

**CARPE Final Report: October 1, 2003 – September 30, 2006**

Project / Sub-Project No.	CONGO BASIN FOREST PARTNERSHIP
Agreement	Cooperative Agreement 623-A-00-03-00064-00 under leader with Associate Award LAG-A-00-99-00048-00
Sub-Project Title	Monte Alen –Mt de Cristal-Gabon, Mont de Cristal Landscape Segment
Reporting Period	1 October, 2003 – 30 September 2006
Date submitted	15 November 2006
Report completed by	Pauwel De Wachter
Organization	World Wide Fund for Nature
Submitted by	Dr. Richard W. Carroll
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**1. INTRODUCTION**

*Name of landscape segment leader:* Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)

*Landscape segment partners:* WWF and WCS

*Total cost of agreement:*

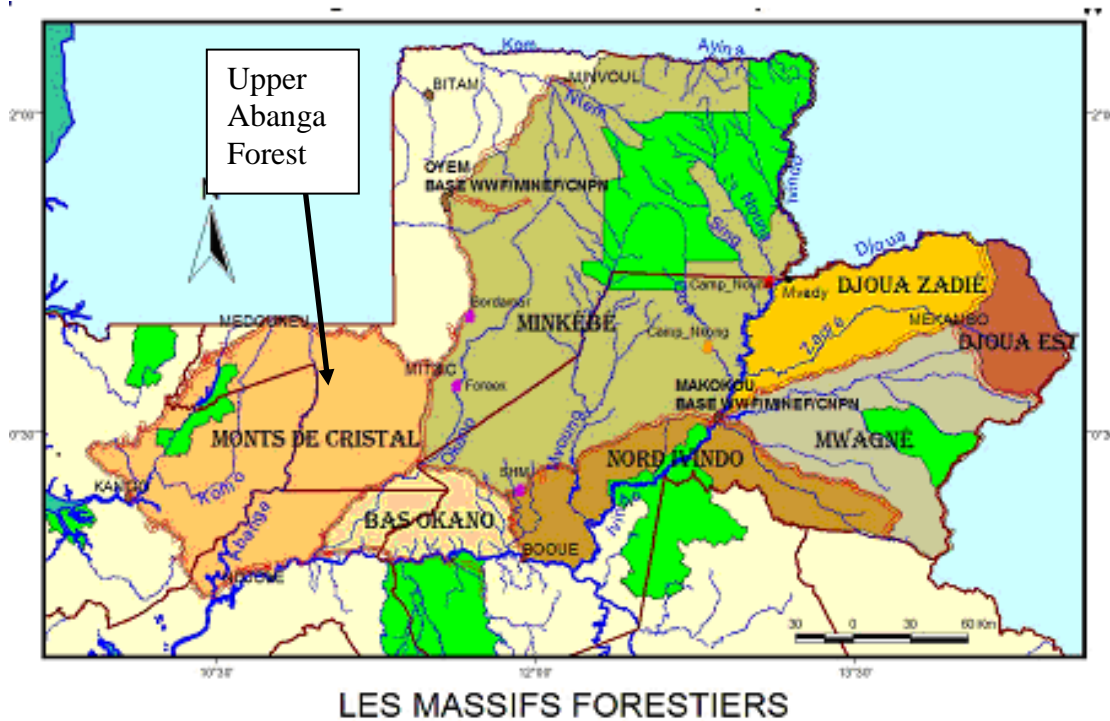
	USAID	Cost Share	Total
USAID Funds	\$309,675.74	\$164,852.35	\$474,528.09

This report covers WWF's operations in the Mt Alen Mt Cristal – Gabon landscape segment. The landscape segment leader WCS is sending the final report on its operations separately. WWF's work has been managed by Pauwel De Wachter, the general manager for WWF's operations in northern Gabon. The total cost of the WWF agreement with USAID over the three year period was \$474,528.09USD, of which WWF contributed \$164,852.35 of matching funds. The source of these matching funds is the European Union (Tropical Forest Budget Line). They were granted to WWF for the implementation of a project that aims to develop hunting management models in Central Africa's large forest blocks.

