

USAID CARPE PHASE IIA - FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT 2003-2006

TRI-DOM, ROC, WCS

1. Introduction

Landscape leader: WCS

Landscape and segment: Tri-dom Forest Landscape, Republic of Congo

Other partners: WWF – see WWF-TRIDOM-Odzala Final 3 Year Report

Funding: WCS: \$773,825

Cost share: WCS: \$177,443

WCS Tridom, ROC segment objectives:

The goal of the CARPE supported Odzala-Koukoua Landscape Project is to conserve the Odzala-Koukoua National Park and peripheral zones in the northern Republic of Congo using a wildlife focused approach to landscape planning and implementation, and by synthesizing and disseminating lessons learned, promote the adoption of best practices at WCS and within the conservation community.

Objective 1: Develop and adopt a participatory strategy to reduce threats to natural resources and human welfare throughout the Odzala-Koukoua Landscape.

Objective 2: Develop and implement mechanisms to strategically address threats to natural resources and human welfare across the Odzala-Koukoua Landscape.

Objective 3: Develop and implement locally appropriate tools to measure conservation effectiveness and adapt the conservation strategy as the context changes.

Summary of achievements

1. WCS and the OKNP finalized the first ever systematic landscape species survey in the OKNP. The results of analyses from these surveys point towards the negative

- impact of the Ebola disease on great ape populations in the quasi totality of the OKNP.
2. The biological and human activity survey of Ntokou-Pikounda forest (long prioritized as a stronghold for ape and elephant conservation) is well underway in partnership between WCS and CNIAF/MEFE. This survey also includes the entire Ngombe concession.
 3. The Minister of Forestry Economy and the Environment, His Excellency Minister Djombo, at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2006, in presence of His Excellency President Sassou Nguesso, announced the imminent creation of the Ntokou-Pikounda protected area.
 4. WCS's initiated a program to assess and monitor wildlife off-take, hunting pressures, and commercial trade in Ngombé concession and Ouessou town. Assessment of wildlife populations and community use zones was initiated in the Ngombe concession under joint WCS-CNIAF collaboration.
 5. WCS provide technical advice to IFO in the development of its wildlife management and community based components of the Ngombe concession management plan. This included socio and biological surveys and design of a preliminary hunting zone system. Similarly WCS provided expert advice to IFO on the development of its interior regulations for wildlife management.
 6. The WCS Field Vet program and WCS Tri-dom staff designed and established a gorilla health and Ebola monitoring program. Protocols and systems have been established for surveys, monitoring and collection of feces and carcass samples for analysis for Ebola and other pathogens. This expertise has been critical in helping to raise the capacity of the OKNP to detect and assess Ebola outbreaks and develop a better understanding for its distribution in relation to wildlife and at-risk human populations
 7. A conservation awareness raising campaign in and around Ouessou has been conducted in collaboration with APEDTS. Collaboration with INCEF in the development and diffusion of films on Ebola virus, bushmeat hunting, elephant conservation, ape conservation, etc. (a series of 6 films have been completed) with local communities and in Ouessou has been an important tool in raising conservation awareness and support in the periphery of Odzala.
 8. Despite significant problems with certain staff of the MEFE, particularly the DFAPP, who have attempted to block WCS work in the Tri-dom landscape, WCS has now established its activities with support of the MEFE. Although an official MOU for this work has yet to be finalized, the Minister of Forestry Economy and the Environment confirmed the Government of Congo's request that WCS work in partnership with the MEFE in the Tri-dom landscape, in OKNP and the eastern periphery (Ngombe concession). The high level political engagement to create the Ntokou-Pikounda protected area reinforces this joint collaboration in the form of a new initiative of global importance

2. Major Accomplishments and Results

The Strategic Objective of CARPE is to reduce the rate of forest degradation and loss of biodiversity through increased local, national, and regional natural resource management capacity in nine central African countries.

