



THE REPUBLIC OF CONGO

MINISTRY OF FOREST ECONOMY



NATIONAL ELEPHANT ACTION PLAN

2019 - 2028



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I. BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFYING REASONS

Composed of 62% of forest areas, some of which are still intact, the Republic of Congo is a suitable environment for the growth and expansion of emblematic species such as the forest elephant.

However, in recent years, this species has come under significant strain, mainly due to poaching and the growing demand for ivory. In Central Africa, more than 65% of forest elephants were decimated between 2002 and 2013, and during this period the populations of Congo were not spared.

In addition, in the medium to long-term, economic development, demographics, population expansion around elephant habitat, civil unrest and climate change are likely to have significant repercussions on the survival of the species through its natural habitat. The increase in human-elephant conflicts, due in part to rapid soil transformation and human population growth, also calls for landscape management.

Faced with these challenges, the fight against environmental crime as a whole has been included in the Society Programme of His Excellency Denis SASSOU-N'GUESSO, President of the Republic, Head of State, "The march towards development", in which the preservation of the environment is one of the urgent priorities of our time.

In keeping with this orientation, which implies a multitude of challenges to be met, the Government of the Republic of Congo, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, Head of Government, Mr Clément MOUAMBA, is making significant efforts at the national and international levels to strengthen the fight against the illegal killing of elephants and its consequent illicit trafficking in ivory, on the one hand, and to ensure peaceful coexistence between humans and elephants on the other hand.

For several years, the Republic of Congo has been firmly committed to the protection of elephants, which is the national emblem of the Republic of Congo. The Congo, our country, is a member of the Coalition for African Elephants, and on 30 December 2015 joined the Elephant Protection Initiative (EPI) among other commitments advocating the need to develop a NEAP, including the implementation of a moratorium on domestic ivory sales and the placing of ivory stocks beyond economic use.

The Republic of Congo has also positioned itself as a leader in the fight against the illegal

exploitation of elephants and, in general, of all protected species, by organising the International Conference on the Illegal Exploitation and Illegal Trade in Wild Flora and Fauna in Africa from 27 to 30 April 2015 in Brazzaville. This Conference provided the basis for the elaboration of the "Joint African Strategy on Combating Illicit Trade of Fauna and Flora". During this international conference, 4.5 tonnes of ivory were incinerated.

As a member of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES), Congo, among other states in the elephant range, adopted the African Elephant Action Plan during the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Doha, 2010). The objective of this Action Plan is to reduce the level of threats to African elephants and to ensure their survival by significantly decreasing the killing and illegal trade of the species and its products, conserving both its habitat and raising awareness among local communities and indigenous populations and strengthening cooperation between range states.

The National Elephant Action Plan (NEAP) thus represents a version of the African Elephant Action Plan on a national scale, making it possible to define a clear and innovative strategy for the conservation of elephants in the Republic of Congo.

With a National Ivory Action Plan (NIAP) in existence since 2015, Congo is renewing its determination to ensure the long-term survival of the species as a whole, integrating broader conservation aspects and specific long-term objectives into the NEAP. The NEAP responds to the need to put in place a strategy, by coordinating the efforts of public and private partners, while developing realistic objectives and priority activities, combined with real funding proposals.

It is therefore an appropriate adaptive management tool with a 10-year timeline (2019-2028) and a 100-year Vision, which represents approximately twice the lifespan of a wild elephant. It will serve as a formal framework, through which technical and financial support can be requested from the Elephant Protection Initiative (EPI), other international organisations and the donor community. Allowing the availability of funding, NEAP implementation will commence in the next 3 years, starting with priority activities.

The NEAP will be specifically dedicated to the conservation of forest elephants in the Republic of Congo. Indeed, according to the latest studies, the country has never been home to savannah elephants. Forest and savannah elephants are thought to have spread over the African continent about five million years ago, depending on their specific genetic characteristics and the areas favourable to their development (Mondol et al. 2015, Roca et al. 2015).