WWF work in this landscape segment focused on the 15,000 km<sup>2</sup> Abanga Forest. This forest block encompasses (in the west) the Mbe Sector of the Mt Cristal NP. However, most – if not all - of this forest block (outside of the park) is partitioned in logging concessions. WWF's program was to promote wildlife management and conservation in the Eastern sector of the Abanga Forest, as this area was relatively easy to access from Oyem, where we have a major base and an experienced field team.

The central objective of the program was to develop hunting management plans for the Eastern Abanga Forest in collaboration with the Ministry of Water and Forest, the local communities and the logging companies. Some of the achievements include:

- (i) development of an agreement<sup>1</sup> Rougier Gabon - MEF – WWF on wildlife management in Rougier’s 288,000 ha Upper Abanga concession that puts in place a financial mechanism for ecoguard patrols;
- (ii) extensive reconnaissance and analysis of hunting, poaching and access in the Abanga Forest;
- (iii) the discovery of important seasonal populations of manatees in the lower Abanga River and the subsequent development of a community based approach for the concerned sector (centered on Ebel Abanga village);
- (iv) the support provided to MEF and CNPN to gain first hand experience of the Abanga Forest (reconnaissance, awareness raising).



**2. MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND RESULTS**

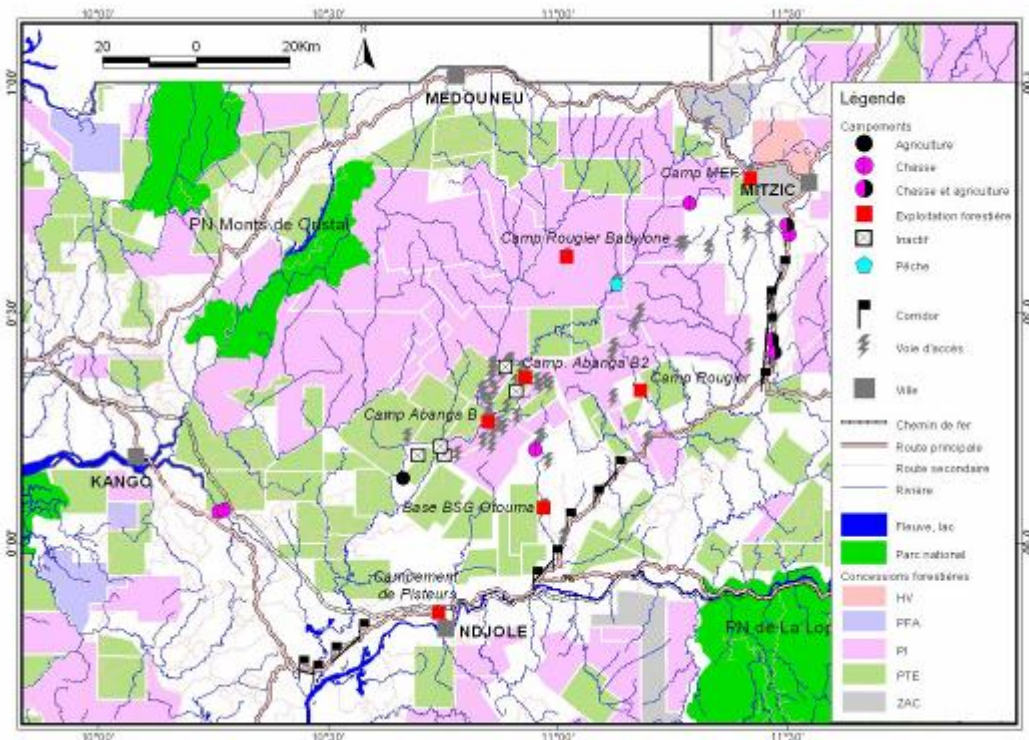
**Intermediate Result 1 – Indicator 1:  
Natural Resources Managed Sustainably – Number of LS covered by integrated LUPs**

*Extensive surveys accomplished to understand hunting, poaching, access, road network and logging camps in the Abanga Forest*

<sup>1</sup> The agreement is finalized and was signed by Rougier and WWF on November 3th, 2006. It is now at the Ministry of Water and Forest for signature by the Minister.

