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# LAC TÉLÉ-LAC TUMBA LANDSCAPE

## THE LANDSCAPE

Lac Télé-Lac Tumba is the largest of the nine USAID-supported landscapes. More than 500 kilometers long and 250 kilometers wide, it straddles the border between the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Republic of Congo (ROC). Situated in the alluvial plain of the vast Central Basin region of the Congo River watershed, it is one of the most biologically diverse wetlands in Africa.

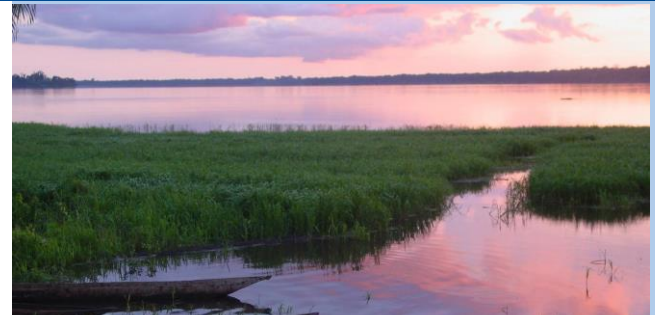
Characterized by swamp-forests, grasslands, floating prairies, seasonal lakes, ponds and rivers, the landscape is extraordinary for its biodiversity. It includes the world's largest freshwater swamp-forest and the second largest freshwater, non-coastal wetland. Parts of Lac Télé-Lac Tumba are so remote and inaccessible that they remain unreached. Its impact on the Congo Basin's climate, river flow and carbon stocks – both tropical hardwood forests and peat – is likely high but is still poorly understood.

Scientists have discovered that this landscape is in the midst of the world's largest tropical peatland estimated to store the equivalent of three years' worth of the world's total fossil fuel emissions. The peatlands cover 145,500 km<sup>2</sup> – an area larger than England. The swamps could lock in 30bn tons of carbon, making the region one of the most carbon-rich ecosystems on Earth.

The northern part of the landscape is dominated by the Oubangui River, a main tributary of the Congo River that flows south from the Central African Republic. The river flows on a nearly flat incline as little as three centimeters per kilometer. During seasonal flood periods the current causes the water's flow to reverse and inundate areas hundreds of kilometers to the north.

The southern part of the landscape includes broad, shallow lakes, such as Lac Tumba and Lac Mai Ndombe, supporting more than 450 species of fish, with 109 species in Lac Tumba alone. Lac Tumba connects to the Congo River by a channel, with water either flowing into or out of the lake depending on the season and water levels.

The remote nature of parts of Lac Télé-Lac Tumba means that it still holds surprises. In 2006-2007, USAID implementing partner researchers recorded a previously unknown population of an estimated 125,000



REPUBLIC OF CONGO: Sunset over the Ubangi River in the Lac Télé landscape. Photo by © Bruce Marcot/USFS

**Area:** 126,440 km<sup>2</sup>

### Protected areas:

- Lac Télé Community Reserve
- Ngiri Triangle Nature Reserve
- Tumba-Ledima Natural Reserve
- Mabali Scientific Reserve

### Main biodiversity threats:

- Poaching for bushmeat and ivory trade
- Overfishing
- Bush fires
- Unsustainable firewood harvesting and charcoal production
- Small-scale logging

### Intervention strategies:

- Managing national and community reserves
- Promoting sustainable economic activities
- Developing climate change mitigation activities

### Partners:

Wildlife Conservation Society (lead),  
World Wildlife Fund,  
World Resources Institute,  
local non-governmental organizations,  
government entities such as ICCN

Western lowland gorillas living in the swamp forests of the sprawling Lac Télé Community Reserve, the highest known local density in the world.

Along with the gorillas, the sections of the landscape that have been inventoried are home to as much as a quarter of the world's populations of both chimpanzees and bonobos, forest elephants, hippos, 16 diurnal monkey species and seven duiker species, more than 7,000 species of plants and more than 350 species of birds, including important migratory waterfowl populations.

