

Land-use planning strategy document

**Landscape 3, Lopé–Chaillu–Louesse
Zone 3010003
Birougou Mountains National Park, Gabon**

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1 Introduction

Birougou National Park was created in 2002 and covers 690km² of rainforest in the highest part of the Massif du Chaillu, a remote area of southern Gabon. The climate is cool and wet and it is believed that the forest here persisted even during the driest periods of the ice ages, producing an elevated level of biodiversity and species richness today. The park and its bufferzone are one of the few remaining blocks of unlogged forest in the Chaillu landscape. Whilst its diversity remains little known, surveys conducted in 2007 found a considerable population of great apes and confirmed the presence of the sun-tailed guenon, a cyrptic monkey species endemic to Gabon. The zone that was currently the park was densely populated in pre-colonial times, but over the past 100 years, villages have moved to the roads that run in the north, western and eastern peripheries of the park. A number of families still use the park however, but mostly on a seasonal basis and the overall impact is low.

The WCS-led consortium has been active in the field in Birougou since 2004. With CARPE's support the team has, among other activities, completed physical delimitation of the park, conducted comprehensive participatory mapping surveys in the majority of the 50 adjacent villages, completed the first ever surveys of wildlife distribution and human impact and initiated a village outreach program. This document presents a brief outline of the strategy for developing and implementing the management plan for the zone, closely following the CARPE/USFS template provided.

2 Identify and Define Roles of Planning Team

2.1 Roles and responsibilities pertaining to planning process of lead NGO staff clearly defined.

- WCS Country Director (Joe Walston) is responsible for overall strategic direction and liaison with CARPE.
- WCS Landscape lead (Malcolm Starkey) co-ordinates field activities and manages the sub-contracts with MBG and IPACC.
- WCS' Assistant Director for External Relations (Romain Calaque) is charged with liaison with the Gabonese National Parks Agency (ANPN), particularly the Cellule d'Amenagement, and managing the sub-contract with RAPAC.
- The WCS Project Manager for the Birougou zone (Frank Lepemangoye) is charged with implementing all field activities relating to the land-use planning process in the zone and working with the National Park Conservateur and local representatives of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Forests.

2.2 Additional staff hired as needed, and/or any tasks contracted to partner organizations.

- Facilitation of the formal stakeholder meetings for land-use plan development and validation has been sub-contracted to the Réseau des Aires Protégées de l'Afrique Centrale (RAPAC).
- Comparative surveys of botanical diversity and forest habitat type necessary for micro-zoning have been sub-contracted to Missouri Botanical Garden (MBG)

2.3 Roles of non-lead NGOs clearly defined.

The two non-lead NGOs active in this zone have specific and clear missions:

RAPAC – facilitate formal public consultation meets necessary for the development and validation of the management plan (3 meetings envisaged for this zone, likely combined with meetings for the Birougou buffer CBNRM zone).

MBG – conduct baseline botanical surveys to describe patterns of species richness and endemism in the park and its buffer zone to inform the micro-zoning plan.

3 Information/Data Gathering

3.1 Physical

3.1.1 Boundaries of the zone delineated.

- Birougou Mountains National Park was physically delimited based on the Decree creating the park in 2004/5 by WCS with CARPE support. Some minor modifi-

cations to the texts defining the limits are proposed where the decree description does not correspond to the physical reality on the ground (presumably since the decree was based on maps of varying accuracy).

3.1.2 Identify topography, water courses, unique physical features

3.1.3 Maps/satellite imagery compiled

- Shapefiles of watercourses, roads, park boundaries and data from wildlife/human impact surveys have been compiled.
- A 90m resolution raster elevation map is available.
- The area is extremely cloudy and there are few recent satellite images sufficiently clear to be useable.

3.1.4 Boundaries of existing legal extractive concessions mapped and their status noted.

- Maps of forestry concessions attributed as of 2007 are available (see www.finances.gouv.ga)
- Currently these concessions are inactive but SFIK (subsidiary of Rimbunhan Hijau) are likely to be logging them in the next 3 years. This needs to be followed carefully.
- Maps of some mineral prospection concessions are available. There has been prospection for diamonds and gold to the south of the park but results were not sufficiently encouraging for the work to continue.

