

## Development of a Trinational System of Conservation: A Ten-Year Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

The history of the previous decade concerning the trinational conservation area development in the Sangha River region can be described in basic terms. The first action taken toward the goal of regional conservation was the establishment, with modest means and funds, of the Dzanga-Sangha protected area in CAR. Some years later, the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park was established, adjacent to Dzanga-Sangha, in northern Congo. Both parks were established on the same principles: forest preservation and wildlife conservation. Protection of the third area, Lobéké in Cameroon, is still awaited and may benefit from the support of a "patron." A decade after this initiative began, we find ourselves today on the same path. Funding, NGO interest, government support, and good collaboration with local communities have all emerged from this process. Failures, however, have included not acting in a timely fashion, continued human demographic problems, marginalization of Pygmy communities despite the obvious need for special consideration, control of logging activities, and not yet completed trinational conservation. A Sangha River Reserve extending along a 35 km stretch of the Sangha River and incorporating Congo, CAR, and Cameroon protected areas is the next step.

### TRINATIONAL CONSERVATION

I first started working in the Sangha region with Richard Carroll in 1986. He had already started a conservation effort that was based quite simply on forest preservation and wildlife conservation. This effort included the Dzanga-Sangha Project concept as we now know it, with two national parks, and a multiple-use special reserve. Part of the plan from the outset was to create a trinational reserve consisting of the Central Africa Republic's Dzanga-Sangha complex and conservation areas in the adjacent forests of Lobéké in Cameroon and Ndoki in Congo. We should recall that this was a time when ICDPs were just coming into vogue, and few conservationists had experience working in forest environments. We had limited experience in developing or managing national parks, particularly in forests with relatively high human population densities or those affected by local logging activities.

In preparing this paper, I reviewed the goals and objectives in our original conservation plan as it was written over ten years ago. I was pleased to find that the plan is still on track following a decade of effort. Even as Dzanga-Sangha begins to reach middle-age, I think we are basically where we had intended to be. This paper reviews that plan in very general terms, gives a brief overview of where we are now, and proposes possibilities for the future.

The basic premise for our activities was that tropical African forests, if exploitation and colonization trends continued, would cease to exist in their pristine form. For us "pristine" meant large tracks of uninhabited forest lands with intact ecosystems and high densities of large mammals including, in particular, elephants and

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gorillas. Our surveys of the Dzanga-Sangha region in CAR revealed an ecologically rich area offering an ideal opportunity for such preservation activities. We also witnessed, however, indigenous populations that were increasingly marginalized by commercial activities in the region. The goal from the start, therefore, was to create integrally-protected lands that would never see a chainsaw, along with multiple-use areas that could be exploited in ways that would provide long-term hunting and gathering opportunities for local inhabitants.

Our goal was clearly identified. The next task was to create a workable strategy to achieve it. We conducted additional surveys, initiated dialogue with government personnel, local authorities, and local people. At the same time, and prior to a mandate, we instituted an anti-poaching program with our limited means. A conservation plan was drawn up and, much to his credit, Richard Carroll was able to turn the tide in Dzanga-Sangha's main population center, Bayanga. The town's existence had been based solely on wood extraction and the slaughter of elephants and other wildlife before Carroll's rapid introduction of wildlife conservation.

It was relatively easy to convince the Central African government that this area was important for forest and wildlife conservation. The local people and local officials in particular did not appreciate the anti-poaching efforts, however, which created a great deal of friction in the town. But our policy of integrating the local population into the management scheme helped the project's level of acceptance. In our plan, we recognized that in order to attain our conservation goal, it was necessary to engage in certain development and education projects. Over the years we were able to start bringing together the elements necessary to create a viable system. This included a research program, a strong anti-poaching component, education, and a limited number of development projects.

The plan was accepted by the government, and donors became interested in the area. By 1988 we were already well on our way to having significant funding from the World Bank for what would today be classified as an ICDP. Since that time the project has been experimenting with many of the classic premises of ICDPs, such as alternative activities.

