

Central African Republic

USFWS supports the continued protection of forest elephants, gorillas and other wildlife in one of the most spectacular protected areas in the world, Dzanga-Sangha.



The Central African Republic (CAR) is a land-locked country in the heart of Central Africa. Home to more

than five million people, the majority of CAR's population represent seven main ethnic groups. More than 60% of CAR's population lives in rural areas, where most rely on subsistence agriculture, forestry, or mining as their main source of income. Since its independence from France in 1960, CAR has been plagued by civil and political instability, low economic growth, and unequal wealth distribution.

Despite difficulties and continued conflict, CAR is making advances towards protecting its rich biodiversity: In May 2013, in collaboration with the Wildlife Conservation Society, World Wildlife Fund, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), CAR entered into a bilateral agreement with Gabon to improve management of CAR's wildlife and biodiversity.

This agreement was a response to 26 elephants being poached at the Dzanga-Sangha Protected Area in southern CAR in early May 2013. Currently, CAR has designated five national parks which have valuable species of concern, including the forest elephant, bongo antelope, western lowland gorilla, and central and eastern chimpanzee. Dense forests cover approximately 36% of CAR and its wildlife is facing increasing threats from logging, small-scale agriculture and unsustainable bushmeat hunting.

Current threats to Biodiversity in Central African Republic

Elephant poaching

Poaching for ivory is the biggest threat to the survival of African elephants. The quality of ivory of forest elephants and the ability of poachers to remain



A female gorilla at Bai Hoku, Central African Republic. Credit: Direk Byler/USFWS.

undetected in the dense Congo Basin forests are partly to blame for the escalating pressure on Central Africa's elephants. Lack of adequate law enforcement coupled with corruption and poverty represent even larger factors.

Commercial bushmeat trade

The commercial bushmeat trade is the over-hunting of wildlife for their meat and income. The commercial bushmeat trade is fueled by a growing market that includes urban consumers, where bushmeat is associated with class and culture. Unsustainable bushmeat hunting is the single greatest threat to the majority of wildlife in CAR's forests. Unless appropriate policies are enforced, logging concessions and other work camps will continue to contribute to this problem by providing access to previously remote forests and also to urban markets.

Extractive industries

Extractive industries – including logging and mining for diamonds and gold – pose a direct threat to CAR's wildlife by destroying or degrading

habitat. They also represent an indirect threat by attracting new human settlements which lead to increased agricultural land conversion and bushmeat hunting. This also increases the risk of disease transfer between humans and wildlife.



A gorilla arm is sold for bushmeat. Credit: Richard Ruggiero/USFWS.

Since 2006, USFWS has supported conservation in the Central African Republic (CAR) through 12 grants, totaling more than \$867,400 which was leveraged with \$1.06 million from other donors.

Gorilla Habituation at Bai Hoku

In 2007, USFWS started supporting one of the most successful western gorilla tourism and research programs in Central Africa. From 2007 to 2013, USFWS awarded a total of \$417,041, which was leveraged by \$579,774 in matching funds, to the World Wildlife Fund to support operations of the Primate Habituation Program in Dzanga-Sangha Protected Area (DSPA) in southern CAR. This project has increased the economic value of DSPA by generating revenue for local communities through gorilla tourism and patrol activities. The project also promoted research and sharing of results with the wider scientific community. By raising awareness about the species and region, the project helped to inspire local and global support for gorilla conservation. Though this project succeeded in habituating and leading tourism with two gorilla groups, in May 2013 the escalating political crisis led to a suspension of tourism until further notice. Since then, a newly elected interim government is in place, which is expected to bring increased security over time.

Dzanga-Sangha Elephant Bai Monitoring

USFWS has supported elephant protection and monitoring at the Dzanga-Sangha forest clearing since 1994. USFWS funds totalled \$698,024 to the Wildlife Conservation Society for this project which was leveraged by \$820,834 in matching funds. This project is the longest ongoing study

of forest elephants and represents the first site where researchers have the ability to systematically study and monitor elephants on a regular basis. Many forest clearings exist throughout the Congo Basin, but Dzanga-Sangha is the only clearing that attracts high densities of forest elephants (between 50 and 200 individuals) each day. Consistent visits by elephants have allowed scientists to gather valuable data on this elusive species' demographics, behavior, and population structure. The presence of the permanent research camp near the clearing also reinforces consistent protection from poachers and illegal hunters. Furthermore, this clearing has been a popular tourist destination, generating income for the local population and helping to raise awareness of this vital forest elephant habitat. Tourism has been suspended since the May 2013 elephant poaching in Dzanga-Sangha.

Sanga Trinational (Dzanga-Sangha National Park)

The Sangha Trinational, or *Tri-National de la Sangha* (TNS), one of the largest blocks of pristine tropical lowland forest in the world, is the first three-country transboundary area to become a World Heritage Site. TNS is comprised of Lobéké National Park in Cameroon, Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park in Congo and Dzanga-Ndoki National Park in the Central African Republic. USFWS has supported the efforts of Ebola virus disease monitoring, great ape habituation for ecotourism, awareness-raising among local communities, and elephant bai monitoring through the administration of 78 grants, totaling nearly \$7 million, leveraged by an additional \$7.7 million in matching funds. In order to build on these investments, in 2013 USFWS entered into a 5-year, \$10 million cooperative agreement with

the African Parks Network (APN), the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to strengthen the ecological integrity and connectivity in and around TNS.

The Chinko Project

The Chinko Project, supported in 2013 with \$99,780 in USFWS funds, leveraged by \$213,248 in matching funds, is implementing an anti-poaching plan as a first step to its long-term goal of ensuring sustainable nature management of the Chinko Project area, a 17,000 square kilometer wooded savanna and forest zone with high levels of biodiversity located in southeastern CAR. Initial activities include training, equipping, and supporting at least six teams of anti-poaching rangers, and conducting participatory workshops and informational sessions with seasonal livestock herders and local community members to build their support for future conservation efforts.



Forest elephants gather at Dzanga-Sangha Bai in CAR.

Credit: Richard Ruggiero/USFWS.

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USFWS Support to CAR FY2006-FY2013	
Grants Awarded	12
Amount Awarded	\$867,468
Amount Leveraged	\$1,067,329
Total	\$1,934,797