II. NEAP DEVELOPMENT

Under the supervision of the MEF, a Technical Commission was created in 2016 (with a renewal of its members in 2017), to ensure the development and implementation of the NEAP throughout the country. A two-day workshop was held in Brazzaville from 20 to 22 February 2017, under the guidance of Mrs Rosalie Matondo, Minister of Forest Economy, on the "Validation of the National Ivory Action Plan (NIAP) and the elaboration of the NEAP in the Republic of Congo". It brought together about sixty participants from public administration, the private sector and the communities to pursue two objectives: the validation and adoption of the NIAP and the launch of the process of developing the NEAP

Thus, the NEAP is the result of a participatory process initiated by the Ministry of Forest Economy (MEF), involving all government actors and technical and financial partners involved in elephant conservation in the Republic of Congo. The various contributors also include representatives of local communities and native populations, as well as private sector actors (concessionaires, public works, mining, oil companies, and so on) with activities that may have an impact on elephants.

This plan has been developed following the Standards & Guidelines established by EPI. The resulting strategy is an evolving document that can be adapted to new conservation threats and opportunities for the species.

III. STATUS REVIEW AND THREATS

1. The Distribution and Abundance of Elephants

Two hundred years ago, the African elephant population may have been as large as 27 million individuals, of which 5% were forest elephants and 95% savannah elephants (Milner-Gulland and Beddington 1993). Today, the African elephant population is estimated at 415,428 individuals (Thouless et al. 2016). African forest and savannah elephants are considered subspecies of *Loxodonta africana* by IUCN, but genetic information increasingly suggests that they should be classified into two distinct species (Mondol et al. 2015; Roca et al. 2001; Roca et al. 2015; Rohland et al. 2010) - savannah elephants and forest elephants.

Forest elephants are found in 19 countries across Central and West Africa; 95% of their range is in Central Africa (Angola (Cabinda enclave), Cameroon, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon (Table 1). A small population is located in Uganda and most likely in Southern Sudan, and a few individuals are still in Rwanda. Most elephants located in the coastal areas of West Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger, Togo, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea) have recently been found to be forest elephants, having survived even though their habitat has been severely degraded (Mondol et al. 2015). This population totals approximately 11 to 13,000 individuals (Thouless et al. 2016).

Forest elephant populations in Central Africa have declined by 65% (about 9% per year) and lost a third of their range between 2002 and 2013 (Maisels et al. 2013).

Table 1. Population estimates of forest elephants in Central Africa

Central Africa	Estimated (Number)
Cameroon	8,815 - 8,964
Central African Republic	1,401 - 1,528
Republic of Congo	26,981 - 32,999
Democratic Republic of Congo	9,597 - 11,351
Equatorial Guinea	884
Gabon	66,115 - 74,152
Rwanda	Present
South Soudan	Present
Uganda	Present
Total	113,793 - 129,878

*Source: Adapted from Thouless et al., 2016

The term "Estimated" refers to locations where inventories have been conducted directly (e. g. in bays), and where inventories have been conducted by studying the site-specific decomposition of droppings.

The Republic of Congo covers a forest area of 213,100 km², representing 62% of the national territory (Verhegghen et al. 2012) (Fig. 1), which represents about 11% of the forests of Central Africa and, by extension, 11% of the forest elephant habitat in Africa. The majority of the forest areas are located in the north of the country (Fig. 1) but large areas are also present in the south, although with very few forests left intact.

