

World Wildlife Fund (WWF-US) Organizational Overview: Dzanga-Sangha Reserve, Central African Republic

Richard Carroll

Director, World Wildlife Fund-US, Africa and Madagascar Program

ABSTRACT

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has worked in the Sangha River Region for many years with the program goal of maintaining biodiversity and ecological processes in central and west Africa through selecting priority biomes, ecosystems, and species to be conserved. The WWF strategy includes the following: developing management plans while ensuring integration with local needs; empowerment of local communities; environmental education; development of policy and legislation; and effective program management, implementation, and evaluation. WWF works in collaboration with numerous government and non-governmental agencies in developing a network of protected areas. It has supported the establishment of a trinational protected area including Congo, CAR, and Cameroon since beginning work in the region. The WWF component at Dzanga-Sangha/Dzanga-Ndoki in CAR has been created as an Integrated Conservation and Development Project (ICDP) and has been faced with numerous conservation challenges having to do with institutions, logging activities and trade, poaching, local attitudes, mining, and financing. A list of lessons learned is given.

INTRODUCTION

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has a strong presence in Central Africa, with representation and projects in Cameroon, Gabon, the Central African Republic (CAR), as well as projects in west Africa. Originally the WWF program in central Africa was based on focal countries: Gabon, Cameroon, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (or DRC, formerly Zaire). In the early 1990s WWF began planning on a biome basis and developed a sub-regional conservation plan for central Africa. This biome-based planning has been further refined by delineation of eco-regions based on distinctive patterns of biodiversity within the region. The main components of the strategy developed by our central African team, made up of country representatives and partners, follows these main lines:

- a program goal of maintenance of biodiversity and ecological processes in central and west Africa;
- a program goal of selecting priority biomes, eco-systems, and species to be conserved. The focus of WWF's program in this region is on the forests as a priority biome.

The Sub-regional Strategy maintains the following program outputs:

- management plans developed and implemented for priority biomes, ecosystems, and species while ensuring integration with local needs;
- empowerment of communities supported and capacity of target groups strengthened to manage effectively;

- environmental education and awareness promoted in target groups;
- development, adoption, and implementation of environmental policies, treaties, national legislation and development assistance promoted;
- effective program development, management, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of operations.

By collaborative efforts with government and communities in the region and links with other organizations (e.g. WCS, GTZ, ECOFAC, IUCN), WWF is creating a network of protected areas stretching across central Africa from eastern CAR through Congo and Gabon. We know that protected areas are not the only answer, so we are trying to build a network of protected areas and work from these points outward to develop and maintain corridors. One of the ways we try to establish corridors is to work with the logging industry, governments and communities to promote sustainable forestry following Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) principles and criteria.

In Gabon and Cameroon we have developed FSC working groups and are trying to get logging companies to adopt FSC criteria. At the same time we are trying to develop buyers' groups for sustainably produced timber in Europe and the U.S. so that market demand will be increased. In CAR, where the concession in Dzanga-Sangha was recently canceled, we are working with the government to develop a sustainably managed program as well as to promote a forest training institute.

In an effort to become more effective in analyzing and mitigating human conditions that lead to over-exploitation and to promote Community-based Conservation (CBC), we have recently completed a training program in Applied Social Science. This program included WWF staff, partner organizations, and community members. They now form a team that is equipped to examine some of the social threats to biodiversity in the region. History takes a variety of forms depending on who is interpreting it, and we feel that central Africans themselves are best equipped to interpret the social conditions in this region. Therefore, we have also created a cadre of Central Africans who are trained in Applied Social Science methods.

HISTORY OF WWF INVOLVEMENT

WWF first became active in the CAR in the late 1970s, offering support for elephant conservation in the northern savanna zone's Manovo-Gounda-Saint Floris National Park and providing support to the Ministry of Water, Forests, Hunting, Fishing, and Tourism for anti-poaching activities. In the mid-1980s WWF provided a small

We know that protected areas are not the only answer, so we are trying to build a network of protected areas and work from these points outward to develop and maintain corridors.

grant for wildlife censuses in southwestern CAR. The results revealed the biological richness of the area and its importance to local populations. A draft management plan for the area's conservation and a proposal for an integrated conservation and development program were subsequently developed. In 1987, a presidential decree banned all hunting in order to allow completion of the studies and to allow wildlife populations to rebuild. The proposal was accepted by the WWF/USAID Wildlands and Human Needs Program and a project agreement for the Dzanga-Sangha Project was signed between WWF-US and the government of CAR in 1988. Initial protection, research, education, and development programs were begun and the management plan refined.