3.2 Ecological

3.2.1 Key wildlife resources

- A survey of wildlife and human impact across the park was undertaken in 2006–7 (Aba'a and Bezagoye, 2007). This provides baseline data on encounter rates and wildlife distribution for large mammals. The encounter rate for great apes was far higher than expected both inside and outside the park.
- The species list for the park remains incomplete, but this is not currently a barrier for management planning.
- Small mammals, reptiles and invertebrates are extremely poorly known. Whilst inventorying these species will be important for the long-term future of the park (since high biodiversity is the *raison d'être* of the park), this is not critical information for the current process of land-use planning and we do not foresee conducting any targeted surveys as part of the CARPE program.

3.2.2 Wildlife migration corridors

- At just over 690 sqkm, Birougou is clearly too small to reliably conserve large mammals like elephants and great apes on its own - elephants clearly migrate into and out of the park. The uninhabited area to the south of the park appears the most important since there are villages and roads to the north, west and south. This needs to be taken into account in the management plan.

3.2.3 Rare and under-represented plant communities

- Virtually nothing is currently known botanically about the park, though climatic and altitude data suggest that this may be an extremely diverse area. At least one and perhaps two field missions are foreseen to evaluate the biodiversity of this area/the adjacent CBNRM zone.

3.3 Socio-economic context

3.3.1 Identify villages, foot paths, transport routes, key economic centers within and around the landscape, agricultural activities, hunting/fishing areas, areas of subsistence level timber extraction.

- Participatory mapping and ground truthing was completed in villages adjacent to the northern, western and eastern boundaries of the park in 2006 (Steil and Lepemangoye-Mouleka, 2006) (the southern boundary is uninhabited). Data from these two studies is presented in the draft management plan and will be presented in the stakeholder meetings to be organized in 2008/9 for validation by the local population.

3.3.2 Identify all stakeholders of the zone (including populations outside the zone).

- A stakeholder analysis was undertaken by (Steil and Lepemangoye-Mouleka, 2006). The results are being compiled for integration into the draft management plan. The main groups of non-government and non-conservation ngo are the local communities (divided broadly into the western and eastern periphery) and eventually the logging company that will operate around the park. There are very few other private sector operations in the zone other than logging.
- There are a number of highly influential elites who are based outside the zone.

3.3.3 Identify those resources and regions of the zone utilized for subsistence purposes vs. larger commercial trade.

- Land-use studies using participatory mapping and ground-truthing. A number of families use about 23 camps in the park, but mostly on a seasonal basis for subsistence use. Individuals from Mbigou and several villages in the north-west currently use a small corner of the park for commercial bushmeat hunting. This data is presented in the draft management plan.

- There currently no commercial logging or mining in the area.

3.4 Government management authority presence on landscape and capacity to play role in planning process.

- The park is under the authority of a Conservateur. He currently has no support staff and no means of transport which hampers his involvement in field activities.
- The park falls in two provinces and four districts, producing a multiplicity of local government actors in the landscape who must be engaged. The fact that there is no direct road connection between the east and west of the park complicates management and means the two halves are essentially treated as two separate zones.
- In parts of the park periphery there are villages flying the Congolese flag but on territory claimed by Gabon. Due to its remoteness, the government presence in this area is demonstrably very weak.

4 Creation of a Public Participation Strategy

4.1 Identify those stakeholders that must be included in process; Interested and affected publics.

- The primary local stakeholders to include in the process are:
 1. the local population to the north of the park, especially those villages closest to the park which use part of the park for their subsistence.
 2. the logging companies adjacent to the park.
- The most significant elites from the zone must also be included (probably via their local representatives).
- At this point there are few other stakeholders actively involved in the park (potential tour operators for example), however over the course of the planning process other stakeholders are likely to arise or be identified. This strategy will therefore be revised as necessary.

4.2 Prioritize which stakeholders should be engaged earliest; based on current activities that pose existing threat to key resources.