Intermediate Result 1: Natural Resources Managed Sustainably

Indicator 1.1: Number of landscapes and other focal areas covered by integrated land use plans

- An overall LUP process has been convened in the ROC section of the Tri-dom landscape. The first phase consisted of assessments of key zones not yet classified for land-use. These areas included Garambindzam and the northwest corner surveyed by WWF and the Ntokou-Pikounda area surveyed by WCS and CNIAF.
- The Minister of Forestry Economy and the Environment, His Excellency Minister Djombo, at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2006, in presence of His Excellency President Sassou Nguesso, announced the imminent creation of the Ntokou-Pikounda protected area. The area supports high concentrations apes and elephants and benefits from strong local community support (see below Success Story). This high level political engagement to create the Ntokou-Pikounda protected area reinforces the GOC-WCS joint collaboration in the form of a new initiative of global importance for conservation.
- Results of the biological/human activity survey of Ntokou-Pikounda forest (long prioritized as a stronghold for ape and elephant conservation) underway in partnership between WCS and CNIAF/MEFE will be employed to define the limits of the new protected area. The survey of the southeastern section of Ntokou-Pikounda forest was completed by WCS/MEFE. The survey was the first effort by the project staff to study the swamp vegetation zone of the Likouala Mossaka basin to the southeast of the Ngombe FMU. Important populations of apes are evident from preliminary data analyses. This mission has had strong support by the local authority (Ntokou District), Ntokou community, and MEFE-CNIAF experts.
- WCS-TRIDOM Congo segment participated actively in the planning and preparation of a project funded by the French GEF (FFEM) (estimate 2.5 million Euro/ 3 years) in conjunction with CAWHFI initiative and CARPE funded activities in the Odzala landscape (in addition to Conkouati-Gamba and Tri-national Sangha). This will contribute to peripheral zone planning and management in complement to CARPE over the coming years under the auspices of the CBFP.

Indicator 1.2: Number of different use-zones within landscapes with sustainable management plans

Protected Areas

- The ECOFAC/WCS large mammal surveys of the 13,000 sq. km. OKNP were completed resulting in the first ever systematic survey of the entire Park and baseline establishment. Analysis of results of these surveys point towards the negative impact of Ebola disease on great ape populations in the quasi totality of the OKNP. The north of the park has low densities of great apes and elephants (Figure 1). Despite the presence of Ebola in southern part of the Park, great apes are found at high densities in this sector. Also, elephant populations are found at high density in some areas, mostly in the south and central part of OKNP. A report on this study is being finalized and will be published officially by the conservator of OKNP for the government. These baselines will serve as a reference for monitoring in the future and contribute to management planning.

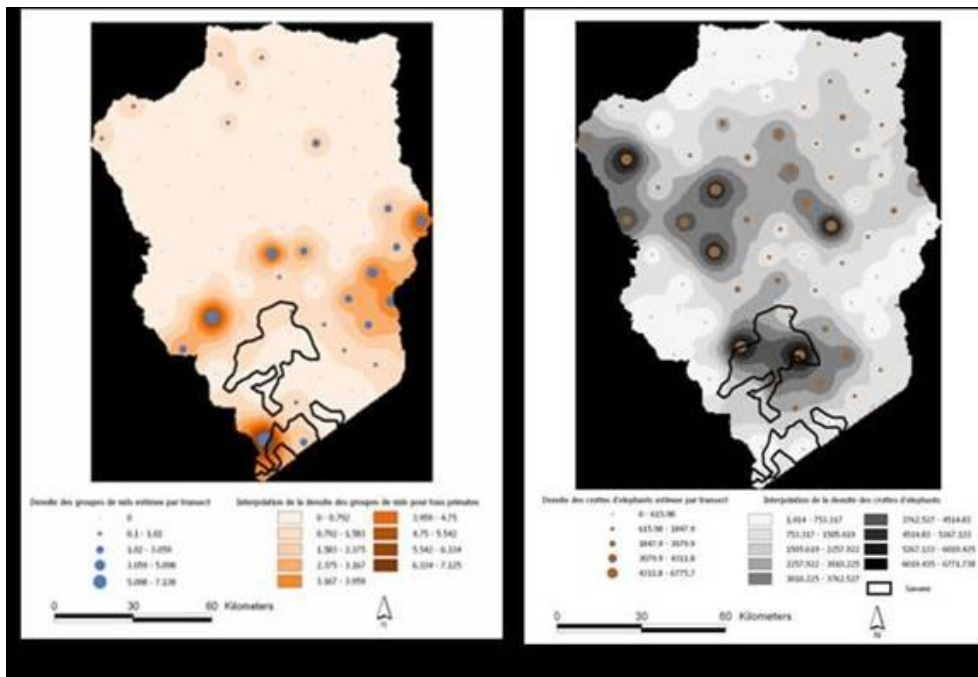


Figure 1: Great apes (left) and elephants (right) distribution inside OKNP (WCS/OKNP 2006).