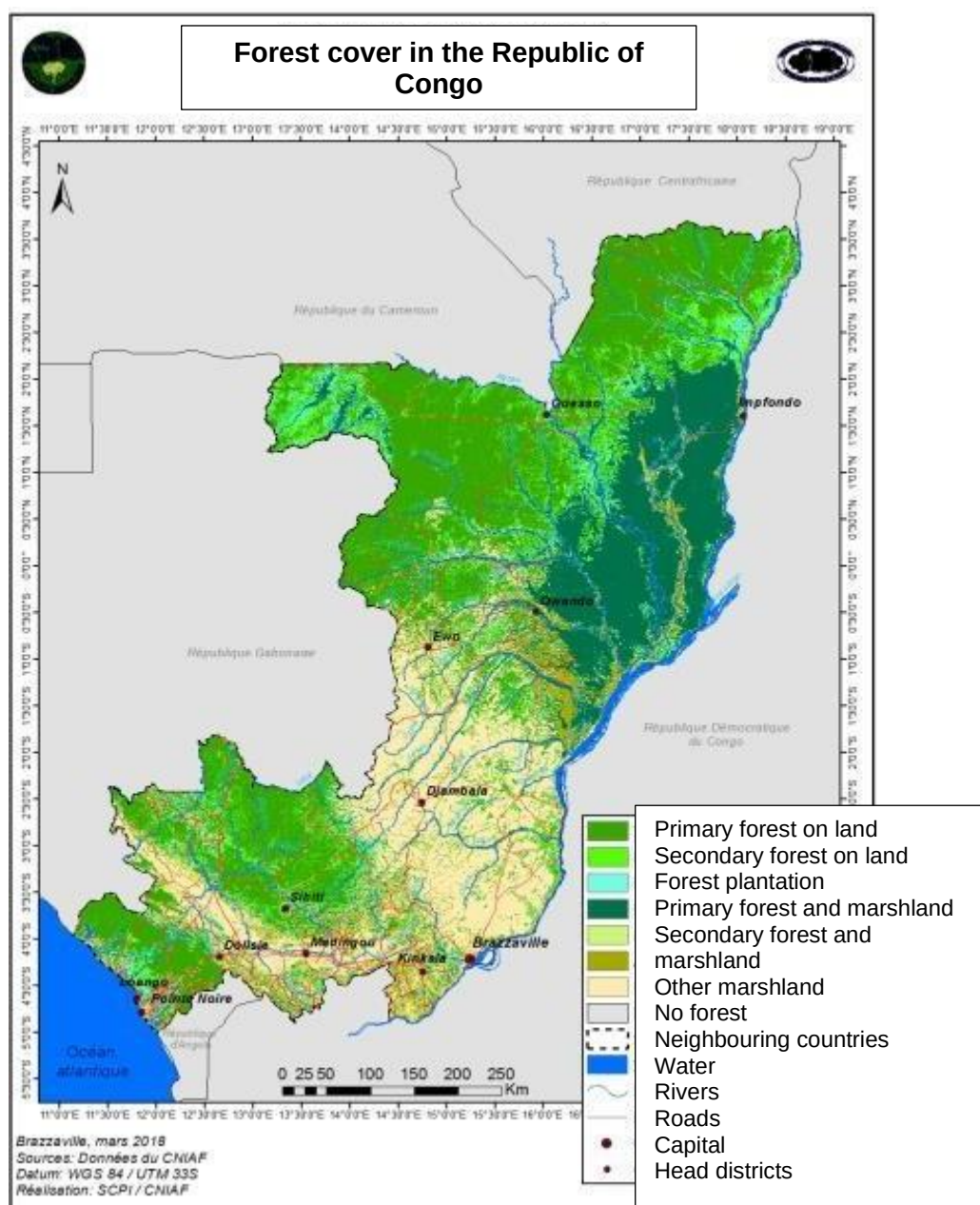


Fig. 1. Presentation of the forest landscape of the Republic of Congo

Source: Ministry of Forest Economy

Elephants in the Republic of Congo are forest elephants, (*Loxodonta africana cyclotis*) and comprise about 20% of the total population of forest elephants in Africa (Maisels *et al.* 2013a), or roughly 20,000 individuals in 2011. Congo's forests cover about 213,000 km² with a potential density of forest elephants of about 0.5 animals per km² (Milner-Gulland and Beddington, 1993). Therefore, the Congo has enough habitat to shelter about 100,000 elephants, five times more than today.