- Most use of the park by local populations occurs in the west and north - in the east the villagers are further from the park and the Bouenguédi river forms a physical barrier. Engaging with the communities in the west is therefore the highest priority.
- In the western section of the park, the priority stakeholders to involve are:

1. The members of the population of Mbigou, Moudouma and adjacent villages who conduct commercial hunting in the north-west of the park.
 2. The families who use camps and old village sites inside the park (approximately 12 households).
- Most human exploitation of the area is currently subsistence-oriented (aside from a small amount of ivory poaching) and does not represent a major immediate threat to the integrity of the forest ecosystems of Birougou. The activities of logging companies have the potential to impact the zone most significantly in the near future, through facilitating commercial hunting, social upheaval and impacts on aquatic ecosystems. Therefore engaging pre-emptively with the logging company is a priority.
 - The concessions adjacent to the park are not in fact owned by Rimbunhan Hijau but by local notables who have ceded management of the permits to Bordmaur (fermage). They are in a position to put considerable pressure on the company – either positively or negatively – and it is therefore a priority to engage these individuals as well.
 - The southern section of the park and its immediate periphery remain of interest for mining prospectation. It will be important to engage pre-emptively with any company that initiates mineral prospectation activities in the area.

4.3 Describe how to engage with different groups

4.3.1 Different ethnic groups may require different methods of involvement in planning processes.

- Although the area is remote, the population living around the park are highly politically-engaged and aware and there are many individuals with high levels of literacy. Direct contact through consultation meetings is the preferred method of engagement. However:
 1. Certain groups in the community may have lower capacity to engage either due to lower levels of literacy/awareness or the pressures of other demands on their time. This is particularly the case for groups like adult women, the most intensive hunters (who tend to spend much time in the forest) and traditional healers.
 2. Any community representation is a highly political activity in Gabon and it is important to be aware that representatives' interests may not always be aligned with those of the people they (purport to) represent. It is therefore important maintain channels of communication parallel to the formal system of representation.
- We propose to overcome these difficulties by as well as organizing formal consultation meetings to:

1. Support the creation of community associations with natural resource management objectives. In other sites, such associations have proven effective at providing a forum for dynamic members of the community who are otherwise marginalized via traditional or official power structures to have a voice. Once created, supporting their capacity to engage in the technical aspects of sustainable management will be an important component. This will be achieved by a combination of regular village visits by the outreach team and specific training sessions with specialist trainers.
 2. Develop and maintain relations with local communities via an outreach and environmental education program. The team visit the villages each week and conduct one or more environmental education classes in the schools. In an area where there is a severe lack of capacity and resources in the education system, this provides a tangible benefit to the villages. The outreach team 'animateurs' stay overnight in the villages in which they work and this permits informal information exchange, in both directions. The team speak the predominant local language (nzebi) and are originally from the area. This program was initiated in late 2006, and will continue during the land-use planning process, providing an important mechanism for maintaining information exchange.
- Supporting the creation and functioning of the Local Management Committee (Comité consultative de gestion locale) provided for in the national parks law, and ensuring that it includes representatives of all major stakeholder groups, is an important mechanism to ensure long-lasting engagement between the park and the local populations even after the end of the project; lobbying to ensure this occurs will therefore be a high priority.
 - Stakeholders external to the zone (such as potential tour operators, mining companies) are best engaged via meetings of the Technical Management Committee (CTG) or ad-hoc meetings.

4.3.2 Identify willingness of various extractive concession holders to engage in landscape planning process.

- The Malaysian company Rimbunhan Hijau (the largest logging company in the world) that is likely to exploit the concession in the area is extremely hierarchical. The field staff are often well-trained technicians but they have virtually no decision-making power. While it is important to engage with the local staff, no serious progress will be made unless the senior management of the company (based in Libreville and Malaysia) are engaged. This requires a considerable amount of lobbying at the logging company headquarters.
- The concessions adjacent to the park are not in fact owned by Rimbunhan Hijau but by local notables who have ceded management of the permits to Bordmaur

(fermage). They are in a position to put considerable pressure on the company – either positively or negatively – and should be engaged early.

4.3.3 Create a process for conflict/dispute resolution between interests/stakeholders.

- The Comité Consultative de Gestion Local for the National Park (foreseen in the parks law of 2007 and scheduled to be created in 2009) will be the main forum for conflict and dispute resolution at a local level.

