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BATÉKÉ-LECONI-LÉFINI LANDSCAPE



REPUBLIC OF CONGO – 2015: A view of the Lefini Valley. Photo by Lucie Escoufflaire for USAID

THE LANDSCAPE

Batéké-Leconi-Léfini, the westernmost of the eight USAID-supported landscapes, is located in central Republic of Congo (ROC). It includes the imposing Massif Du Chaillu, a mosaic of ancient grasslands and deep valleys with gallery forests.

This unique ecosystem is dominated by a collection of Congo River tributary watersheds and the Batéké plateau. The plateau forms the western edge of the vast Congo Basin, a table-flat sedimentary landform stretching east for more than 1,500 kilometers across the center of neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Batéké's soft sandstone and sand deposits form a major underground aquifer. Rainwater from this aquifer percolates through the hills, feeding the headwaters of the major rivers in Gabon and southern ROC, including those flowing through the landscape.

Batéké-Leconi-Léfini's unusual combination of forest and savanna ecosystems makes it an important biodiversity conservation and carbon sequestration area. In the west, it has significant populations of forest dwelling species, including forest elephants, gorillas, chimpanzees, bush pigs, duikers and monkeys, with recent evidence of lions. These are combined with savanna species in the eastern sections, such as Grimms's duiker, side-striped jackal and Denham's bustard. In addition, there are several species of monkeys, buffaloes, crocodiles, storks and other water birds, wild orchids and butterflies.

Area: 35,164 km²

Protected areas:

- Léfini Faunal Reserve
- Lésio-Louna Gorilla Sanctuary
- Ogooué-Leketi National Park (proposed)

Main biodiversity threats:

- Poaching for bushmeat and ivory
- Unsustainable logging
- Slash and burn agriculture
- Bushfires
- Unsustainable firewood harvesting and charcoal production

Intervention strategies:

- Improving management of protected areas
- Increasing wildlife law enforcement and prosecution activities
- Improving farming techniques
- Developing a REDD+* program addressing uncontrolled burning and firewood management

Partners:

Wildlife Conservation Society (lead),
The Aspinnall Foundation,
World Resources Institute,
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

A growing population, lack of viable economic alternatives, ivory poaching, illegal hunting and logging, slash and burn agriculture and bushfires are combining to create significant challenges for the conservation of Batéké-Leconi-Léfini.

Although part of the landscape was set aside as a hunting reserve in the 1950s, little government investment since then has meant the area is largely unprotected. A new national park has been proposed in the west of the landscape to help protect endangered species. However, the uncontrolled expansion of agriculture around growing towns, and illegal logging, are contributing to ongoing deforestation and forest degradation.

In more remote areas, bushmeat hunters and ivory poachers, including the employees of industrial logging companies, are taking advantage of new roads to export these lucrative products from previously unexploited areas.

In the impoverished savanna areas, deforestation for agriculture and brush cutting for charcoal are eliminating scarce timber resources. Traditional systems of controlled burning are no longer practiced, and have instead been replaced by uncontrolled bush fires set during the dry season to clear land. These fires prevent forest regeneration and reduce valuable carbon stocks.