- The WCS Field Vet program and WCS-Tridom staff designed and established a gorilla health and Ebola monitoring program with two national WCS veterinarians. Dr. Ken Cameron and Dr. Trish Reed, WCS Field Vet for WCS-Congo, has trained national technicians and developed a laboratory based in Mbomo in collaboration with OKNP. This includes monitoring for parasite and disease transmission between apes and humans, sample collection from potential wildlife deaths from Ebola, and spatial data basing of data on carcasses charting Ebola. Protocols and systems have been established for

surveys and collection of feces and carcass samples for analysis for Ebola and other pathogens. This expertise has been critical in helping to raise the capacity of the OKNP to assess the Ebola outbreak and develop a better understanding for its distribution in relation to wildlife and at-risk human populations. Several expeditions were conducted by Congolese WCS field vet researchers inside and outside the OKNP to detect and evaluate the expansion of Ebola.

- Following the intervention of the Minister in support of WCS work in the Tri-dom landscape, WCS mobilized support to law enforcement activities to secure the east and south of the OKNP. This was done through a Note Verbale signed between WCS and OKNP outlining the focus and terms of the collaboration. This has contributed greatly to securing the OKNP, as ECOFAC funding has ended and they are awaiting the renewal of ECOFAC IV in early 2007. In addition the OKNP has been highly appreciated of WCS's support and this has contributed to the establishment of a sound collaboration platform. A general protocol has been outlined and is under discussion between the MEFÉ and WCS to formalize this collaboration in the Tridom landscape.

Forestry Concessions

- The WCS-CNIAF survey includes the entire Ngombe concession to contribute to the development of its wildlife management strategy and landscape scale monitoring of large mammals and human activity. Combined with the Odzala NP surveys this will result in assessment of a contiguous block of some 28,000 sq. km in the TRIDOM landscape. The results of this survey will be employed to inform buffer zone and peripheral zone planning and the interface between the two LUPs.
- The MOU signed between the IFO, WCS and the government permitted ecoguard wildlife law enforcement teams to be trained and deployed on the eastern border of the OKNP in the IFO concession under the auspices of the MEFÉ/'Unite de Surveillance et Lutte Anti-Braconnage'. However, shortly afterwards the MEFÉ voiced objections against the agreement and it has been suspended ever since, awaiting revisions by the MEFÉ.
- The Danzer logging company has declared its intentions to seek FSC certification for the Ngombe concession. WWF-Forestry program worked with Danzer in this process and consulted with WCS for technical advice on the Ngombe concession and the prospects and key elements to be addressed to achieve certification of the concession.

Community Natural Resource Management Zones

- WCS's initiated a program to assess and monitor wildlife off-take, hunting pressures, and commercial trade in Ngombé concession and Ouesso town. Assessment of wildlife populations and community use zones was initiated in the Ngombe concession under joint WCS-CNIAF collaboration. Information on hunting techniques, species, age/sex and sale value has been collected. Results from these studies indicate an alarming growth

in threats to elephants and great apes in the periphery of Odzala, mostly in Ngombe concession. Bushmeat has long been a part of the staple diet of forest resident peoples. Increasingly, as the population of Ouessou, in particular, increases, the demand for this traditional resource is being met by commercial hunters and traders. The trade in bushmeat, much of it illegal, has become a business in which opportunists can make large profits. This trade also threatens the survival of many other unprotected species throughout Odzala landscape, from giant pangolins to forest buffalo. A strong effort to work with local communities on appropriate wildlife management regulations and zoning will be critical to addressing this problem and securing wildlife populations and local community livelihoods.