The CAR accepted the management plan and in 1990 officially gazetted the Dzanga-Sangha Dense Forest Special Reserve (3,159 km²) and the Dzanga-Ndoki National Park (1,220 km²). The "special reserve" classification, allowing multiple use, became a new statute in CAR. Interior regulations for the Park and Reserve, signed in 1992, allowed for a 90% local disbursement of tourism entrance fees. Of this, 50% was intended to finance the park/reserve and 40% to support a community association for rural development activities. Gustave Doungoumbe, the former WWF National Coordinator for CAR, was named the first National Director of this program.

REGIONAL IMPORTANCE

The WWF Africa/Madagascar Program has made a long-term commitment to the Dzanga-Sangha Project, and forms an integral part of the Congo Basin Forest Conservation Network we are establishing. Dzanga-Sangha has formed the core of our effort to create a trinational protected area system expanding from Dzanga-Sangha into the contiguous forests of northern Congo and southeastern Cameroon. Recently (1993) the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park was gazetted in neighboring Congo. In addition, we are developing management plans for three protected areas in southeastern Cameroon which will contribute to a contiguous proposed protected forest of over 10,000 km² in the three country area.

The long-range plan is to establish a network of protected forests to stabilize the northern fringe of the Congo Basin forests. The network begins in Bangassou (eastern CAR), extends to Dzanga-Sangha and the trinational region, and then links with the Minkebe region of northern Gabon and the Gamba complex on the coast. This network supports ECOFAC projects in the Ngoto region of CAR, Dja in Cameroon, and Lope in Gabon, creating a viable conservation program for the forests of these central African countries. Through funding from the USDA Forest Service, we are also estab-

Dzanga-Sangha has formed the core of our effort to create a trinational protected area system expanding from Dzanga-Sangha into the contiguous forests of northern Congo and southeastern Cameroon. . . . The long-range plan is to establish a network of protected forests to stabilize the northern fringe of the Congo Basin forests.

lishing a community-based forest management network, the African Forest Action Network (AFAN), to form a means for communication and exchange among NGOs in west and central Africa.

INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES TO CONSERVATION

Despite these advances, the project is faced with serious obstacles. The political climate in CAR remains highly unstable. Three ministerial changes occurred during a single year and resulted in an inefficient and often chaotic situation. Macroeconomic and political instability resulted in the suspension of a World Bank Natural Resource Management Loan, which was to have supported the Dzanga-Sangha Project, and a reduction in all World Bank-supported components of the project. Efforts to protect the area's natural resources continue to meet with resistance from local authorities who have a vested interest in illegal poaching. Logging companies also resist protection efforts such as National Forestry Code controls and enforcement.

The institutional framework of the government's environmental section is in transition. Creation of a new Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) has resulted in a narrower scope of action for the former Ministry of Waters, Forests, Hunting, Fishing, and the Environment (MEFCPT). The creation of this independent ministry of environment could have implications for policy-making and resource use, by providing a clearer and less ambiguous mandate for administration. Environmental jurisdiction is placed within a ministry whose primary charge is perceived to be promotion of resource exploitation. It is not clear how the cross-cutting aspects of environmental policy will be managed by a self-contained ministry under the new scheme. No mechanism has been proposed for resolving inter-ministerial issues and is a key concern. Many environmental problems impinge upon the portfolios of line ministries such as Agriculture, as well as specialized agencies such as Economy and Planning. A super-ministerial body of some sort would be advisable in order to ensure that the environment does not become compartmentalized and marginalized at the level of a small and inadequately funded ministry of environment.

On regional and local levels, controls on logging, hunting and mining are often ineffective and hampered by resistance from the very agents assigned to law enforcement. Wildlife protection is viewed as the responsibility of "the project" with little support for other services from the government. The police will more readily arrest a Reserve Guard than a poacher. Guards often confiscate guns that had already been confiscated by the police and then were used for poaching. Internal corruption within the Wildlife Department has also hampered effective controls.

