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THE CENTRAL AFRICA FOREST ECOSYSTEMS CONSERVATION PROJECT

OVERVIEW

The Congo Basin is the world's second largest contiguous rainforest. It is unequalled in its biodiversity, with a rich array of wildlife often found nowhere else in the world. It is also the second largest global "sink" for carbon, the most important gas implicated in global warming.

The forests are also an important source of food, materials and medicine for more than 80 million people who live in the region. The lack of economic alternatives for the local inhabitants and the expected doubling of the population in Central Africa over the next 20 years are increasing pressures to clear forests.

Deforestation, forest degradation and biodiversity loss due to habitat destruction and the bushmeat trade and wildlife trafficking, environmental destruction from civil and military conflicts, population growth, and growing global demand for food, timber, minerals, petroleum and other resources are combining to create great and growing threats, impacting the region both now and in the future.

Economic growth and poverty alleviation are dependent on the effective and sustainable use and sound management of natural resources. The governments of the Congo Basin countries¹ have recognized the growing threat to their forests, and have indicated a desire to act, but they also need to strike a balance between managing the resources to meet current local and global needs and conserving the resource base for future generations.

Some governments have begun to put legislative and policy frameworks in place, although implementation is lagging due to inadequately trained personnel and other deficiencies in capacity to implement these commitments. So while official recognition of the need for regional cooperation in tackling these challenges is high, and has already led to cooperative work and the formation of channels and structures for collaboration, much more needs to be done to protect these valuable and irreplaceable resources.

¹ The core countries in the Congo Basin are Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Republic of Congo



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO – 2014: Man fishing on the Salonga River. USAID is supporting sustainable fishing practices in the landscape. Photo by Jonas Abana Eriksson for USAID

CAFEC at a Glance

USAID's Central Africa Forest Ecosystems Conservation (CAFEC) project supports the sustainable management of targeted forest landscapes representing some of the most important ecosystems found across the vast Congo Basin as the foundation for building low carbon emissions economies and mitigating threats to biodiversity.

USAID's implementing partners – the African Wildlife Foundation, Wildlife Conservation Society and the World Wildlife Fund – protect and build capacity to manage eight landscapes covering 29 million hectares of land; six in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and two in the Republic of Congo.

CAFEC and the Environmental Monitoring and Policy Support (EMAPS) project, which improves the quality and scope of conservation policy making, and forest monitoring, analysis and information dissemination, are "institutionalizing" the management of the Congo Basin forests through individual, organizational, and systems capacity building during the third phase of USAID's Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE) program.

THE CENTRAL AFRICA REGIONAL PROGRAM FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

In 1995, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) established the Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE), a 25-year program aimed at reducing the threats of forest and biodiversity loss within the Congo Basin. CARPE aims to slow the rate of forest degradation and the impact it can have on climate change by increasing local, national, and regional capacity and participation in natural resource management, and strengthening conservation policy development and implementation.

CARPE's approach is both top-down and bottom-up. It works at the local level with forest dwelling communities and at the national level with an array of international, regional, national and local partners to transition from the

past spiral of environmental degradation and poverty toward a trajectory characterized by climate resilience and rising earnings from sustainable low-emissions development and flourishing biodiversity.

Now in its third phase, CARPE is "institutionalizing" the management of the Congo Basin forests through individual, organizational and systems capacity building. To achieve this, two distinct but interdependent projects have been established: the Environmental Monitoring and Policy Support (EMAPS) project, which works to boost the quality and scope of conservation policy-making, and forest monitoring, analysis and information dissemination; and the Central Africa Forest Ecosystems Conservation (CAFEC) project.



REPUBLIC OF CONGO – 2014:
Testing fuel-saving cook stoves as a strategy to reduce forest degradation and deforestation in the Batéké-Leconi-Léfini landscape.
Photo by Lucie Escoufflaire for USAID

THE CENTRAL AFRICA FOREST ECOSYSTEMS CONSERVATION PROJECT

The Central Africa Forest Ecosystems Conservation (CAFEC) project supports the management of targeted forest landscapes as the foundation for building low carbon-emissions economies with a reliance on land-based activities and natural resources. It also works to mitigate threats to biodiversity in these landscapes.