5 Creation of Strategy for Formal Recognition of Plan

- National Parks are mandated by Gabonese law to have a management plan. The National Parks law signed in 2007 stipulates a three-year period to develop the management plan (so by end 2010). At this point it will be submitted to the Cabinet (Conseil de Ministres) prior to signature by the National Parks Agency at which point it comes into force.
- Prior to submission of the plan a wide stakeholder consultation process is required. We envisage three formal public meetings in the Birougou area to validate the vision and objectives of the park and the implementation plan. These will include at a minimum representatives of local communities, local government and economic operators active in the surrounding area. Prior and between these meetings, WCS will conduct informal village meetings and discussions to allow stakeholders who are unable to attend the formal meetings or who are for whatever reason unable or unwilling to express themselves in a public forum. All these meetings come under the purview of ANPN. The formal public meetings will be facilitated by RAPAC as per the terms of the subcontract. WCS and MBG will provide technical input.
- Once a final draft validated by local stakeholders is complete, the management plans will be presented at ANPN's public annual planning workshop for further review.

6 Creation of Vision and Objectives for the Zone

- A preliminary vision and objectives for the park were identified during a workshop in 2005 and updated in 2006 and have been incorporated in the Plan Cadre de Gestion of the National Parks Agency. These are presented in the accompanying draft management plan. Until the management plan is officially validated, these remain 'working objectives'.

7 Identify Management Micro-Zones and Associated Objectives and Guidelines

- A draft micro-zoning plan was produced based on GoG national vision for eco-tourism, and the specific possibilities of this park, particularly research. It was based on incomplete data, and needs substantial refining. The identification of micro-zones will initially be addressed during meetings of the Comité Technique de Gestion and on-going technical support to the Conservateur (when one is appointed). Proposals will be validated during the formal public consultation meetings.
- A particular issue for zoning is that the northwestern corner of the park is intensively used by several families from adjacent villages and from the town of Mbigou. A fair solution needs to be found, either permitting customary use of the zone in the park (as a traditional use zone for example, though there is no legal framework for this), declassifying this part of the park (probably simplest) or finding a fair negotiated settlement. Participatory mapping and surveillance patrols have identified the villages and families involved, whilst wildlife surveys indicate that this area of the park is relatively low priority. We will continue to use this information to lobby for an effective settlement to this issue.

8 Elaboration of Implementation Plan for the Zone

- A preliminary list of activities that need to be undertaken to achieve the vision and objectives for the zone was developed in concertation with the National Parks Agency (formerly CNPN) and is presented in the accompanying draft management plan.
- A more detailed list of tasks required to complete each activity has been developed as part of a full work breakdown structure; these will be incorporated into a later revision of the management plan.
- The implementation plan has not yet been validated by non-park stakeholders. This will be undertaken during the consultation meetings described in section 4 and section 5 above.
- It is important to note here that the activities specified in the draft management plan are those that the GoG, and its partners have deemed necessary to achieve the park objectives. While some of these activities are clearly aligned with the objectives of CARPE (support for community associations, developing zoning plans etc), many others fall outside of the scope of the CARPE program (eg road-building, construction of major park infrastructure). For the sake of completeness, these activities are included in the draft management plan accompanying this document, but this does not imply any engagement on the part of the CARPE Landscape Consortium to undertake or support these activities.

9 Creation of Monitoring Plan for the Zone

- A framework for measuring and evaluating progress towards objectives and the execution of different planned activities is presented in the draft management plan accompanying this document. The indicators, means of verification and responsibility for execution remain to be specified. This will be undertaken during the meetings of the Comité Technique de Gestion, with the ANPN Cellule d'Amenagement and during on-going technical support to the park Conservateur (when a new Conservateur is officially appointed).

References

- Aba'a, R. and Bezagoye, A. (2007). Estimation de la densité, de l'abondance et de la distribution relative des grands mammifères et l'impact des humains au parc national des monts birougou et ses environs : Etablissement d'une ligne de base pour le monitoring. Technical report, WCS Gabon.
- Steil, M. and Lepemangoye-Mouleka, F. (2006). Participatory resource use mapping of communities surrounding birougou national park: Findings and potential park management implications. Technical report, WCS Gabon.