A super-ministerial body of some sort would be advisable in order to ensure that the environment does not become compartmentalized and marginalized at the level of a small and inadequately funded ministry of environment.

Effective law enforcement cannot take place when all infrastructure depends on logging companies, including police and ministerial offices, and when such promising financial gains result from illegal activities. Local authorities are all too aware of high political involvement in the granting of forestry permits, in poaching rings, and in mining interests and therefore little will or ability exists to affect any controls. This situation is compounded by the fact that there is little to no follow-up of incidents or prosecution of poachers presented to the judicial branch by the conservator of the park.

TIMBER CONCESSIONS AND TIMBER TRADE

The major constraint on the success of this project has been the conflicting interests of the two logging companies operating in the Dzanga-Sangha Dense Forest Special Reserve. These companies, especially Silvicole of Bayanga, based in the same village as the project, have been quite unwilling to collaborate with the conservation program. They have gone so far as to sue the government of CAR, demanding a revocation of the Interior Regulations of the Park/Reserve. They have destroyed infrastructure, and harassed project staff.

The logging companies have attempted to sway public opinion against conservation programs, resulting in a general sense of animosity toward the project. Their campaign, however, has ultimately backfired, as local populations see the project as favorable to their long-term interests. This point is underlined by the logging company's inability to meet regular pay schedules for employees and its consistent demonstration that its priority is profit maximization.

Logging activity attracts an immigrant population, which leads to a large number of permanent residents. These immigrants, primarily attracted to economic opportunities, have attempted to increase their benefits through poaching and the sale of bushmeat and ivory. Logging roads have opened the forest to hunters; a considerable increase in the number of guns and cable snares in operation has resulted. Logging and the influx of immigrants have disrupted traditional tenure systems and inter-ethnic relations, particularly between the BaAka and neighboring farming and fishing communities. This has resulted in the marginalization of the BaAka, increased rates of alcoholism, and generally poor health conditions.

The recent devaluation of the Central African Franc (CFA) has given an added stimulus to the logging industry. The logging industry in the area has continued to experience a series of boom and bust cycles. The original company, Slovenia Bois (SB), operated in favorable economic conditions and offered constant employment for many years. When economic cycles turned downward, production dropped, layoffs ensued, and eventually Slovenia Bois went bank-

Effective law enforcement cannot take place when all infrastructure depends on logging companies, including police and ministerial offices, and when such promising financial gains result from illegal activities.

rupt. Long-term employees were left without several years of back pay. While waiting for their wages, many of them turned to poaching. More recently, logging companies have attempted to maximize profits while minimizing investments, which has led to unstable employment. The CFA devaluation has consequently resulted in a significant increase in production and export of timber from the area.

Because of the pervasive political, financial, and military influence of the French government in CAR, French logging concessions often receive preferential treatment. French companies often bypass the appropriate ministry procedures and get their permits directly at the presidential level. Such permits generally exempt companies from the usual controls. Middle Eastern logging companies in Central Africa, particularly Lebanese and Syrian, are growing in importance. They are able to exert enough financial and political pressure to make the application of forestry and customs laws difficult. The power of these economic actors, with their associated high political connections both within and outside CAR, often sidetracks conservation activities.

POACHING

Poaching for meat, ivory, and skins has been a major challenge to conservation in the Dzanga-Sangha region. These activities are extremely lucrative, and guns, ammunition, and cable for snares are readily available. Meat is supplied to nearby forestry workers who have sufficient income to purchase it on a regular basis. External market merchants have hunters under their employ, often BaAka, who hunt almost exclusively for their patrons. Payment to hunters is frequently made in the form of bullets, second-hand clothing, soap, alcohol, cigarettes, or other consumer items. Wealthy and politically connected people often support both meat and ivory hunters. The Dzanga-Sangha project has been actively involved in controlling the illegal trade of forest products. One of the first successes of the Dzanga-Sangha protection team was to catch the Interior Minister's poaching agents trying to export ivory.