A long series of surveys have been carried out in a large part of Congo. The results of the most recent surveys and subsequent studies (where available) at each site are presented in Table 2, providing information for each location on the trend in elephant numbers since the last survey.

Forest elephants are present in most of northern Congo, but predominantly in Nouabalé-Ndoki and Odzala-Kokoua National Parks, but the massive forest concessions around these parks also support large elephant populations, as does the Garabinsam region (Djouah-Ivindo). Forest elephants are also present in parts of the southern coastal areas. While the landscape of the central belt is mainly savannah, with forests in some galleries or deeper valleys, elephants are mostly absent (Fig. 2). Table 3 provides estimates of the elephant populations for each of the four elephant conservation landscapes.

Wildlife inventories have never been carried out over the entire country, but methodologies have been developed over the past 25 years, allowing spatial modelling to "fill the gaps" in areas not studied (Buckland and Elston 1993). The basis of this method is first of all the identification of a set of specific factors known to affect elephant distribution, linking elephant density to the degree of intensity of these factors at a given geographical point. For example, it is recognised that the further away an area is from a road, the higher the elephant density (Barnes *et al.* 1997; Blake *et al.* 2008; Maisels *et al.* 2013a; Stokes *et al.* 2010; Vanthomme *et al.* 2013).

Similarly, it is recognised that when eco-guards protect an area, elephant density is higher. A series of mathematical models were then developed to explain the current pattern of elephant distribution in the field of interest (in this case, it was the whole of Central Africa). The next step is to use this model to predict elephant density throughout the area of interest, using the variables available in this area. This process was carried out in 2011, and a map of elephant density for the entire forest region of Central Africa was produced. The result for the Republic of Congo is shown in Fig. 3¹.

¹ Adapted from published data <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0059469>