The Abanga Forest was a very badly known forest where very few conservation operations or studies took place. We contributed to an overall understanding of this forest by supporting several field missions oriented to gather specific knowledge about hunting, poaching, actors and corridors in this large forest block. Local Consultant Marika Ngovangue led three missions: one in the northern Abanga Forest (Sam-Medouneu), one in the Southern Abanga Forest (Ndjolé-Larara), and one from Kango to Ndjolé to Mitzic. Further reconnaissance work was realized by André Mba Obame (Wildlife Department) and Lionel Endamne Nguema (ENEF trainee). Support was also provided to the Mt Cristal Park conservator to assess use by hunters of logging roads near the park. Through these missions the MEF-CNPN-WWF team learned (1) the distance covered by hunters; (2) the use of abandoned logging camps and a vast network of old logging roads by hunters; (3) the corridors where elephants traverse public roads and travel from the Abanga Forest to neighboring forests or landscapes; (4) the status of camps along the road Bifoun-Ndjolé-Larara-Mitzic; (5) bushmeat trade and ivory trade via the railroad; (6) village hunting patterns in three sites; (7) the opinion of logging companies (Assala, Rougier, BSG, BSO); (8) an appreciation of wildlife abundance. This work – in the southern and eastern parts of the Abanga Forest, is complementary to work undertaken by WCS in the western part of this forest. This knowledge and understanding thus gathered is an important foundation for the land use planning process. As almost all of the land is either in the Cristal Mt NP or in a logging concession, the LU plan will in particular focus on access regulation, hunting management, and inter-landscape connectivity (preserving corridors that traverse public roads).

We learned that the Abanga Forest is rich in wildlife (elephants, great apes, mandrills, leopards, giant pangolins). Bongo do not seem to inhabit this forest. Rural human population density is low (1 inhabitant/km<sup>2</sup>). In some villages in the southern periphery (like Engongome) almost 90% of people have their origins in Equatorial Guinea.



Before the CARPE support, almost no anti-poaching missions had been organized in the Abanga Forest (and the Cristal Mountains NP). During the three years we supported at least 530 man/days of ecoguard patrols in the landscape. These patrols focus on (i) poachers using logging roads to access the deep forest; (ii) control of hunting in concessions (Rougier and BSG); (iii) elephant poaching. During one such large mission in December 2004 around the Mt Cristal NP, eight rifles used for elephant poaching were confiscated. In addition, the Cristal NP conservator, Hervé Ndong Allogho and the Wildlife Department director were supported in awareness raising missions in the Cristal landscape. During these missions hunting control in logging concessions is also promoted.

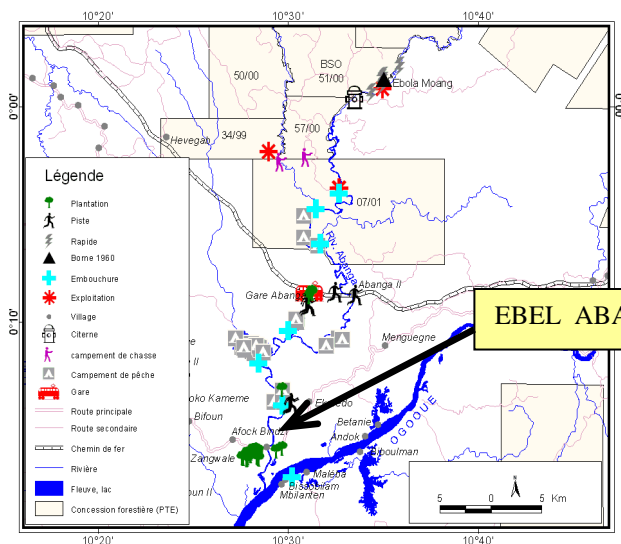
Support to ENEF trainees (National Forest School)

We have a tradition of integrating trainees from the national forestry school and thus assisting them with their theses. Also, it allows these future civil servants of MEF to become sensitive to conservation and sustainable management issues and visions.

