

# **Proposal to CEPF: DRC-62610: Establishment and management of the Itombwe Massif and Misotshi-Kabogo as new protected areas in the Democratic Republic of Congo.**

## **Free Prior and Informed Consultation of Indigenous Peoples**

### **Background to Project**

Since 2006 the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) has been working with the local people to improve the conservation of the Itombwe Massif and the Misotshi-Kabogo highlands, two biologically important regions. The situation varies between the two sites as explained below.

**Itombwe Massif:** The Itombwe massif has been known to be biologically important since the 1950s when research by Prigogine and Laurent identified species that were endemic to this mountain region. Surveys conducted by WCS in 1995 showed that the region was still very important and plans were thus made to develop a protected area. Unfortunately the Congo wars in 1996, 1998 and 2002 led to a halt of these plans. However ICCN and the Ministry for the Environment in DRC were made aware of the importance of this place by these surveys. Subsequent surveys in 2004 and 2006 of Itombwe highlighted that the area was still rich in species including Grauers gorilla (*Gorilla beringei graueri*), elephants (*Loxodonta africana cyclotis*) and Bongo (*Taurotragus euryceros*). In 2006 with the reports of these surveys and other sources, the Minister for the Environment unilaterally declared Itombwe to be a Natural Reserve and an arête was drawn up establishing the reserve. This was done with no consultation with the communities living in the reserve and the document did not include any boundary points, only a draft map that WCS had prepared in one of its reports. This naturally led to a lot of friction in the Itombwe region and local NGOs started to call for the annulment of the arête. Rainforest Foundation supported these local NGOs and started to move the case forward to degazette the reserve. WWF also had started a project to support Itombwe at around this time and was arguing that the reserve needed modifying but did not need to be degazetted and conducted some socioeconomic surveys across a large part of Itombwe to obtain information on use of the region by the people and their interest in conserving it. In 2008 WCS called a meeting of all the parties to try to find a compromise. At this meeting it was agreed that WWF, WCS, Rainforest Foundation and two local NGOs from Itombwe AfriCapacity, RACCOMI, would work together to consult the communities in the massif and identify possible compromise boundaries and develop a zoning plan for the reserve that would incorporate the needs to conserve the unique biodiversity of the area and the development needs of the local communities.

Since that time WCS, WWF and RACCOMI/AfriCapacity have been working together to visit all of the traditional chiefs and their councils and all of the villages in the massif to present information about why a reserve is important for Itombwe, to identify where to establish reserve boundaries if there is consent to the finalization of the existing reserve, and to start discussions on the zoning of the reserve once

gazetted. This process has been necessarily slow partly not to rush the communities, but also because of insecurity and the presence of both “mai mai” and FDLR (Forces de Liberation du Rwanda) rebel groups. To date we have completed all the consultations with villages and have boundaries roughly agreed for the whole reserve. There is a need to visit certain sites to obtain names of locations where the boundaries will pass in the field (such as hill top names, rivers etc) and this process is underway at the moment. Both indigenous (Pygmy - Mbutu) and other ethnic groups (Baoloolo, Bembe) have been consulted in each of the villages during this process and the villages are now pushing to speed-up and complete the process.

### ***Misotshi-Kabogo Massif***

Surveys conducted by WCS in the Misotshi-Kabogo massif in 2007 identified this area as being of conservation importance with the discovery of six new vertebrate species for the World. Subsequent socioeconomic surveys to all the major villages around the massif identified the extent to which the people living here rely on the forest for their annual incomes. The socioeconomic survey also asked households their interest in protecting the forest and if so how they would prefer it to be protected. About 90% stated that they thought a protected area was a good idea and 60% wanted a national park to be created. In 2009, WCS and ICCN held meetings with the traditional chiefs (Mwamis) of the villages in both Katanga and South Kivu (the provinces which overlap the massif) to present the findings of the biological and socioeconomic research and to discuss options for the conservation of the region's biodiversity. At both meetings the Mwamis voted to create a National park in the region to be called Ngamikka Park (after Nganja, Misotshi, Kabogo cultural sites in the massif). Since that time, WCS has been working with each of the village councils in 91 of the villages surrounding the proposed Ngamikka Park (along the lake shore and also along the road between Kalemie and Fizi) to map where the boundaries of the park should be as well as buffer zones and village expansion areas for agriculture. Villages in the Lubondja groupement (unknown number) in the north east are the only villages that we have not been able to access as FDLR rebels have stationed themselves here and it is too insecure to visit. Despite this inability to visit these villages, the Chief of these villages has given his consent to the creation of the park. In addition, along the road between Kalemie and Fizi, 253 pygmies have been consulted within 91 Bantu villages.

The boundaries of the park for Katanga Province have been agreed and accepted by the local communities and we are working with the Provincial Ministry for the Environment to gazette the park at the provincial level (a current pre-requisite to establishing a park at the national level in DRC). In South Kivu, we are planning on training community members to map the boundaries with GPS units as we have been unable to access South Kivu to complete the boundary demarcation due to political instability. We will then submit a similar document to South Kivu province to gazette at Provincial level.

Throughout the process we have not applied pressure but have presented the information and asked the people what they would like to see. We had expected they would want a community reserve but they wanted a national park because they felt it would a) bring greater attention to their area and hence

potential funding in future, and b) it would be a stronger mechanism for protecting their land against immigrants coming from the north in search of land.

## **Consultations**

Consultations have been conducted at several stages of the process to date. The main components included:

1. During the socioeconomic surveys in both Itombwe and Ngamikka we asked households about their use of the forest and how it contributes to their national incomes – measuring the percentage of income derived from the forest in the case of Ngamikka. We questioned people about their interest in creating a protected area and whether they thought it was a good idea or not. Based on these results we were encouraged to follow-up with the consultation meetings at both sites.
2. At meetings in Kalemie and Misisi we presented to the Mwami's of all the villages around the proposed Nagmikka Park information about the biological importance of the place, the results of the socioeconomic study and the interest in creating a protected area, and the various options that are legally available under Congolese law to create a protected area: national park, faunal reserve, natural reserve, hunting reserve and community reserve. They were then given time to discuss amongst themselves in small groups to decide what each group would like to see for their area.
3. In Itombwe a team made up of WCS, WWF, AfriCapacity and RACCOMMI staff have consulted with each of the villages within the region of the proposed reserve. They have similarly presented the biological importance of the region, the socioeconomic needs and interests in the place and then allowed the village committees to discuss what they would like to see in future. Overall there has been agreement on creating the reserve and then suggestions have been made on where boundaries should be established. At two sites in the south west the communities decided to not be part of the reserve and instead to establish a community reserve to be managed by RACCOMMI. Their wishes have been respected and this part of the proposed reserve has been dropped. This is mentioned to highlight that the villages have not been pressured into accepting the protected areas.
4. In the case of Ngamikka we have undertaken participatory mapping using gender-sensitive approaches by separating men and women and using female facilitators with the women groups to encourage their full participation. These mapping exercises were used to identify three zones for the park: a) areas for village cultivation expansion; b) the park boundaries (core protected zone) c) areas of sustainable use of the forest. This type of approach is planned for Itombwe but has not been undertaken yet as the area is much larger and we wanted to establish the outer boundaries first.

In both cases the communities are asking WCS and its partners to move more quickly in establishing the protected areas, complaining that they have agreed long ago and asking why there is such a delay. We see this as being a clear demonstration of their desire to see the protected areas established.