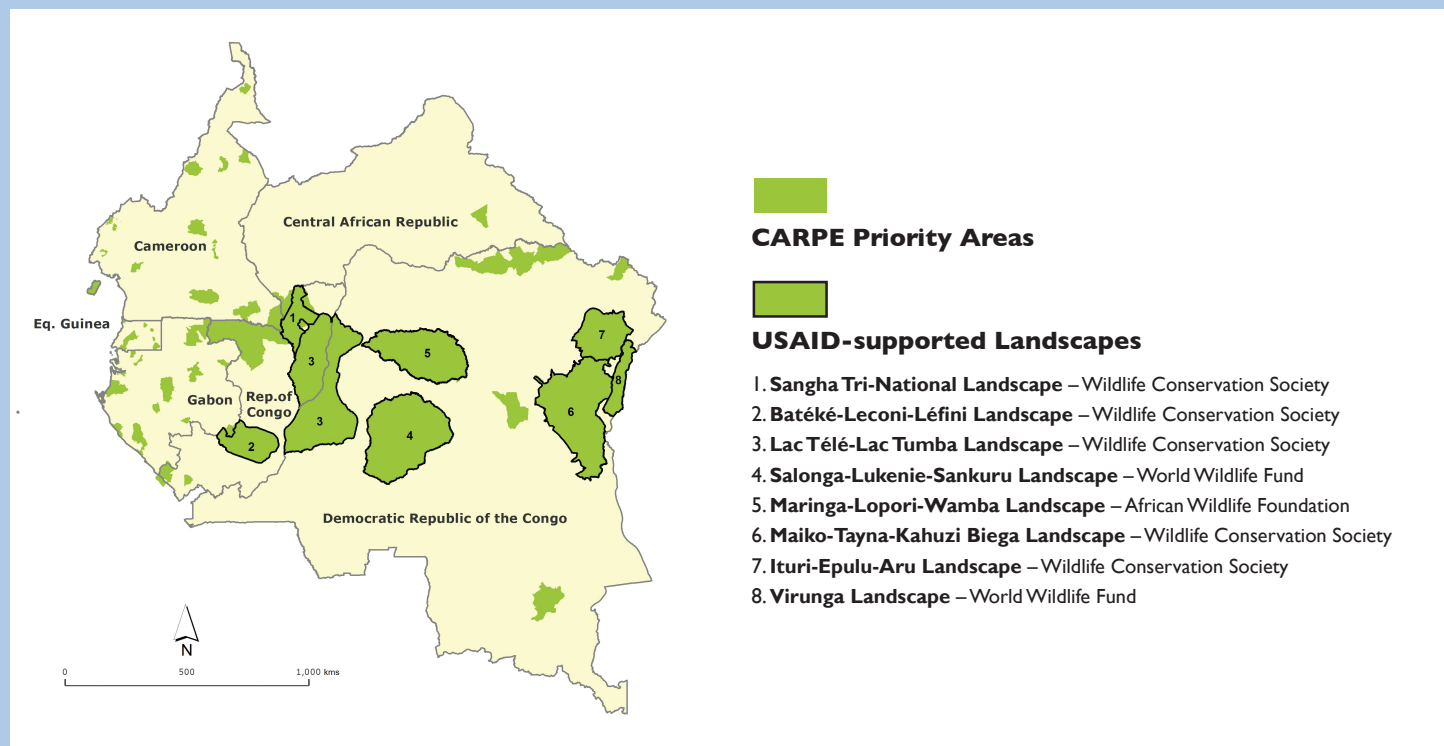
CAFEC will build local and national capacity to implement land use management plans designed to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and conserve biodiversity based on participatory and inclusive approaches that engage key stakeholder groups.

To achieve this, CAFEC focuses on two key objectives to meet the goal of maintaining the ecological integrity of the humid forest ecosystem of the Congo Basin.

The first is to develop approaches and strengthen capacity to sustainably manage forest landscapes. CAFEC strengthens local and national capacity to successfully implement land use management plans, such as improving access to proven technologies and practices for sustainable forest

management and global climate change mitigation. CAFEC also works with communities to adopt “alternative livelihood” approaches, such as using better farming techniques and plantations of fast-growing trees for charcoal to reduce the amount of forest impacted and habitat destroyed, producing alternative protein sources so fewer forest animals are killed and using sustainable forest products to generate family incomes. These approaches help to reduce deforestation, forest degradation and GHG emissions, resulting in increased carbon sequestration in the Congo Basin.

The second objective is to mitigate biodiversity threats in targeted forest landscapes. CAFEC strengthens capacity for biodiversity conservation and promoting compliance with wildlife laws and regulations, such as improving access to new technologies, practices and methodologies in conservation and monitoring, and training judiciary officials in wildlife laws. CAFEC also supports initiatives to expand the reach and effectiveness of law enforcement activities, with a focus on apprehending poachers and other offenders and ensuring they are held accountable for their actions through court procedures.



CAFEC is currently focusing on eight landscapes covering 29 million hectares of land; six in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and two in the Republic of Congo. These landscapes, which represent some of the most important ecosystems found across the vast Congo Basin, are considered areas of high conservation value for a range of endangered flora and fauna.

USAID's implementing partners – the African Wildlife Foundation, Wildlife Conservation Society and the World Wildlife Fund – protect and manage these landscapes by engaging with local communities, local and national governments, regional agencies and private stakeholders to develop and implement plans and pursue approaches that recognize traditional hierarchies and activities while at the same time balancing the environmental and economic needs of each area.

CAFEC focuses on combating wildlife trafficking, sustainable hunting and bushmeat harvesting, and tackling drivers of deforestation impacting each of the eight landscapes by improving the capacity of relevant authorities to implement and enforce wildlife strategies and laws, building local capacity to address conservation threats and improving wildlife security, enhancing the forest management capacity to monitor illegal activities in protected areas and bushmeat transportation corridors, and reducing bushmeat consumption and its commercial trade.

CAFEC supports partner governments in Central Africa to build their capacity to better protect their natural resources, particularly national parks and wildlife reserves where most of the wildlife poaching and trafficking, estimated to be the fourth largest black market in the world and worth billions annually, takes place.

At the country level, CAFEC partners with government agencies, civil society groups, and local communities to develop and strengthen local, subnational and national capacity for sustainable forest management, biodiversity conservation, and climate change mitigation.

CAFEC collaborates with national REDD+ coordination units to design and implement pilot REDD+ activities that take advantage of USAID's long-term presence in the landscapes. And CAFEC assists local organizations to ensure broad-based, gender-balanced, and inclusive participation in managing community-based natural resources.

Select Recent Accomplishments

- Managing more than 12.8 million hectares of high conservation value habitat (an area roughly equal to Arizona) in established protected areas.
- Training more than 300 eco-guards and 50 wildlife law enforcement agents and judiciary officials.
- Introducing SMART (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool) technology across all eight landscapes, providing real time data and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of anti-poaching and enforcement patrols.
- Developing and disseminating a variety of outreach materials to improve people's knowledge of existing laws and the rights of local communities and resource users, with a special focus on engaging women and disadvantaged groups.



REPUBLIC OF CONGO – 2004: Endangered western lowland gorillas in Mbeli Bai, Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park enjoy better protection due to USAID's conservation efforts. Photo by Thomas Breuer for USAID

For more information:

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