Many of the merchants, mostly Hausa, who have set up shop in Bayanga to supply the forestry workers with basic commercial goods also side-line in ivory and diamonds. In addition, they sell moped brake cable by the roll to snare-hunters. Larger snares for trapping elephants are made from materials stolen from the logging company. Pesticides are also stolen from the logging company for use in fishing, despite the fact that consumption of fish captured using these pesticides has been linked to a number of human casualties.

ATTITUDES

The attitude that the forest is an inexhaustible supermarket with free products for the taking is pervasive. The forest is measured by cubic meters of timber, baskets (truckloads) of meat, and boatloads of fish. The forest has been a great supplier, but the supplies do not meet current increasing demands. People are generally individualistic: they take care of themselves and immediate family. A sense of community is lacking.

Altruism is not a viable operating agenda when there are hungry mouths to feed in one's home, an attitude aggravated by the large variety of immigrants having few relations in the region. Mistrust and sorcery are the norm, hampering the establishment of community-based conservation systems. Most conservation project employees view the project as an economic opportunity for paid work and not as a service with long-term benefits to their country. Few have a commitment to conservation. The progressive distribution of tourist revenue does not necessarily result in more positive behaviour toward conservation as there is a universal contradictory attitude. People are pleased to make agreements in order to benefit from tourist revenue, while maintaining a gun and snare trails in the forest.

MINING

The discovery of significant diamond deposits within the reserve has attracted a new wave of immigrants establishing settlements within the protected area (Mogba and Freudenberg, this volume). While based at these mining camps, the main source of food is bushmeat from animals trapped within the reserve. The Reserve Management has carried out missions with the police and gendarmes to disband these mining camps, without much success. Many of the enforcement officers, the local political elite, and a significant portion of the population are profiting from diamond mining, and are thus not willing to uphold the laws creating the protected area.

CONSERVATION FINANCE

An additional constraint has been the uncertainty of funding, emphasizing the need to develop long-term funding mechanisms. The current investments from the Forestry and Tourism Fund and the development of the Dzanga-Sangha Conservation Trust Fund are steps toward addressing this situation. Over the last two years, the project has been hampered by the unreliability and disruption of World Bank financing that was intended to be a primary financial contributor.

SUMMARY

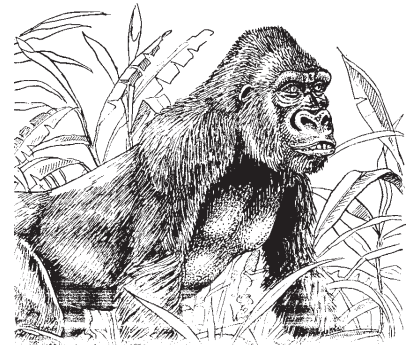
Despite the above noted challenges, the project maintains a sound technical foundation in an extremely rich forest and has the potential to serve as a model ICDP if sustainable, non-politically-linked funding can be achieved. The government of CAR has shown a commitment and a willingness to support conservation and has developed many progressive and positive policy advances. The conservation sector in CAR, however, is in a weak position due to pressing economic and social needs. CAR is a desperately poor, landlocked country depending on natural resource exploitation for foreign exchange and internal employment. This great obligation and dependence on foreign companies puts the government of CAR in a weak bargaining position with potential partners in the timber trade. The ability to control logging is exacerbated by structural adjustment programs imposed by the IMF and the devaluation of the CFA. Structural adjustment has resulted in staff reductions within already weak agencies, and the devaluation of the CFA has cut salary values in half. No adjustments in government employee salaries were made, while the cost of both foreign and domestic products in CAR has risen following devaluation, de-motivating staff and opening the door to further temptation for corruption.

Concentration of economic power in commercial enterprises greatly diminishes the ability to establish community control and rational land use plans. Concessions are often imposed upon communities with little consultation. These forest lands are the domain of the state; land tenure reforms are necessary to support and protect the integrity of local resource management. Without such measures, the long standing presumption of central government supremacy poses a constant risk of arbitrary action and undermining of local authority.