Photo: Richard Malonga, 2006

Bushmeat trade in Ngombe market

- A conservation awareness raising campaign in and around Ouessou has been conducted in collaboration with APEDTS (a local NGO). An official MOU was signed between WCS and APEDTS “*Protocole d’Accord pour l’Appui au programme d’éducation et aux activités alternatives à l’est du Parc National d’Odzala-Kokoua*”. APEDTS, with support from WCS, worked with communities in the Ngombe concession and Ouessou to disseminate information, on animal health, alternative activities, and measures to decrease risk of exposure to Ebola. Methods consisted of meetings target groups (IFO workers, hunters, bushmeat trader and local authorities). Several meetings were organized in many local communities to promote alternative resources and to raise awareness on animal healthy. This collaboration and activities have resulted in a sound dialogue between the project and local stakeholders and improved awareness on the risks of Ebola.

Success Story

Creation of the Ntokou-Pikounda Protected Area

Excerpt from WCS Press Release

The Minister of Forestry Economy of the Republic of Congo announced September 18, 2006 at an event at the UN General Assembly in New York, its commitment to the creation of two new protected areas that together will be larger than Yellowstone National Park, spanning nearly one million hectares (3,800 square miles). Instead of bison and elk, these new protected areas contain elephants, chimpanzees, hippos, crocodiles, and some of the highest densities of gorillas on earth. The announcement was made by Minister Henri Djombo, in the presence of His Excellency President Sassou Nguesso and officials from the Bronx Zoo-based Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS).

“We are delighted that the Republic of Congo continues to take a leadership role in safeguarding its world-class wildlife and wildlands for generations to come,” said Dr. John Robinson, WCS senior vice president and director for international programs. “This is an extraordinary achievement for the entire Congo basin region.”

“The Republic of Congo depends on forest resource use for economic development, but it is also deeply committed to biodiversity conservation and sustainable forest management. It has already set aside an estimated 11 percent of the country's surface area as protected areas, 90 percent of which is tropical forest. Establishing these new protected areas reinforces the protected area network portfolio and affirms this commitment,” said Henri Djombo, Congo’s Minister of Forestry Economy

The first new protected area to be created, soon to be named Ougoue-Lekiti National Park, lies in the western part of the country, adjoining an existing Bateke national park in Gabon, established with WCS’s help in 2002. Together this transboundary protected area will now safeguard some 600,000 hectares (2300 square miles). The northern half of Ougoue Lekiti contains a vast and ancient sand dune system, and is covered by large grass and wooded savanna patches separated by fine lines of dense gallery forest, along with a multitude of small lakes and river valleys. The south and west of the new Park supports an intact block of Chaillu forest and the Ougue river basin along which a series of important natural forest clearings are used forest elephants and other large mammals.

Until recently the region contained lions – unusual to the Congo Basin – though poaching may have wiped out the population. The Savanna landscape still supports such rare species as Grimm’s duiker (a small antelope species), side-striped jackal, and rare birds including Denham’s bustard. Inside its forests roam elephants, forest buffalo, bush pigs, duiker, leopard, gorillas, chimpanzees and several monkey species.

The second protected area to be created in the coming year, known as Ntokou-Pikounda, lies southeast of Odzala Kokoua National Park, which is well-known for one of the highest gorilla populations in the world. WCS conservationist Dr. Mike Fay identified parts of this area as the “Green Abyss” in 2000, during his “Mega-transect,” an expedition co-sponsored by National Geographic. Fay also recorded extremely high densities of great apes in the region’s broad Marantaceae forests.

Even though the deadly Ebola virus has decimated great ape populations in nearby regions, of northern Congo and Gabon, preliminary surveys of Ntokou-Pikounda by WCS

and the Government of Congo indicate that this region still contains healthy gorilla and chimpanzee numbers, and may in fact support some of the highest great ape densities on the planet. Along with great apes, this mosaic of swamp forest, clearings, and mixed forests region contains elephants, chimpanzees, crocodiles, hippos, as well as rare and threatened birds such as crowned eagles and many species of hornbills. According to WCS, large mammal populations are still relatively strong because many core areas are outside of current reach of bushmeat hunters, leaving relatively undisturbed habitat.

