



SUSTAINABLE ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT

AT A GLANCE:

-  Technical assistance provided to **three protected area agencies** in the region
-  Hiking trails for **environmental education and tourism** rehabilitated and created in two national parks

OUR WORK

The rich and diverse ecosystems of the Congo Basin, home to thousands of different species, offer unique experiences to adventurous visitors. Central Africa is one of the last places on earth where one can see great apes such as gorillas, chimpanzees, and bonobos, giant creatures like hippopotamuses and elephants, and rare mammals like okapis and pangolins in the wild. Ecotourism presents a huge opportunity in the region to give protected areas and animals intrinsic economic value. The U.S. Forest Service is working with various partners in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo and Gabon to improve ecotourism infrastructure, resources, and capacity with the aim to increase ecotourism opportunities and income while reinforcing biodiversity conservation efforts throughout the region.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

The U.S. Forest Service has been working with Kahuzi-Biega and Virunga National Parks, both UNESCO World Heritage sites. Kahuzi-Biega is home to critically endangered Grauer's gorilla populations and Virunga, the oldest park in Africa, hosts endangered mountain gorillas and the Nyiragongo volcano, featuring the world's largest lava lake. In both parks the U.S. Forest Service has facilitated trainings for local communities and park staff on design, construction, and maintenance of hiking trails and bird watching to develop local expertise and skills as well as diversify services and activities for tourists. Additionally, the U.S. Forest Service has been supporting communication efforts, providing training and material for guides, encouraging the park to cultivate relationships with regional tour operators, developing signage and brochures, and facilitating park learning exchanges.

GABON

The U.S. Forest Service has worked with Gabon's National Protected Area Agency (ANPN) since 2010, providing technical support for improved infrastructure and management of Gabon's national parks, which cover over eleven percent of the country. Building upon past support to revamp ANPN's protected area management planning process and implement their thirteen protected area management plans, the U.S. Forest Service currently focuses on low-impact tourism access, trail system identification, and interpretive infrastructure with the aim to increase tourism within the country to promote protected area conservation.

REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

The U.S. Forest Service is working to strengthen institutional capacity of Congo's National Protected Areas Agency (ACFAP). A relatively young agency established in 2008, one of ACFAP's current focuses is on developing its internal operating capacity.

At its request, the U.S. Forest Service has supported the development of an institutional procedures manual and continues to focus on strengthening administrative procedures and mechanisms to ensure effective protected area management.

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