In 1989 the IUCN began producing books on the various potential conservation sites in central African forests. Dr. Philippe Hecketsweiler identified the area adjacent to Dzanga-Sangha, the Nouabalé forestry exploitation unit in Congo (Brazzaville), as one of several sites in the country with enormous potential to become a forest and wildlife reserve. At that time I conducted a number of surveys in this area, which we confirmed to be an enormous wilderness across the border from the CAR conservation areas. This find-

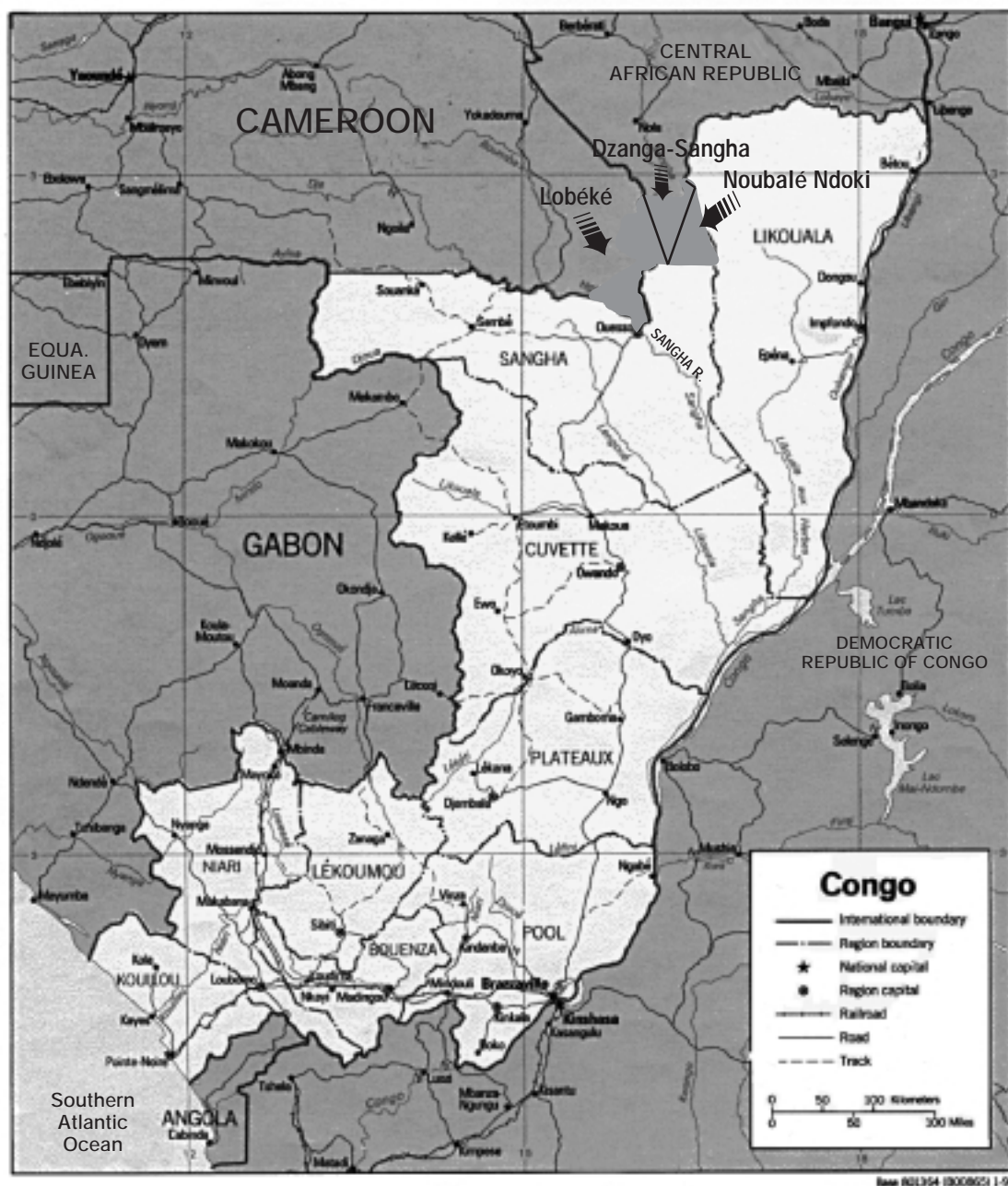


Figure 1 Republic of Congo national and administrative borders. Shaded area in upper portion shows the approximate location of the three protected areas discussed in this volume.

ing confirmed the notion that we should embark on the second phase, which progressed much more rapidly than the first.

In December 1993 the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park was gazetted by the Congolese Government. The core national park area was to have been buffered by a system of legally-protected special reserves. Nearby logging concessions, which were envisioned as being well-managed, were largely unoccupied at the time. Our thinking had evolved somewhat as to the approach needed to accomplish the conservation goal, but in general, we remained focused on our principal objective. The adjacent Lobéké area was surveyed on several occasions by WCS in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the concept of a "Lac Lobéké Reserve" started to take shape. The program in Cameroon has evolved somewhat independently of the other two components of the trinational area, but in general, the goals have remained those of forest and wildlife conservation.