“These two new protected areas are a tremendous addition to the Republic of Congo’s protected area network and to global protection of biodiversity. The Ougoue-Lekiti will protect a critical ecotone zone, a block of intact Chaillu forest, a mix of savanna and forest wildlife. The Ntokou-Pikounda forest will be a stronghold for great apes and forest elephants. There is already a great deal of local community support for the creation of both these protected areas.” said Dr. Paul Elkan who directs WCS’s Congo program. “We look forward to working with the Congolese Government to making these effective protected areas and foundations for landscape scale management in the Congo basin.”

During its recent visit to the U.S., the Congolese Government also announced several other initiatives aimed at improving conservation of its forests, including rehabilitation of neglected protected areas, supporting ecotourism of existing national parks, and investigating more cross-border conservation with neighboring countries.

See National Geographic Website for More Information:

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2006/09/060925-congo-parks.html>

Ntokou-Pikounda Protected Area

Size: A critical area has been identified (Figure 2.) and the new protected area limits will be defined on the basis of the surveys currently underway. WCS and Government of Congo are surveying a high priority area of some 2,200 square miles of forest, an area larger than the state of Delaware. The results of these surveys will help define the key area to be protected.

Location: Ntokou-Pikounda is located in the northern section of Congo just southeast of Odzala Kokoua National Park and south of Noubalé-Ndoki National Park

Habitat types: Habitats contained within Ntokou-Pikounda include a network of swamp forests and mixed forest types, along with forest clearings. WCS conservationist Dr. Mike Fay called the area the “Green Abyss” in 2000 during his famous “Mega-transect” through Central Africa’s rain forest. A small savannah system can be found along the Mambili River, one of the tributaries of Likouala Mossaka River which in turn feeds into the Congo River.

Wildlife of interest: Preliminary data from nest count surveys currently underway by WCS and government biologists suggest that this still largely unexplored area could possibly contain some of the highest densities of gorillas and chimpanzees in the world. Ntokou-Pikounda is also a stronghold for other large species such as elephants, hippos, crocodiles, and birds such as crowned eagles and several species of hornbill. Large mammal populations are relatively intact because many areas of the zone are beyond the reach of bushmeat hunters, who gain access to wild areas mainly through logging roads and navigable rivers.

Threats: The looming threats to Ntokou-Pikounda’s biodiversity are unsustainable hunting for commercial markets, Ebola virus, overfishing in the country’s river ecosystems, and unsustainable forestry practices.