Essangui Mve Cyrille studied hunting patterns in Kango (southwestern Abanga Block); Bekui Bekui Mac Célaire realized two separate studies on the village hunting and fishing territories of Ebel Abanga, and surveyed the Abanga River; while Lionel Endamne Nguema studied first hunting and access roads in the Oyan area (southwestern Abanga Forest) and later participated in an Abanga Forest wide survey to identify access, hunting camps, inter-landscape connectivity and to raise awareness among logging companies. Moussopo Ibessa Richard participated in September 2006 in building of community consensus and vision on improved natural resource management within the Ebel Abanga community.

**IR1 – Ind 2: Number of different use-zones within landscapes with sustainable management plans**

CNRM program under development in the southern Abanga Forest, with a particular focus on manatees and large mammal conservation

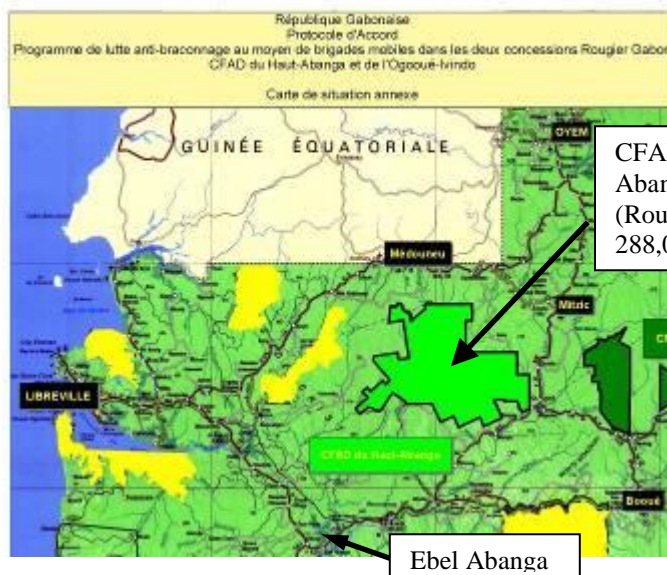


A very interesting community based program has effectively started, centered on the community of Ebel Abanga (1500 inhabitants). The opportunity is provided by the Abanga River, a river that cuts through the heart of the Abanga/Cristal Forest. During May 2005 we became aware that the lower Abanga was an important area for manatees. We therefore initiated a study on the lower Abanga with ENEF student Bekui Bekui and consultant Louembet Stéphane. We learned that the manatees were subject

to heavy hunting<sup>2</sup> and concluded that we needed to engage in a discussion about this with the village and the manatee hunter(s). Ebel Abanga's forest and river was surveyed, and hunting pressure and poaching patterns analyzed. This has led to the village agreeing and being interested in a community based management plan that includes conservation of manatees (no-kill policy), fisheries management in the lakes, and diminishing hunting pressure from other villages that access Ebel Abanga's forest via old logging roads. WWF's young Gabonese consultant, Stéphane Louembet (ex- ENEF trainee), is working on the subject with success, and has earned the trust and respect from the villagers. He and Bekui Bekui have been gathering knowledge about the southern Abanga Forest - a world of poaching, fishing, logging, old logging roads and camps, of navigable rivers, yet a world that remains relatively rich in wildlife, including elephants and gorillas. The Ogooué Basin is certainly the largest manatee population remaining in Africa and the Abanga, a tributary of the Ogooué, is known for important densities during high water season. The manatee thus is the entry point for positive engagement with the community and other partners (MEF) and the starting point for more elaborate CBNRM work focused on hunting management (need expressed by the community / widespread big game poaching in the sector).