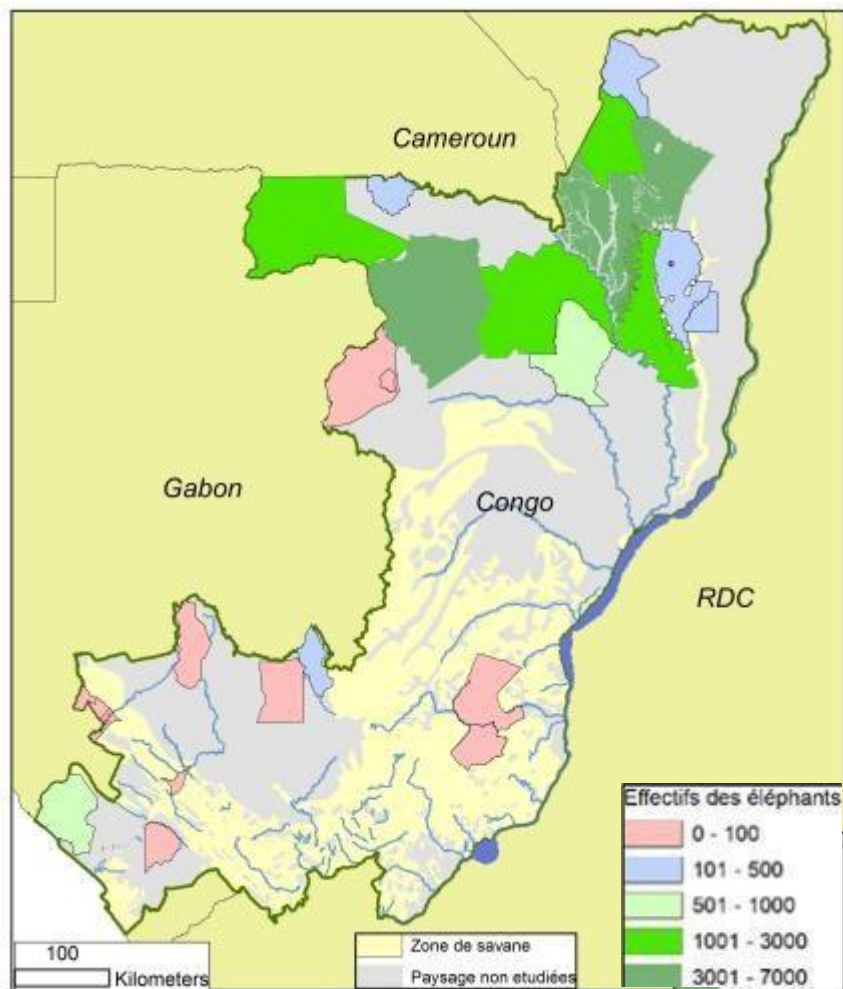


Fig. 2. Approximate size of the elephant population in the areas identified to date in the Republic of Congo * (The savannah area is not suitable for forest elephants and has therefore been excluded from the inventories)

Source: Inventory data from WCS, APN, JGI and WWF - MEF-WRI 2016

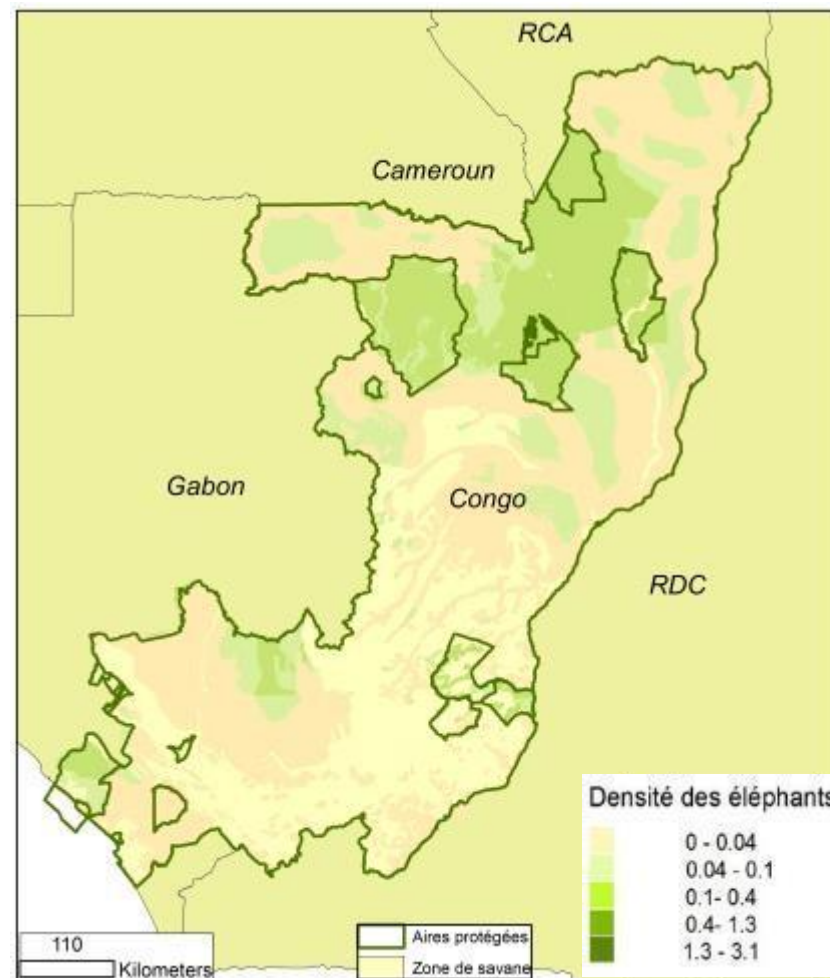


Fig. 3. Distribution of elephants in the Republic of Congo, by using a statistical model to estimate the national distribution

*** (The Savannah area is not suitable for forest elephants and has therefore been excluded from the inventories)**

Source: Maisels et al. 2013; MEF-WRI 2016

These different areas can be classified into four elephant conservation landscapes (high elephant density areas) and delineated according to natural barriers, and elephant movement. To the north are the West Sangha and East Sangha areas, and further south the Central/Plateaux area and the Coastal/South area (north of Pointe-Noire). The two northern landscapes (West and East Sangha) contain respectively 32% and 29% of Congo's elephants (using the national statistical estimation model), while the Coastal zone and the Plains zone contain 3% and 4% respectively, with the remaining elephant population (32%) spread throughout the rest of the country (Fig. 4; Table 3).

