortium partners implementing the CARPE projects throughout the various landscapes must shoulder some of the responsibility for this misunderstanding, CARPE could better be served if CARPE representatives facilitate an annual workshop in each country whereby all relevant governments officials participate in discussions about the scope and limits of implementing CARPE's Strategic Objectives as well as the roles and responsibilities of Consortium members who are awarded USAID/CARPE Cooperative Agreements.

Senior CARPE personnel undertook several productive visits at regional and country program headquarters and many field sites. Given the great value of getting direct feedback from CARPE we recommend that expanded time and effort be allocated towards field site visits. It is important to visit each site within each segment to guide CARPE related activities, to assist in monitoring and reporting activities and to liaise between the CTO, consortium partner leadership and field staff.

6. ANNEXES

Annex I – items purchased with US government money over US\$ 5,000

- a) Please refer to the [Bateke - ROC, WCS, FY06, Equipmt-DisposalLetter](#) for the list of equipment

Annex II – disposal plan for items in Annex I above

- b) Please refer to the [Bateke - ROC, WCS, FY06, Equipmt-DisposalLetter](#) for the disposal plan

Annex III – GIS files of landscape zones and limits

These shape files will be sent directly to Jackie Doremus as requested.