The CBNRM work with Ebel Abanga is linked to indicator 2 under IR1. However, note that Ebel Abanga is not yet a recognized CBNRM zone.

Collaboration agreement between MEF, Rougier Gabon and WWF on anti-poaching finalized. Rougier files for FSC certification.



Following a 2 year process of contacts and negotiation, an agreement between MEF, Rougier Gabon and WWF regarding collaboration on anti-poaching has been finalized. It was signed by Rougier and WWF on November 3, 2006 and is currently at MEF for signature by the Minister. The agreement

initiates a financial mechanism whereby the logging company contributes to the operational costs of anti-poaching patrols in the concession. The financial mechanism is based on a bank or postal account, accessible in the provincial capitals Oyem and Makokou, where operating funds coming from

Rougier are deposited. Funds are disbursed based on joint signatures of a MEF representative and a WWF representative. The agreement will contribute to Rougier's aim of obtaining FSC certification for its 'Haute Abanga' and 'Ogooué-Ivindo' (Minkebe ls) forest concessions. An FSC pre-audit took place in August, and WWF was among the parties consulted. The 288,000 ha

<sup>2</sup> One sole hunter killed 16 manatees in a four month period.

‘Haute Abanga’ concession is located in the heart of the Abanga Forest and is *a MEF recognized ‘logging concession under sustainable management’*<sup>3</sup> meaning that it is considered to be part of the permanent forest domain (according to the Forest Code) and that it has an endorsed management plan. It is a critical piece for the conservation of biodiversity in the Upper Abanga Forest.

### 3. SUCCESS STORIES

#### *The plight of the manatee: Saving manatee lives in the Abanga River via building community awareness and engagement*

Forests and landscapes in Gabon are partitioned in large forest blocks, in general circumscribed by public roads. As such the Mbe sector of the Mont de Cristal NP, a park famous for its wet mountains and high botanical diversity, is located in the wider 15,000 km<sup>2</sup> Abanga Forest, an area larger than the U.S. state of Connecticut. The forest is traversed by the Abanga River, a tributary of the Ogooué. WWF’s approach has been to understand the threats and opportunities related to wildlife and land use planning at the level of the forest block. This means learning about access roads (like logging roads) and their possible use by poachers. It means learning about the willingness of logging companies to engage in responsible management of their concessions.

In May 2005, during a field mission in the Southern Abanga Forest, we observed manatee meat for sale. We were informed that the meat came from Ebel Abanga, a large village of about 1,500 inhabitants. From inquiry there we learned that there are several lakes on the Abanga and that, in particular, one hunter is specialized in killing these animals. A young forestry school student, Bekui Bekui Mac Célaire, was asked to realize a first survey in the village during August – September 2005. His report showed that manatees are regularly killed on the lower Abanga. Elephant poaching was widespread. He learned that the specialist hunter took 16 manatees between January and May 2005. In April 2006 we asked Stéphane Louembet to start working in the village. Stéphane had worked for us before, also as an ENEF student, in the lower Ogooué lakes to look at threats to manatees and other aquatic wildlife. Stéphane thus started to build a relationship with the villages and to raise awareness on manatee hunting, fisheries management and hunting management. The process is ongoing, but during Stéphan’s recent two-month stay, the village community expressed its interest in building a community based system of natural resource management with the intent of: improved management of fisheries in the Abanga lakes; implementing a no-kill policy for manatees; and circumscribing their hunting territory so as to avoid unauthorized hunting by outsiders. The main manatee hunter in Ebel Abanga stopped the killing during Stéphan’s recent two month stay, but in the end killed one manatee. He has received a very last warning that any new manatee killing will be followed by referral to the courts. Manatees are a protected species in Gabon and killing them is punishable by imprisonment.