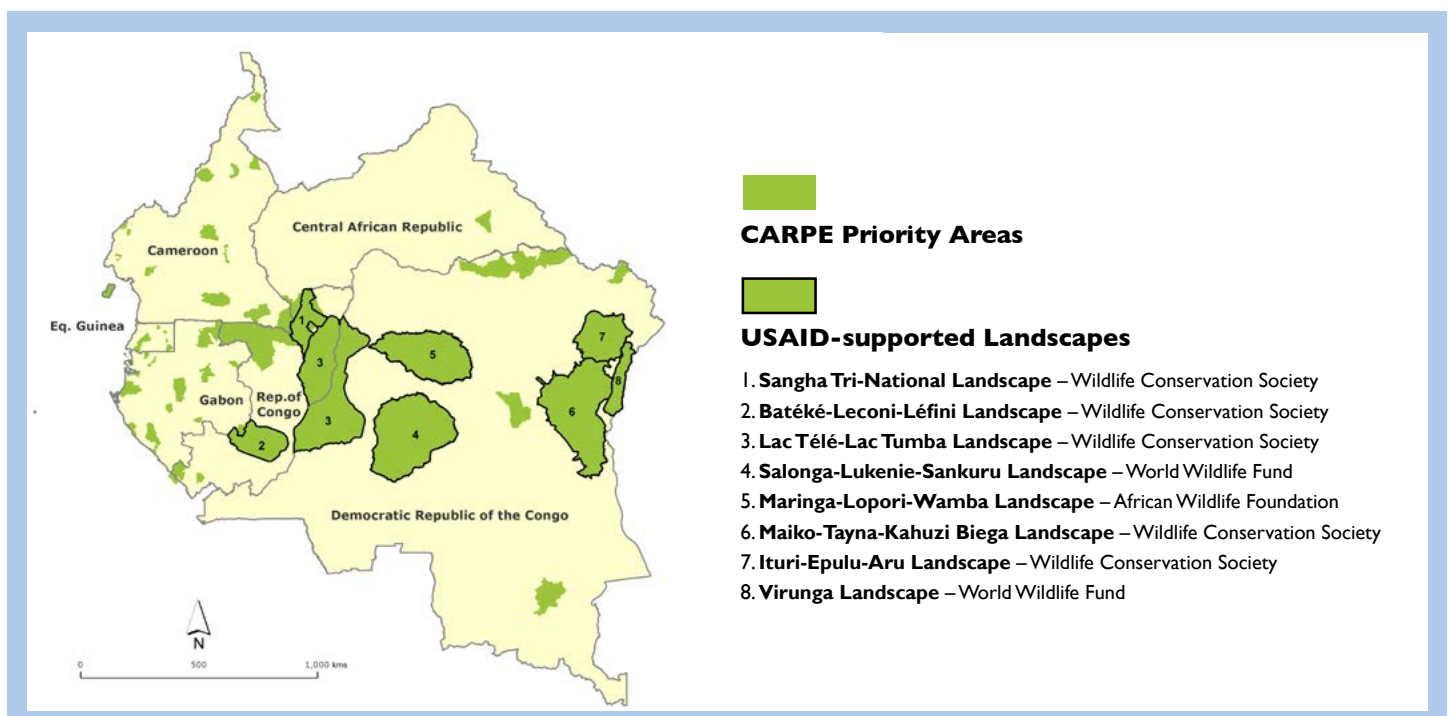
CAFEC at a glance

USAID's Central Africa Forest Ecosystems Conservation (CAFEC) project supports the sustainable management of targeted forest landscapes representing some of the most important ecosystems found across the vast Congo Basin as the foundation for building low carbon emissions economies and mitigating threats to biodiversity.

USAID's implementing partners – the African Wildlife Foundation, Wildlife Conservation Society and the World Wildlife Fund – protect and build capacity to manage eight landscapes covering 29 million hectares of land, six in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and two in the Republic of Congo.

CAFEC and the Environmental Monitoring and Policy Support (EMAPS) project, which improves the quality and scope of conservation policy-making, and forest monitoring, analysis and information dissemination, are “institutionalizing” the management of the Congo Basin forests by building individual, organizational and systems capacity during the third phase of USAID's Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE) program.

The CAFEC and EMAPS projects are complementary. 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. They both align with and contribute to the Presidential Initiative on Global Climate Change and the National Strategy for Combatting Wildlife Trafficking.



INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

USAID's CARPE implementing partners have already helped preserve parts of Batéké-Leconi-Léfini's important biodiversity. In the Léfini Wildlife Reserve, located in the east of the landscape, local groups have conserved a remnant population of elephants. The program is supporting these communities to secure the area from hunting and to develop an eco-tourism project.