## THREATS

The nature of the threats to Lac Télé-Lac Tumba differs according to country.

In DRC, which has just over half of the area and most of the 2 million inhabitants living in the landscape, the greatest threat is the loss of the forest caused by commercial and small scale logging, firewood collection and charcoal production.

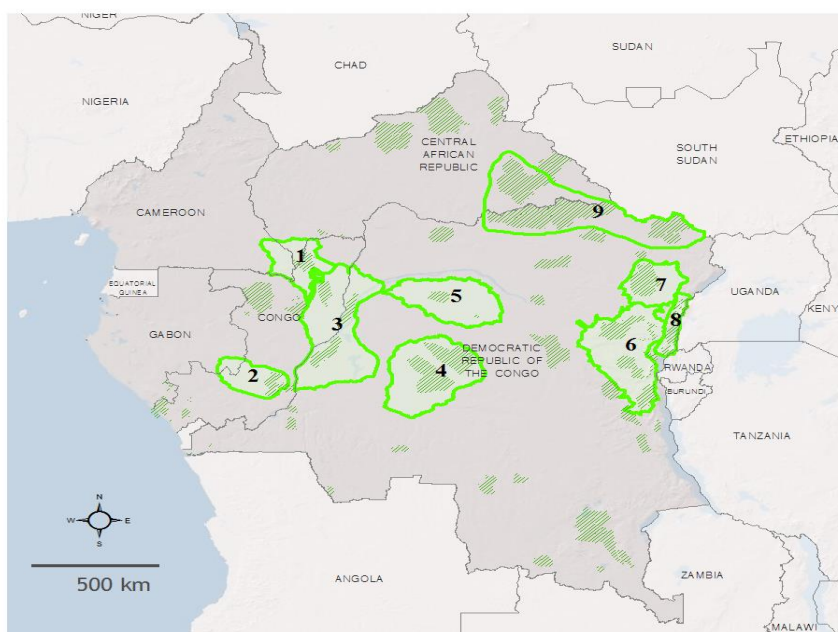
In ROC, where the human population is much lower, poaching for bushmeat and ivory are the biggest threats, along with wildlife trafficking of live animals, including grey parrots and fish eagles. Other threats include bush fires and overfishing.

## 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 country, especially 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 with and contribute to the Presidential Initiative on Global Climate Change and the 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



# INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

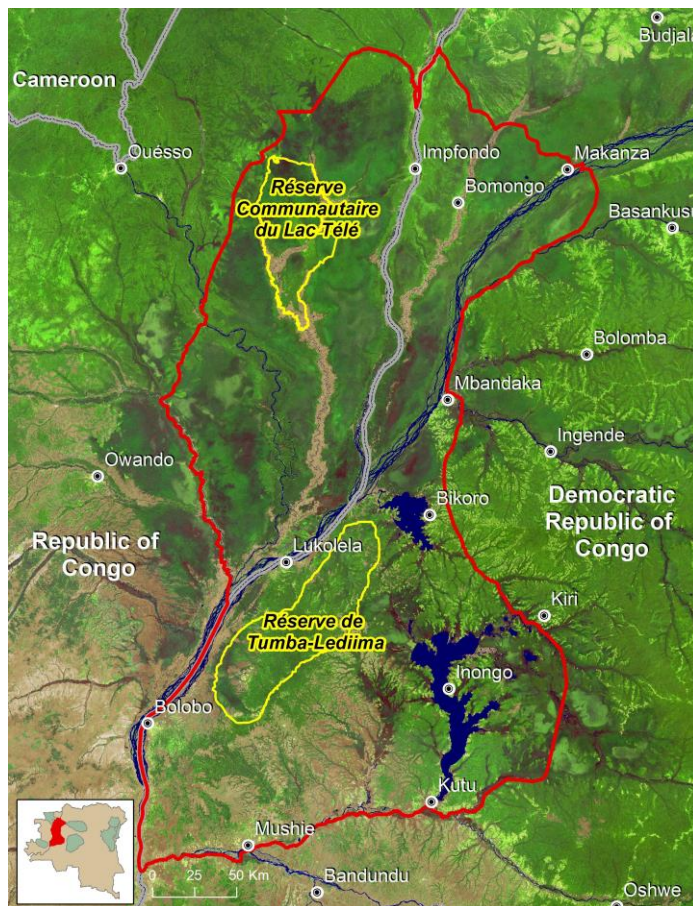
More than in any other USAID-supported landscape, the focus in Lac Télé-Lac Tumba is on organizing, educating and mobilizing community-based organizations to develop land use plans designed to prevent forest and biodiversity loss.