Fig. 4. Estimated percentage of the total elephant population in the Republic of Congo within the four main landscapes identified

Sources: WRI Interactive Atlas of Congo, WCS Inventory Data, APN, JGI and WWF, Statistical Modelling - MEF-WRI 2016

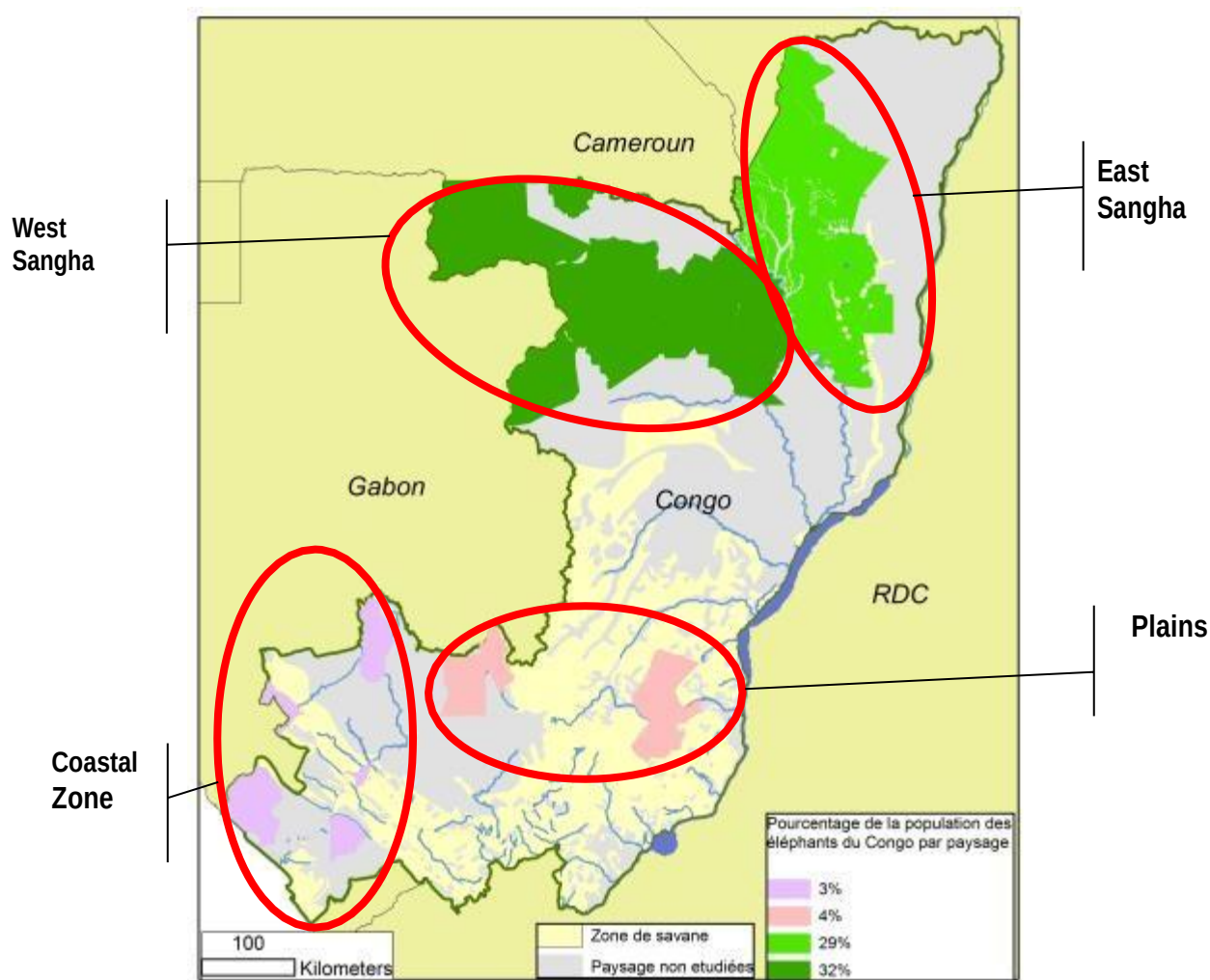


Table 2. Sites surveyed since 2005 to assess the elephant population trend in the Republic of Congo:**S=Stable; D=Decline; A=Increase**

Source: Thouless et al. 2016

Technical Consultants	Area	Sites	Size km ²	Type	Year last survey	Population last survey	Trend	Population previous survey	Year previous survey
WCS	Batéké-Léfini	Lefini	3,495	Reserve	2016	79	-	-	-
WCS	Batéké-Léfini	MPD	2,841	UFA	2009	100	-	-	-
WCS	Batéké-Léfini	Ogooué Lékéti zone de forêt	1,423	Parc proposed	2016	288	S	192	2010
WCS	South Congo	Conkouati	3,452	National Park	2013	947	S	659	2010
WCS	South Congo	Mayoko	2,290	UFA	2005	211	-	-	-
WCS	South Congo	Mont Fouari	288	Reserve	2005	94		-	-
WCS	South Congo	Mt Mavoumbou	229	Domaine de chasse	2005	92	-	-	-
WCS	South Congo	South Nyanga	209	Domaine de chasse	2005	12	-	-	-
