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LAC TÉLÉ-LAC TUMBA LANDSCAPE

THE LANDSCAPE

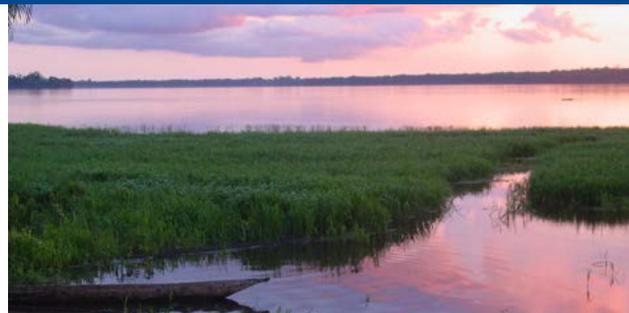
Lac Télé-Lac Tumba, the largest of the eight USAID-supported landscapes, is situated in the alluvial plain of the vast Central Basin region of the Congo River watershed, one of the most biologically diverse wetlands in all of Africa. More than 500 kilometers long and 250 kilometers wide, this immense landscape, straddling the border between the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Republic of Congo (ROC), is 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 unresearched. 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.

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 3 centimeters per kilometer – that 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 Western lowland gorillas living in the swamp forests of the sprawling Lac Télé Community Reserve, the highest known local density in the world. More recently, the discovery of vast peat bogs, covering an area the size of England, underscores the landscape's significant reservoirs of carbon and its vital global role in carbon sequestration.



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

Area: 126,440 km²

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
- Slash and burn agriculture, bush fires
- Unsustainable firewood harvesting and charcoal production
- Small-scale logging

Intervention strategies:

- Managing national and community reserves
- Promoting sustainable alternative activities
- Developing REDD+* activities

Partners:

Wildlife Conservation Society (lead),
World Wildlife Fund,
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

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 and slash and burn agriculture.

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, slash and burn agriculture, bush fires and overfishing.

