

## 1. Executive Summary

**Context:** WWF DRC has operated in Itombwe since 2004 with principal focus on the gazettement of the Natural Reserve of Itombwe for its high biodiversity value mainly in great apes. The reserve is a stronghold of an important group of endangered species and/or endemic species such as big mammals, birds and, amphibians. Habitat, ecosystems and fauna umbrella species like large mammals are part of the conservation target of WWF in the Natural Reserve of Itombwe (NRI). The project is focused on the main conservation targets: Great apes (Eastern lowland Gorilla, *Gorilla beringei graueri*; Chimpanzee, *Pan troglodytes schweinfurthii*), Forest elephant (*Loxodonta africana cyclotis*); Humid forest, Bamboo forest, savannah and *Malambo* (maternity place for mammals, known as areas of wildlife occurrence and benefiting cultural protection from traditional chiefs having customary jurisdiction over land allocation).

The Itombwe protected area (IPA) is still under its status as Natural Reserve which was gotten in 2006 with its squared shape. This situation created so any confusion and conflict while managing the PA. Obtaining the final status of the IPA, became crucial for being legally able to protect the last stronghold of great apes and home of important the fauna and flora biodiversity. During the WWF six years of intervention in Itombwe, the final legal status of the Itombwe protected area is not yet obtained. Nevertheless, all stakeholders (local population included) found the protection of IPA against pressures and threats will be vain unless this status and decree is obtained. The proposed status of the IPA will be the category VI under UICN classification. This category is the one which will allow communities to be involved directly in the management of the IPA. The choice was influenced about the fact that many villages are including inside the initial square shape of the IPA.

**Threats:** Despite all invested conservation efforts, the forest degradation and deforestation continue with the increase of human footprint, thus jeopardizing the biodiversity. FACET statistics related to surfaces, losses/rates loss and gains on forest cover in landscapes macro zones of the DRC show that deforestation rate in Itombwe macro zone is set at 0.021% in 2011-2012.

Factors causing these threats are mainly: shifting cultivation driving habitat degradation and habitat destruction; Abusive illegal logging driven by a poor application of laws; armed poaching driven by the international market (ivory); small scale and large scale mining concessions in and outside of the Itombwe protected area, driven by national and international markets. Unsustainable grazing and charcoal productions have been identified as major threats respectively in savannah and forest habitats. Bushmeat; more other species are not protected in DRC. The local population when they are hunting most of the time do not make the difference between protected species and non-protected ones. All of species they catch could be eaten or sold in the market

**Opportunities:** However, great opportunities also do exist to leverage the natural resources management efforts such as: (a) the Convention on Biological Diversity ratified by the government which will serve as umbrella for saving great apes, elephant and the richness of the forest and other various habitat; (b) the recommendation from recent Indigenous People and Protected areas workshop held in Kinshasa on 25 March 2015 and stressing the adoption by ICCN of the Participatory approach developed in Itombwe as a national case study to be followed for the setting aside the remaining 4% of DRC protected areas network; (c) the Prime Minister decree on the establishment modalities for community forest concessions No 14/018 signed on August 14, 2014 and allowing communities to manage their own forest with respect to other existing law governing the conservation of natural resources..

**Vision and goals:** The vision stated as follows “The exceptional value and the biodiversity of habitats in Itombwe Protected Area are conserved in a participatory way with local communities and indigenous peoples for the pride of the nation and for tangible future generation benefits”. It emphasizes the close relation between human development and participation for saving the high biodiversity of IPA.

Two strategic goals have been developed for maintaining in good health the biodiversity and the overall environment:

- Goal 1: By 2025, increase 10% of flagship species population (gorillas, chimpanzee);
- Goal 2: By 2018, the formal gazettement of Itombwe is obtained
- Goal 3: By 2025, at least 50% reduction of hunting pressure on other protected species<sup>1</sup> existing inside the IPA

In order to achieve these goals, several objectives and accompanying strategies have been elaborated by the WWF DRC team in collaboration with the WWF international team in 2013 (while defining the priorities for the project: Conservation African Forest Ecosystem). The strategies were elaborated based on five year interventions. In early 2015 (February 15), the strategies and the activities to be developed under each strategy were revisited as an entire part to be inserted in the DRC conservation strategy. These strategies focus on:

- Strategy 1: Strengthen protected area management capacity
- Strategy 2: Enhance law enforcement and prosecution
- Strategy 3: Promote sustainable agriculture, energy and livelihood
- Strategy 4 : Strengthen the implementation of land use management
- Strategy 5: Promote (ecologically) sustainable use of natural resources
- Strategy 6: Promote activities as payment for ecosystem services (PES)
- Strategy 7: Integrate REDD<sup>+</sup> on a landscape level
- Strategy 8: Reduce the impact of industry extractive by promoting best management practices (BMPs)
- Strategy 9: Strengthening Civil society organisation and Community based organisations

These strategies were defined for tackling the main threats in Itombwe Natural Reserve (INR). Except for the strategies, 6, 7 and 8, they are implemented with mainly three program/projects in Itombwe (The Central African Forest Conservation Ecosystem and the Energy programs/ CAFEC, the Swedish International Development Agency/SIDA project and the WWN NL project).

The current concept is designed to focus its efforts mainly on two strategies: Strategy 1 (Strengthen protected area management capacity) and Strategy 2 (Enhance law enforcement and prosecution). Nevertheless, WWF is continuing to look for other sources of funding for reinforcing its intervention in some strategies which are also critical for biodiversity conservation and, mainly on the strategies 5, 6, 7 and 8).

The field-based project will be implemented by WWF’s RNI team, based in Bukavu with an operational base in Mwenga, South-Kivu. The project team consists of a coordinator, a GIS and database officer, a project technical assistant, a project accountant and a driver. The team will receive support from the Eastern DRC WWF Manager based in Goma, key staff from WWF DRC’s Kinshasa office, including the Conservation Director and the Protected Areas Program Manager.

The main partners in the project will be the ICCN, the official agency in charge of the nation’s protected areas, as well as administration at provincial and national levels, including the Ministry of Mining and the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development. Collaboration with local

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<sup>1</sup> List of other protected species with evidence of presence in Itombwe in appendix 0b.

communities and local NGOs will represent an important element of the project's approach to secure consensus and buy-in from a large spectrum of stakeholders. Apart from the above mentioned human resources, the project will be using a set of material resources, including computer, printing and scanning machines, GPS, operational equipment (boots, uniforms, binoculars, tents, sleeping bags, etc..) and other office equipment.

WWF DRC is engaged through several commitments following the update of its conservation strategy which has to be aligned with the various strategic documents such as the Global Impact Goal for WWF International, The Africa Conservation strategy and the National DRC conservation strategy.

Other activities and strategies implemented by WWF-DRC in the Itombwe, but not funded by the NL contract, are set in annexe 0 a.