### CONSERVATION CHALLENGES

As we enter the second decade of conservation efforts in the trinational area, where are we? In general we're on track. We are well on the way to having set up national reserves in all three areas. We have funding agencies that are involved in supporting projects, and we have NGOs and governments collaborating in the development and management of the programs. We also have local people participating in the conservation scheme. In general, I would give us a good grade on these efforts that began over ten years ago. As our colleague Richard Ruggiero has described, we believe in the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park, and we have developed a model that addresses the core issues of an ideal conservation project which can lead us to our goal.

We are still faced with certain shortcomings, however, and I would like to reflect on these a bit further. We have failed the region in certain respects. Although we can still address some of those failures, it will not be as effective as if we had addressed them in a timely fashion.

**Sustainability.** As these projects age, we will feel the strain of sustainability weigh heavily on being able to preserve the national parks that have been created. It will be necessary to come up with systems that can expand with expanding economies and expanding human populations. We have created a system that requires approximately 1.5-2 million US\$ per year to sustain. As time goes on, human population pressure increases, logs become more valuable, and the conservation model becomes increasingly strained as funding impacts are diminished. We have tried tourism, large fund-

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raising drives, cost cutting, nationalization, but we still have a major long-term sustainability problem as well as a number of short-term funding problems.

We are competing for funding with a large number of similar projects world-wide. We had a war in Congo that disrupted progress and created further divergence between revenue and costs. In reflecting extensively on this issue over the past year, I have come to the conclusion that a system similar to that used by private universities such as Yale to create endowments can be a viable one. We need to create trust funds based on gifts, grants, and revenue from investment and commercial activities, as well as improved systems of forestry taxation. My hope is that the world will recognize the importance of these reserves and support large scale trust fund development. If not, I believe we are in serious trouble. If forestry and safari hunting revenues from outside reserves are not partially allocated to reserve management, these reserves must be externally subsidized. In the face of civil unrest and governments unable to contribute significant financial resources, it becomes increasingly difficult to imagine that these protected areas will survive without such funding. We need to find a solution in the very near future.

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**Buffer zones in Nouabalé-Ndoké.** In 1990 we developed a concept in Nouabalé-Ndoké that recognized the threat of large-scale mechanized logging in forestry concessions surrounding the national park. As time passes, the resources surrounding the park continue to become more valuable. Thus far we have failed to gazette zones around the park and to make annexes where necessary. We have failed to implement collaborative programs with the logging operation that is now only 25 km from the park border and advancing fast. We have lost a significant amount of time so that it is now difficult to implement a comprehensive program. If we do not succeed in implementing our buffer zone plan around Nouabalé-Ndoki in the very near future, we will have little chance to do so effectively.

**A gazetted reserve in Lobéké.** The process in Lobéké has been slow. At present there is a conservation project, and a conservation planning exercise is in place. The sooner we can establish a reserve in the Lobéké area, the more quickly we can start planning for the future of the trinational area.

**A trinational reserve.** The trinational is still only three contiguous land masses with a similar conservation/management objective. Given a great deal more consultation and an effective master plan, I think that we have before us an opportunity to demonstrate that

this large area can be properly managed. One way to do that is to create a Sangha River Reserve extending 35 km along the Sangha River. This would make the Sangha River the center of a grand reserve rather than the thoroughfare that divides three separate entities. It could be the centerpiece of joint management and become a tourist attraction without parallel. In this time of great political and social volatility, collaboration is of the utmost importance, as demonstrated by the invaluable aid the Nouabalé-Ndoki Project has received from our colleagues both in the Lobéké and Dzanga-Sangha Projects.

We have come a long way in the past ten years. I am generally satisfied with our success. I urge all who can help in making the future of the trinational a solid one to join these efforts. I congratulate all those that have made this concept live for as long as it has. It is doubtful that Richard Carroll and I, as two very green conservationists, could have imagined back in 1986 the phenomenal growth and success of conservation in this region. It is certainly encouraging to note the tremendous interest in the trinational area we have witnessed at this conference and we look forward to continued and collaborative efforts for the conservation of this ecologically important and aesthetically magnificent region of central Africa.

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