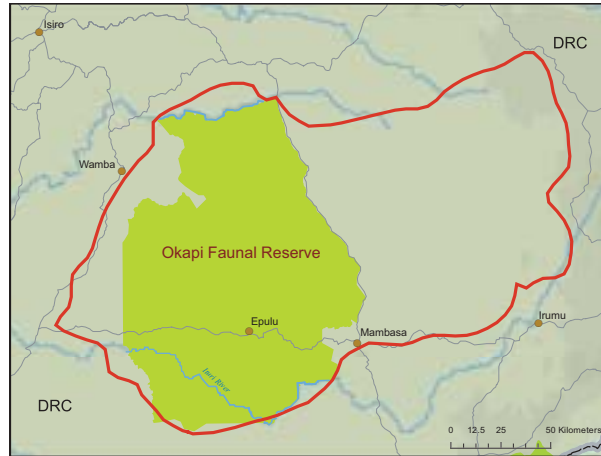# Ituri Forest Landscape

The Ituri Forest Landscape is one of Central Africa's most biologically diverse regions, containing an exceptionally rich bird and mammal fauna, including major populations of the endemic okapi. The Ituri River watershed contains a largely undocumented and lightly exploited fish fauna. The Ituri Forest is a globally important reservoir of floristic diversity, with a significant flora restricted to a chain of spectacular granite inselbergs that span the forest-savanna boundary. About 30,000 nomadic hunting-and-gathering Mbuti and Efe pygmies live in the landscape. They have long shared the forest with shifting cultivators. More recently, immigrants from the conflict-torn Albertine Rift and savannas that border the Ituri to the east and north have settled here. These pioneers have led the expansion of commercial-scale agriculture, mining, and forestry into the landscape. During the recent civil war, militias occupied the Ituri Forest and fought for access to the landscape's ivory, bushmeat, minerals, and wood. Recovery from the conflict has been initiated; however, the institutional/legal framework for protection and management remains weak at both local and national scale.
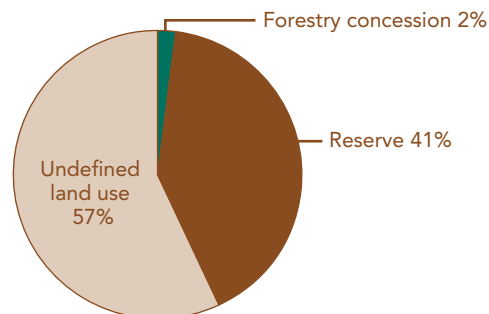
Sustainable Resource Management and Natural Resource Governance

A capture station for okapi was established at Epulu in the 1950s. The okapi reserve (RFO) was established in 1992, covering nearly 41 percent of the landscape, with a mandate to ensure biodiversity conservation in conjunction with sustainable use of forest resources by local communities. Managed land use was initiated in the RFO in 2000 with the establishment of agricultural zones in collaboration with local communities and ICCN. Management of subsistence hunting was initiated in the Epulu sector of the RFO with the participation of Mbuti hunters in 2004. Control of immigration into the landscape and land use practices to protect important biodiversity in areas not included in the RFO are a priority. CBFP partners will work beyond current landscape limits to the south in an important ecological transition zone.

Natural Resource Monitoring Institutionalized

In the RFO, law enforcement monitoring is mandated to ICCN. Community participation in monitoring agricultural and hunting zones in the reserve is organized through CEFRECOF. Since 1994, CEFRECOF, WCS, and the Smithsonian Institution have been monitoring 30,000 trees in four Forest Dynamics Plots in the Ituri Forest. These plots can be directly compared to a network of standardized large plots in 13 other tropical countries. The Ituri plots indicate that distinctive forest stands that are dominated by a single canopy are equally biologically diverse to adjacent mixed-species forests. The Forest Dynamics Plots have been used as a platform for basic ecological research, forest management experimentation, and training of many Central African botanists. Outside the RFO, monitoring of artisanal forestry was initiated through CEFRECOF in 2002. RFO is a site of the MIKE program, and one elephants survey has been completed to date. A second systematic, site-wide survey of elephants, apes, and human impact is in progress.

Okapi Faunal Reserve

Forestry concession 2%
Reserve 41%
Undefined land use 57%

Landscape Highlights

Surface Area: 33,188 km²

Partners: ICCN, WCS, GIC, SI

National Parks: 0; protected areas: 1 (13,700 km² or 41% of landscape)

Biodiversity
Plants: 121 plant families containing 1,192 species
Large mammals: 62 (forest)
Birds: 312 (forest)

Threatened Species

Animals
- Forest elephant
- Okapi
- Owl-faced monkey
- Fishing genet
- White-bellied duiker
- Golden-naped weaver

Plants
- *Encephalartos ituriensis*
- *Encephalartos septentrionalis*
- *Euphorbia bwambensis*
- *Euphorbia venenifica*
- *Euphorbia teke*

Human Occupation
- Hunter-gatherers
- Traditional forest gardeners
- Recent immigrants

Major Threats to Landscape

Direct
- Immigration and settlement
- Unsustainable hunting
- Artisanal mining
- Artisanal forestry
- Military occupation

Indirect
- Lack of legal mandate for zoning
- Weak enforcement capacity
- Weak land tenure
- Civil strife and insecurity

Key Interventions

- Landscape base map and site database
- Post-conflict baseline inventory
- Land use zoning in the RFO
- Development of monitoring programs
- Construction of patrol posts in the RFO
- RFO-community information and education network