CONCLUSIONS

In theory, logging and conservation can coexist. But real world experience shows that a balance is extremely difficult to achieve because of mistrust and conflicts of interest. Without proper NGO staffing, logging concession and timber trade issues may be too complicated and counterproductive to tackle. Many of the timber trade and concession issues can be effectively addressed through WWF networks in Europe and the U.S. by lobbying donors, government aid agencies and logging company headquarters. Only with concerted positive international attention and coordinated pressure can the power of the economic/state actors be countered to support the conservation agenda.

ICDPs are extremely complex programs attempting to effectively engage ecosystem conservation, community relations and develop-



Western lowland gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla gorilla*).
(Illustration: Bernardin Nabana)

ment, and complicated policy issues. We are increasingly aware, however, that ICDPs must be based on a solid foundation of socio-economic as well as ecological data. They must be properly staffed and funded to engage the issues at hand. In Dzanga-Sangha, having a social scientist on staff from the beginning may have helped to avoid misconceptions and false starts of developing community cooperation.

WWF has shown itself to be a persistent, loyal, consistent and honest partner with the government of CAR. This long-term relationship has involved numerous conflicts and successes for the conservation of nature and has yielded fruitful results. The positive international attention given to CAR for its conservation efforts by WWF is appreciated by the government and provides leverage for considerable funding opportunities. The government of CAR wishes to maintain this positive external image and carefully considers WWF points of view. WWF has credibility and a voice at the policy table.

Many of the issues concerning timber concessions and corruption persist because of lack of political access and awareness of local citizens. Effective engagement of the media to disseminate information should be used as a tool for affecting policy issues.

Big is not necessarily better. One of the most effective activities resulting in positive relations with the community was establishing the village pharmacy (cost: approximately US \$200). Large capital-intensive components dependent on tenuous external funding sources are fraught with insecurity and have a high failure rate.

WWF must be able to respond to field needs in a timely and proactive fashion so as not to limit its effectiveness in the field or concerning policy issues. This problem could be accentuated by decentralized program management. WWF-US and the network must be actively engaged in supporting policy issues and needs of ICDPs.

It is fundamental that appropriate legal frameworks be established early in the project cycle. A project agreement defining roles and responsibilities of WWF, the government, and other partners is an essential foundation. Clear regulations for protected areas established in consultation with stakeholders help to define parameters of policy relating to the protected area (e.g. zoning for hunting, logging, protection, settlement and agriculture areas, revenue sharing, rights, rules, and restrictions).

Economic development activities based on enlightened self-interest, not on assumptions of altruism, must become the focus. Individuals must perceive and receive individual benefits from collective activities. This has been the key to the development of a community association and decentralized management. Programs must be of benefit to all stakeholders and not favor one ethnic

In theory, logging and conservation can coexist. But real world experience shows that this is extremely difficult due to mistrust and conflicts of interest.

group. Economic development activities must be significant enough to offset the alternatives of logging and wildlife trade.

Local institutional development necessitates involvement and representation of all stakeholders. Because of animosity between the community and local authorities the latter were not represented on the committee and consequently used their power to sabotage committee efforts. The current CDB structure provides a voice and forum for all stakeholders including community members, authorities, and logging company representatives.

RICHARD CARROLL, Director of the WWF-US Africa and Madagascar Program, served as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Central African Republic, working on issues of environmental management. He received his doctorate at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies in 1997. He has also served as the director of the Dzanga-Sangha Dense Forest Reserve in southwestern CAR.

Selected bibliography:

- 1986. The status, distribution, and density of lowland gorillas (*Gorilla gorilla gorilla*), elephants (*Loxodonta africana cyclotis*) and associated dense forest fauna in southwestern CAR: research toward establishment of a reserve for their protection. Unpublished report. New Haven, CT: Yale University.
- 1988. Relative density, extension, and conservation potential for *Gorilla gorilla gorilla* in Dzanga-Sangha Region of Central African Republic. *Mammalia* 52: 309-323.
- 1994. Feeding ecology of the western lowland gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla gorilla*) in the Central African Republic. Unpub. Ph.D. dissertation. New Haven, CT: Yale University.

Richard Carroll, World Wildlife Fund, 1250 24th Street, Washington D.C. 20037. Tel: 202. 778. 9670; Fax: 202.861.8377; E-mail: richard.carroll@WWFUS.org