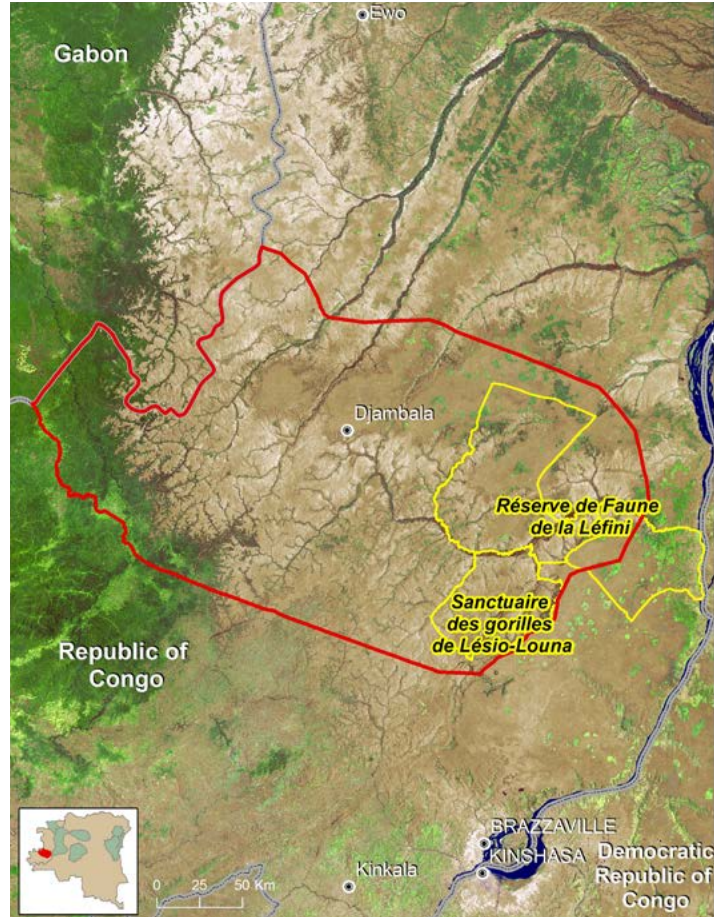
Just to the south of Léfini, the Lésio-Luna Gorilla Sanctuary, now managed by the Aspinall Foundation, provides a refuge for recovering native populations of hippo, sitatunga, gorilla and monkey species, and confiscated and orphaned chimpanzees. The introduction of additional eco-guard patrols has resulted in increased sightings of hippos and other species that were on the brink of local extinction, and the re-introduced gorilla population continues to flourish.

A proposed new national park – Ogooué-Leketi National Park, adjacent to Gabon's Plateau Batéké National Park – would create a trans-national protected area of half a million hectares, and protect an important forest savanna transition area thought to hold the last remaining lions of the Congo Basin. The program is working with local government staff to increase anti-poaching activity in the area, and to maintain pressure on the nearby logging companies to comply with legal requirements.

Local communities are encouraged to adopt more sustainable livelihood approaches to reduce dependence on bushmeat, reduce deforestation caused by slash and burn agriculture, and generate sustainable sources of firewood.

The introduction of SMART¹ technology is helping to combat illegal poaching and bring offenders to justice. As more teams are trained to use SMART, levels of bushmeat hunting and ivory poaching are decreasing, giving endangered species a chance to recover.

A REDD+² project under development for the Léfini and Lésio-Louana Reserves, based on promoting reforestation by reducing uncontrolled burning, establishing firewood plantations, and introducing improved cooking stoves, has been accepted by the ROC government as a national pilot project and linked to its national REDD strategy.



Landsat composite image courtesy of the University of Maryland

Batéké-Leconi-Léfini has an unusual potential for sustainable development due to its relative proximity to Brazzaville (about 100 kilometers south), its well-organized communities and its open habitat, which means that it might be possible to develop several economically viable activities, including the generation of carbon credits, commercial livestock production, agroforestry and tourism, resulting in a healthy balance of community and commercial interests and conservation priorities.



REPUBLIC OF CONGO – 2015: CAPRE's ongoing support has been instrumental in preserving a remnant population of forest elephants. Photo by Lucie Escoufflaire for USAID

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



REPUBLIC OF CONGO – 2015: Community members are producing fast growing tree species in the Mpama tree nursery on the Batéké Plateau. Photo by Tim Rayden for USAID

Select Recent Accomplishments

- Working with the ROC government to have Ogooué-Leketi National Park officially designated as a protected area.
- Supporting community groups to protect biodiversity in Léfini and Lésio-Luna.
- Training reserve rangers in data collection using SMART (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool) techniques during patrols.
- Developing community agroforestry initiatives with local communities and ROC partners.
- Introducing a national REDD+ pilot project for Léfini and Lésio-Louna.



REPUBLIC OF CONGO – 2015: Controlled, early burning in an experimental fire management plot established in the Léfini Faunal Reserve. Photo by Lucie Escoufflaire for USAID

For more information:

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