



Gabon

TYPE OF ACTIVITY:

- Reimbursable technical assistance
- Memorandum of Understanding

NPS CONTACT:

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YEAR INITIATED: 2003

PARTNERS: USAID; Conseil National des
Parcs Nationaux du Gabon (CNP), also
known as Parcs Gabon; U.S. Embassy –
Libreville



Background

Gabonese President Bongo's September 2002 declaration of his country's first 13 national parks followed the Johannesburg Summit (WSSD), and became a focus of the international Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP), chaired initially by the U.S. Government, but now by France. US and international NGO's have been actively involved in conservation efforts in Gabon and the Congo Basin for two decades and their efforts laid the groundwork for and served as the impetus to President Bongo's action.

NPS played a small role in the U.S. interagency effort on CBFP, beginning with the Alaska Regional Director's participation in a USG needs assessment visit to the Congo Basin in February 2003. In July 2003, NPS received President Bongo's letter requesting NPS technical assistance for Gabon's efforts to launch its new national parks. During a study tour arranged by the State Department in September 2003, Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks served as hosts and NPS staff provided briefings both at the parks and at the National Conservation Training Center in West Virginia.

Activities

With the Congo Basin **study tour** participants at Grand Teton NP in September 2003, NPS and Gabon's National Council on National Parks (CNP) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to collaborate in training and capacity building projects concerning conservation and management of national parks. USAID and NPS's September 2004 interagency agreement provided funding for NPS to provide 2 workshops: on national parks legal and policy frameworks; and another on civic engagement.

The first **workshop** was held December 2004 in Libreville, as a public hearing for Gabon's draft parks legislation. Prior to this, NPS, led by Deputy Director Murphy, visited Loango National Park in the Gamba region and were able to appraise park infrastructure, ranger training needs and eco-guide abilities. 60 Gabonese officials attended, including all 15 park superintendents, or 'conservateurs,' as they are called.

NPS donated \$25,000 of **surplus equipment**, including hiking and patrol boots and shoes, and uniform pants, which were officially delivered to Parks Gabon during the December 2004 workshop in Libreville.

With Embassy Libreville and the State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), NPS arranged a 3-week U.S. **study tour** in August 2005 for the Loango NP conservateur to visit Everglades, Fire Island, Great Smoky Mountains and an extended stay at Shenandoah National Parks for a 3-day shadow assignment with the park Superintendent and his Management Assistant.

A second **workshop** was given in November 2005 for Gabon's 15 conservateurs and 10 Parcs Gabon staff, covering concessions, gateway communities, mining in the parks, planning, partnerships and border parks. Two francophone NPS trainers from Olympic National Park delivered the majority of the workshop materials and have maintained ongoing contacts with several of the Gabonese conservateurs since the visit. It is hoped that sister park relationships can be established through these contacts.

NPS hosted 4 conservateurs – from Birougou, Mayumba, Minkebe & Monts de Cristal national parks - in April 2006 on a US **study tour** on various parks management issues at a number of relevant NPS units, including Big Cypress National Preserve (mining issues), Great Smoky Mountains National Park (biodiversity conservation) and the Mather Training Center in Harpers Ferry, WV.

Two NPS units in the latter half of 2006 expressed interest in establishing **sister park** relationships with similar national parks in Gabon – Lope and Mayumba. The Gabonese conservateurs of each park had expressed interest in these no/low-cost relationships during their April 2006 visit to the U.S.