The communities on the ROC side of the landscape were displaced from the forest to the river under the colonial administration, but maintained much of their original social structure and cohesion. Much of the rest of the landscape also in DRC retains strong community identity elements, with widely recognized, traditional natural resource rights and management systems.

These firm social foundations allow CARPE implementing partners to work with local people to conserve the rich resources around them. New agricultural approaches are reducing the need to cut primary forests for slash and burn plots, and alternative sources of protein are lowering local demand for bush-meat,

SMART<sup>1</sup> technology is increasing the effectiveness of patrols and improving accountability in the management of protected areas, supporting anti-poaching patrols and contributing to the effective prosecution of poachers.

The landscape's huge carbon stocks are being conserved through the development of plans for REDD+<sup>2</sup> offset payments to help reduce deforestation. This initiative includes the Tumba-Ledima Natural Reserve, a 200-kilometer



Landsat composite image courtesy of the University of Maryland

long section of rich forest running parallel to the south bank of the Congo in the DRC section of the landscape, which is one of DRC's key REDD+ pilot areas.



REPUBLIC OF CONGO – 2006:  
The slow-flowing Likouala-aux-Herbes River ('Grassy Likouala River') is the main artery of the Lac Télé swamps. The river rises and the swamp floods several months after the rains; subsurface seeps and flows from neighboring rivers flowing from the Central African savannas to the north fill the swamps around Lac Télé.  
Photo by Hugo Rainey for USAID

<sup>1</sup> Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool

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





REPUBLIC OF CONGO – 2009: Eco-guards release confiscated crocodiles in Lac Télé.  
Photo by Felin Twagirashyaka for USAID

## Select FY 2017 Accomplishments

- 2,122,473 Hectares of biological significance are now put under improved management.
- Successfully closed down an illegal domestic ivory market, seizure of 20kg of ivory and 4 traffickers arrested.
- Carbon sequestration study published and reveals that an estimate of 30 billion tons of carbon (More than 5.5 billion cars' CO<sub>2</sub> emission per year) are stored in the peat swamps (145,500 km<sup>2</sup>) of the Landscape, making the region one of the most carbon-rich ecosystems on Earth.
- 531 cookstoves produced and distributed to reduce wood energy consumption in Mbandaka and the urban areas around the LTLT landscape.
- Restoration of 282, 6 ha of degraded areas in the Scientific Reserve of Mabalie.
- Financial and technical support provided to 48 agroforestry family groups to ensure that 240 ha were put under the new integrated production system.
- 36 application packages related to community forests allocation officially submitted with a total area of 261,775 ha and 13 approved.
- Participatory mapping of 37 terroirs recognized as community land or private land (CBNRM) with a total area of 148,893 ha.
- Wetlands and Fisheries Management Plan and a Fisheries Charter



MALEBO, LAC TUMBA – 2015: Traditional Chief at land use planning meeting in Mbou Mon Tour Village. Photo by Jordan Kimball for USAID

**For more information:**

[www.usaid.gov/central-africa-regional](http://www.usaid.gov/central-africa-regional)

[cod.forest-atlas.org](http://cod.forest-atlas.org)

[CARPEManagement@usaid.gov](mailto:CARPEManagement@usaid.gov)