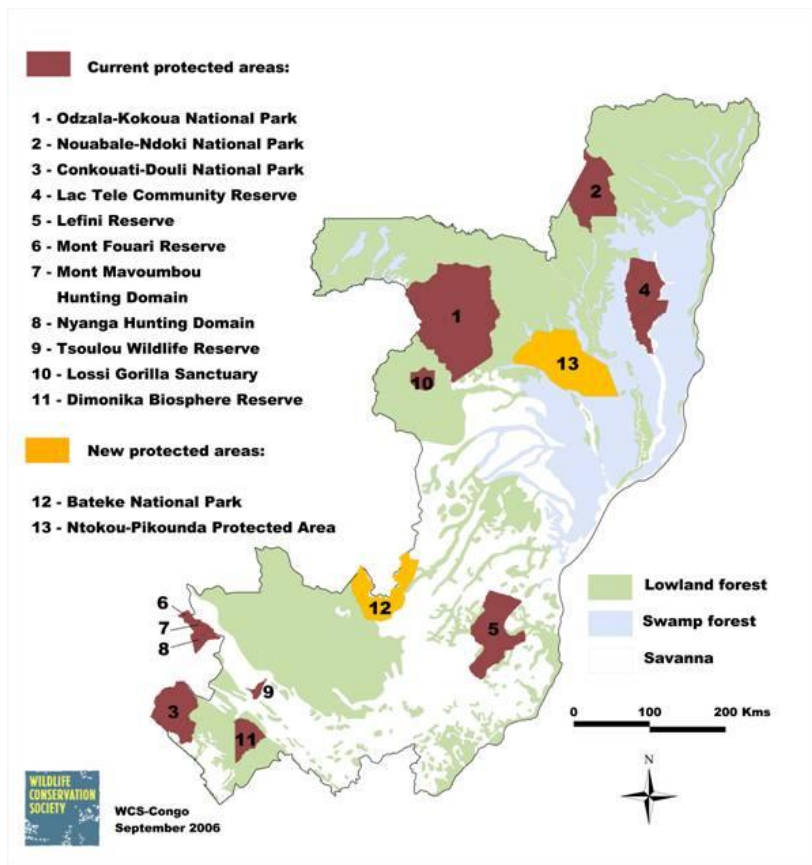


Figure 2. Protected area network and priority zone for the creation of the Ntokou-Pikounda protected area.

3. Conclusion

Significant progress has been made over the past three years in the ROC section of the Tridom landscape. The conservation value of Odzala-Koukoua National Park and its peripheral zone are remarkable and universally acknowledged. The creation of the Ntokou-Pikounda protected area will be an important step to further securing biodiversity and building community support for conservation. Ivory poaching is an imminent threat and problem in Odzala National Park and its peripheral zones. Ebola is also a particular concern for ape populations and human welfare. Measures to address these critical threats, and develop sound land-use planning will require focused and united efforts by the Government of Congo, EU, CARPE, WCS, WWF, and other CBFP partners.

However, lack of MEFE political support for effective conservation and management at the site and in the concessions has been a main constraint for MEFE and WCS. It is very important to note that negotiations between WCS and the Government of Congo regarding collaborative agreements have been very difficult and consensus has not been reached up to this moment, despite an agreement having been signed between OKNP and WCS to legally provide provisions and logistics to ecoguards on the eastern border of the OKNP. An important source of various complications with the MEFE seems to stem from the Director of Wildlife and Protected Areas (DFAP), who has consistently demonstrated a lack of professionalism in his interactions with WCS and various other conservation partners and a strong preoccupation with financial management. This has been manifested through inaccurate negative reporting by the Director of Wildlife and Protected Areas to the hierarchy of the MEFE, thereby straining the relationship between MEFE and WCS. This problem needs to be effectively addressed.

4. Lessons Learned

Despite the difficulties working collaboratively with some elements of the MEFE (DFAPP), WCS successfully adapted its approach towards implementation of the Tridom CARPE supported program, working closely with CNIAF, local authorities, and local communities leading to significant progress. As described in reports to CARPE over the past years, prospects for achieving annual benchmarks have been difficult in the Ngombe concession in particular, as the MEFE rejected the MOU and signed between IFO, WCS, and the Government of Congo and has not been forthcoming with a revised version. Recent meetings with the Government of Congo indicate new progress to alleviate previous complications concerning WCS involvement in the design and implementation of a wildlife management plan in Ngombe concession. Local authorities and communities in the Ngombe concession and WCS have established confidence and comfortable dialogue regarding management of natural resources and the creation of the Ntokou-Pikounda protected area. Now that collaboration is improving with the MEFE with support at the highest levels, it is critical to stabilize the situation with the signature of a formal protocol between the MEFE and WCS for the work in the ROC-Tridom area.

5. Recommendations

US Government and CARPE support will be critical in ensuring smooth implementation of the CARPE program in the Republic of Congo over the coming years. Problems encountered with the MEFE are largely tensions related to financial management regulations. While significant progress has been made in improving the situation, it is recommended that USG/CARPE continue support to NGO implementers in the process of finalizing protocols with the MEFE to guide collaborative implementation of landscape projects. Also, dialogue with high level GOC decision makers should be developed to ensure that US assistance to environmental management in Congo is supported appropriately by concerned Ministries.

6. Annexes

Annex I – items purchased with US government money over US\$ 5,000

- a) Please refer to the [TRIDOM - ROC, WCS, FY06, Equipmt-DisposalLetter](#) for the list of equipment

Annex II – disposal plan for items in Annex I above

- b) Please refer to the [TRIDOM - ROC, WCS, FY06, Equipmt-DisposalLetter](#) for the disposal plan

Annex III – GIS files of landscape zones and limits

These shape files will be sent directly to Jackie Doremus as requested.