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<sup>3</sup> “Concession Forestière sous Aménagement Durable” : CFAD



*Photo (Bekui Bekui / WWF-ENEF):* In front of the Abanga train station, the prominent way to transport bushmeat to Libreville. And Bekui Bekui with a large sized net used to catch manatees in the channels.

### ***Wildlife conservation in logging concessions: agreement finalized between Rougier, the Ministry of Forest Economy and WWF***

Selective logging is the dominant land use in the forests of the Western Congo Basin. Logging companies manage huge tracks of land. For example, Rougier Gabon, a French logging company, manages 288,000 ha (or 711660 acres) in the Mt de Cristal landscape in addition to 331700 ha (819645 acres) in the TRIDOM-Gabon landscape. These lands – even though losing their pristine character in the logging process – are large tracks of habitat and remain of high value for conservation. Rougier’s Mt de Cristal landscape concession (called Upper Abanga concession) is located in the heart of the 15,000 km<sup>2</sup> (5,791 mi<sup>2</sup>) Abanga Forest and is filled with elephants and other wildlife such as leopards and gorillas. The animals are in relative safety since most of the concession is located outside of village hunting territories. Rougier also has a strict policy that prohibits its staff from hunting, its vehicles from transporting bushmeat, hunters or arms, and it practices strict control at the barriers and entry gates to its concessions to avoid entry of hunters with vehicles. To ensure respect for these rules, Rougier relies on its own checks as well as outside control via wildlife surveillance missions of the Ministry of Forest Economy. That’s where WWF comes in. Since 2000, WWF is supporting and building capacity of mobile wildlife brigades, in particular to operate in northern Gabon’s vast complex of logging concessions. These teams also operated sometimes in Rougier’s concessions, controlling vehicles and logging roads. Rougier appreciated these controls by outsiders and MEF, and Rougier and WWF started drafting an agreement that formalizes collaboration in wildlife conservation. As an innovation, the agreement stipulates a mechanism for Rougier to make financial contributions for the cost of operating wildlife patrols in its concessions. A transparent funding mechanism is proposed for the operational costs of ecoguard patrols. The initial contribution of Rougier is estimated to be at least \$16,000 for the first year and should allow the operation of 4 patrols per trimester. The agreement is seen as the start of a process, and replication will be sought with other logging companies who until now refuse to contribute to the operational costs of patrols. The agreement was signed by Rougier and WWF on November 3th, 2006 and is currently at the Ministry for signature by the Minister of Forest Economy. In the meantime, Rougier has requested a pre-audit as a first step to obtain FSC certification, a credible

timber certification system that requires effective wildlife conservation and management. For WWF, all this is part of a process to ensure that the long-term cost of the wildlife brigades is covered by the Government (ecoguards) and logging companies (operation costs). Logging companies benefit as workers are more disciplined (they work rather than hunt), there is less theft and fewer accidents (in particular outsiders are dangerous), and there is less influence and disturbance from powerful people who want to enter the concession for hunting. Finally, timber with a blood-stained aura has not been an easy sell for logging companies. In particular, in the West consumers are sensitive and companies are worried about negative campaigns by pressure groups.

Most of the remote forests of the Western Congo Basin are in the hands of logging companies, and effective collaboration for good wildlife and forest management is deemed to be crucial. In general working with the private sector becomes crucial for conservation NGO's, not only in the forest sector but also in the mining sector. In the Mt de Cristal South African mining company LONMIN is exploring for platinum. In TRIDOM-Gabon Chinese companies (CMEC and SinoSteel) will exploit the 1000 MT Belinga iron ore deposit. Impacts will be huge, and NGOs like WWF and WCS who are in the field have a critical and constructive role to play.