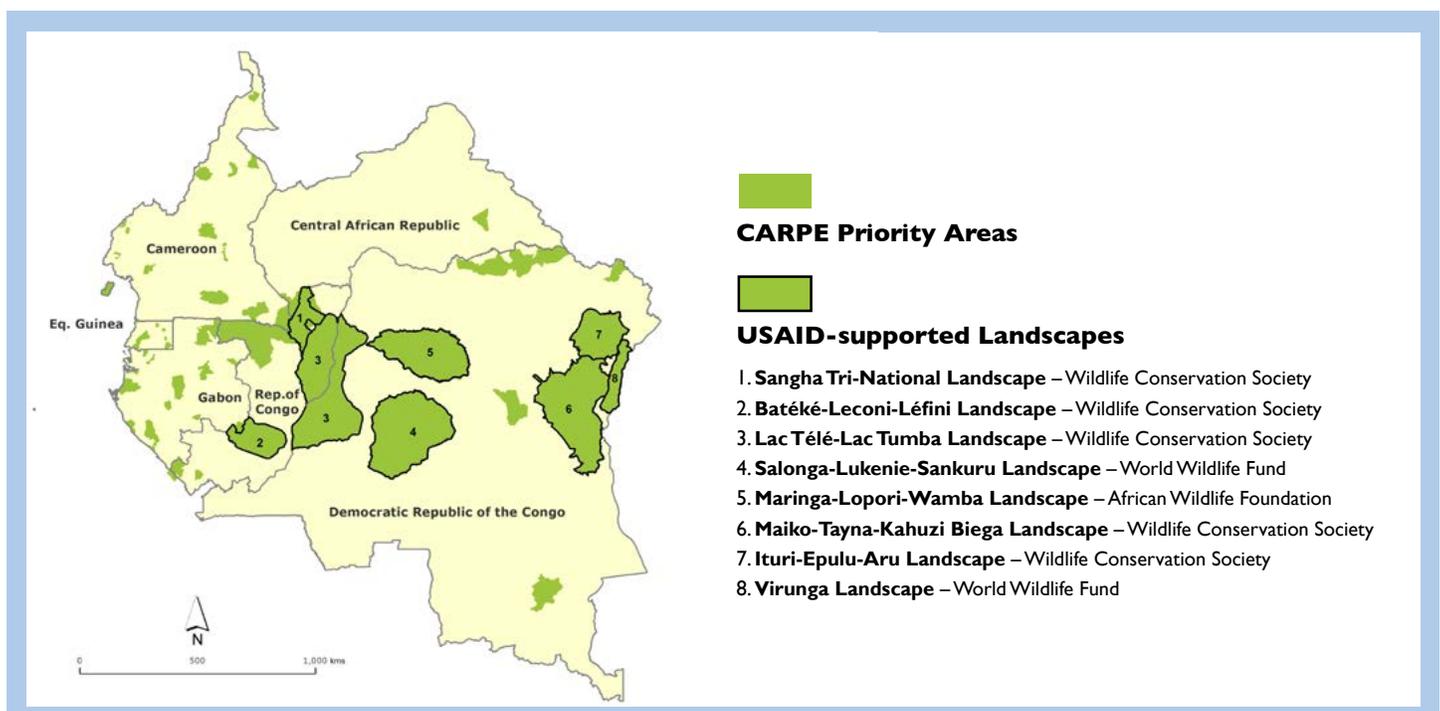
CAFEC at a glance

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

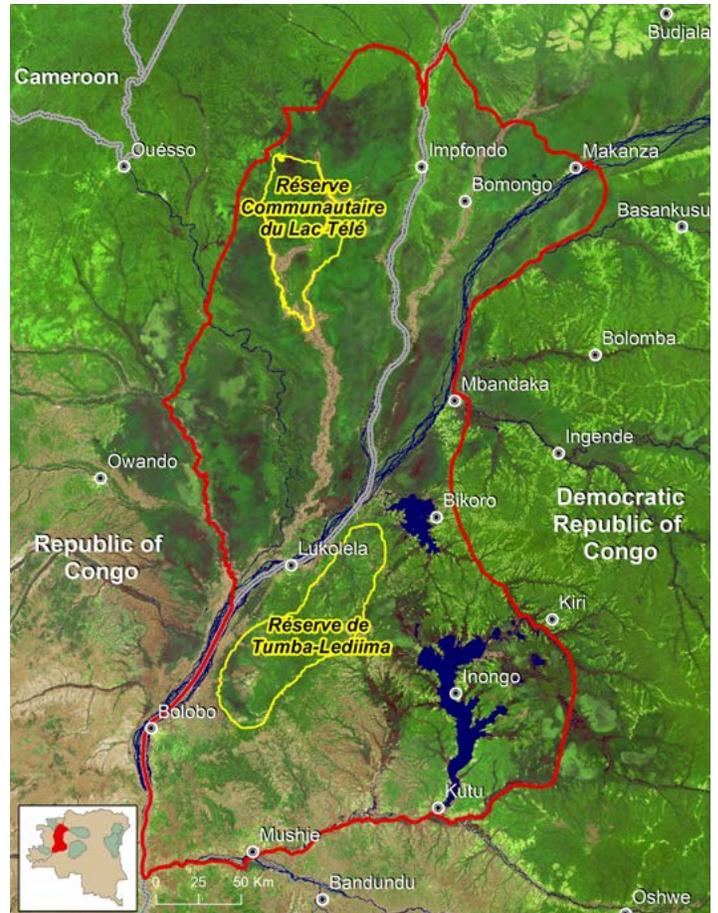
More than in any other USAID-supported landscape, the focus in Lac Télé-Lac Tumba is on organizing, educating and mobilizing community-based organizations to develop land use plans designed to prevent forest and biodiversity loss.

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 retains strong community identity elements, with widely recognized, traditional natural resource rights and management systems.

These firm social foundations allow USAID's CARPE implementing partners to work with local people to conserve the rich resources around them. New agricultural approaches and model farms are reducing the need to cut primary forests for slash and burn plots, alternative sources of protein are lowering local demand for bushmeat, and new tourism initiatives are creating jobs and much-needed incomes.

SMART¹ 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+² offset payments to help reduce deforestation. This 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

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

Select Recent Accomplishments

- Supporting 16 local associations to develop new agricultural methods and new crops, including establishing model farms in nine villages.
- Identifying alternative agricultural methods and transportation options for remote Lac Télé regions.
- Introducing SMART (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool) technology in protected areas of the landscape.
- Developing new anti-poaching and trafficking strategies, including regular surveillance missions to control boats, motorbikes and vehicles.
- Reducing deforestation through REDD+.



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

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