WCS	South Congo	Dimonika	1,360	Reserve MAB	2008	Absent		-	-
WCS	East Sangha	Bailly swamps	5,477	Marshland	2017	297	S	1136	2011
WCS	East Sangha	Batanga	2,276	Marshland	2017	292	S	190	2012
WCS	East Sangha	Kabo	2,773	UFA	2016	1915	S	2135	2010
WCS	East Sangha	Lac tele	4,219	Community Reserve	2017	267	S	58	2011
WCS	East Sangha	Loundougou	5,455	UFA	2016	1406	S	307	2010
WCS	East Sangha	Mokabi	1,753	UFA	2017	269	S	78	2006
WCS	East Sangha	NNNP	4,071	National Park	2016	3174	A	1902	2010
WCS	East Sangha	Pokola	4,797	UFA	2016	2627	S	2090	2010
WWF	West Sangha	Djouah-Ivindo	11,415	UFA	2016	2130	-	-	-
WWF	West Sangha	ETIC	4,769	UFA	2006	115	-	-	-
WCS	West Sangha	Loundougou marécages	3,028	Marshland	2016	371	S	279	2011
WWF	West Sangha	Messok Dja	1,457	UFA	2013	285	S	346	2013
WCS	West Sangha	Ngombe	10,816	UFA	2014	2900	S	3299	2007
WCS	West Sangha	Ntokou-Pikounda/Pik. N	5,213	National Park	2014	1141	S	1692	2007
WCS APN	West Sangha	Odzala	13,767	National Park	2012	9600	S	7460	2005

Table 3. Important conservation landscapes for elephants in the Republic of Congo