*Photo (Ndong Nguema Martial / WWF) : Mobile Brigade agents controlling a Rougier logging truck. These controls are welcomed by Rougier as they maintain or strengthen respect for the regulations.*

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Thanks to the support of CARPE and the European Union it was possible to put on the map the 15,000 km<sup>2</sup> Abanga Forest Block - a forest block that not only encompasses the Mbe sector of the Mt Cristal NP but surrounds it with a vast area of continuous habitat and forest cover and a stronghold for large mammals. Some of the logging concessions in the area, like Rougier's Haute Abanga Concession, are critical pieces of the puzzle. The effort is all part of a wider effort to ensure conservation and sustainable use in the Congo Basin. The Upper Abanga Forest overlaps



with the Ogooué Basin and wetlands, and is ecologically connected to the Minkebe Forest and the Bas-Okano forest, as well as to the forests of southern Equatorial Guinea. Sound management of all these forest blocks, through preservation of protected areas and nature friendly use of logging concessions, should allow the conservation of wildlife and flora in the short term. For the future, it will be interesting to assess and define strict protection zones in the logging concessions to ensure that more areas maintain old growth forest characteristics. Also, here and elsewhere, we need to continue the battle against outrageous commercial bushmeat hunting and indiscriminate killing of endangered species such as gorillas, chimpanzees, elephants, and manatees. An increased investment in environmental education is needed, to change public opinion and to prepare a next generation that is more nature friendly. Developing constructive engagements with the forest and mining sectors is another necessity.

In general, we are satisfied with the CARPE work planning and reporting system. We appreciate it as a system that tries to minimize the reporting burden while maximizing transparency and accountability. However, we observe that *we* tend to propose too many tasks for too many zones, and intend to simplify during coming work planning revisions (for the next CARPE phase). In fact we tend not to have the needed capacity for realizing all the tasks we propose and should probably delete a few less strategic outputs to allow more focus on fewer, but really strategic, outputs. We agree with CARPE that macro-zoned landscapes as a central output is very strategic in nature. LU planning within recognized zones is in many cases, though not always<sup>4</sup>, less strategic in nature.

## 5. LESSONS LEARNED

- The development of memorandums of understanding on resource access/use rules are a great way to raise awareness and produce targeted and productive dialogue among stakeholders. The process can lead to a certain ‘social pressure effect’ in which the worst behavior is weeded out or repulsed as it becomes unacceptable among the MOU signatory partners.
- (Wildlife) law enforcement is a full time task of a specific nature and highly important. We should not, as we sometimes do, request wildlife law enforcement officers to carry out additional technical tasks (like mediating a negotiation process or realizing a study). Technical tasks like negotiating hunting territories, regulation and land use plans, should be confined to people recruited for these tasks, because they demand 100% attention and availability. Law enforcement officers can still have an extremely useful role in these technical tasks, by providing their input and rich field experience, and by participating in strategic meetings. The law enforcement officers are not well placed, however, to be task leader for these activities. *To the contrary*, wildlife law enforcement work should be upgraded through a performance monitoring system and performance-based salaries, as it will remain a critical activity to save wildlife from indiscriminate hunting.
- In the Abanga Forest most land is effectively attributed to logging concessions or to the protected area (Mbe sector of Mt Cristal NP). Much of the land use planning activity is devoted to building a wildlife management plan, ensuring adoption by key stakeholders and ensuring implementation. The critical rule is that hunting should only be done from villages,

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<sup>4</sup> Example : a land use plan for a national park might contain very important prescriptions for a large peripheral zone. And consequently have an impact on an area much larger than the park.

and on foot. In Gabon, people rarely walk further than 15 km into the forest, as the cost of going so deep into the forest outweighs the benefit. Therefore, the first policy to adopt should be the prohibition of using logging roads for hunting. This means that hunters cannot use any wheeled equipment – no vehicles, no bikes - to facilitate transport; that logging company vehicles are prohibited from transporting hunters, arms or meat; and that workers cannot hunt at the place of work. The effective implementation of such a policy ensures that most of the hunting originates on the public roads that circle the large forest blocks and that hunting does not reach deeper than 15 km (typical). A large core forest can thus remain, largely unhunted, and operating as a source of game for the hunters in the periphery.