Preservation Landscape	Protected Areas	Forestry Concessions	Elephant population (Estimation)
West Sangha	National Park Odzala-Kokoua National Park Ntokou-Pikounda Gorilla sanctuaries of Lossi	North Pikounda, Kelle-Mbomo, Tsama-Mbama, Ngombe, Mambili, Jua-Ikie, Tala-Tala, Makoua	16,000
East Sangha	National Park Nouabalé-Ndoki Community reserve of Lac télé Parc National Ntokou-Pikounda	Kabo, Pokola, Loundougou-Toukoulaka, Mimbéli-Ibenga, Betou, Missa, Lopola, Mokabi-Dzanga, Ipendja, Mongouma, Bonvouki	10,000
Plains	Reserves of Léfini and of Lésio-Louna	Mpoukou-Ogoue, Bambama, Letili, Massanga, Mayoko	500
Coastal Area/south	National Park Conkouati Mt Fouari, Dimonika, Mt, Mavounga, Nyanga NetS	Ntombo, Nanga, Nkola, Kola, Louvakou	1,100

*Source: Thouless et al 2016

It is estimated that about 25% of the elephant population is found in national parks and about 25% in FSC-certified forest concessions (representing 18% of all concessions in Congo, knowing that elephants would take refuge there because of better protection than in concessions that are not FSC). Therefore, about 50% of all elephants in Congo live in national parks and FSC concessions, while non-certified FSC concessions contain 21% of the population. Finally, about 5% of the elephant population is concentrated in the various reserves, approximately 16% in the Likouala swamps and roughly 7 - 8% in unprotected areas.

2. Value and Importance of Forest Elephants in the Republic of Congo

The importance of elephant conservation is based on the following three aspects:

a. Ecological aspects:

African forest elephants are frugivorous (Blake 2002; Blake et al. 2009; Turkalo and Barnes 2013; White et al. 1993), and are essential ecosystem engineers (Terborgh et al. 2016), within one of the earth's main carbon sequestering forests in the humid tropical forests of Central Africa (Blake et al. 2009; Campos-Arceiz and Blake 2011; Dargie et al. 2017; Lewis et al. 2009). Because they move quickly and over long distances (Blake et al. 2009; Blake et al. 2008; Blake et al. 2001; Campos-Arceiz and Blake 2011; Kolowski et al. 2010; Schuttler et al. 2012), they can move large quantities of seeds over several kilometres (Blake et al. 2009).

Their absence has shown that forest structure and tree diversity begin to change within a decade of their disappearance from the ecosystem (Beaune et al. 2013). They create and maintain clearings in mineral-rich soil (Turkalo and Fay 1995; Turkalo et al. 2013), on which a great

diversity of African forest fauna depends (Turkalo and Fay 2001). Finally, new studies suggest that elephants and other animal species that travel long distances are essential to transport of essential soil nutrients away from rivers and mountains (Doughty et al. 2016; Doughty et al. 2013; Wolf et al. 2013), and that their elimination through hunting has stopped this lateral movement of nutrients away from rivers (Doughty et al. 2013).

This is believed to have resulted in the displacement of millions of people away from the nutrient-poor foothills and their return to the valleys. As a result, elephants are responsible for the replenishment of soil nutrients in Central African forests. This is of paramount importance given that most rural communities in the region depend on food grown in small forest fields (Abernethy et al. 2016; Atyi et al. 2009).

b. Economic aspect (Tourism):

The development of a country's tourism sector depends on its tourism potential, which, in the case of Congo, is firmly focused on the unusually rich and diversified nature, fauna and flora, as well as on its ancestral cultural traditions and manifestations of diverse ethnic groups. Protected areas, therefore, represent a robust potential tourist attraction for the country.

Firmly committed to a policy of economic diversification, the Congo intends to make tourism one of its main areas of focus for sustainable economic development. The elaboration of the National Strategy and the Master Plan for Sustainable Development of Tourism is part of this perspective.

By defining the Plan's 10 strategic axes, it will provide a long-term vision for sustainable and responsible tourism development, thereby contributing to the eradication of bad deforestation practices; poaching of protected species such as elephants, while at the same time creating businesses and jobs, particularly for the benefit of the younger generation and the most disadvantaged members of society.

c. Socio-cultural aspects:



Emblem of the Republic of Congo with elephants on both sides

Elephants are a privileged cultural symbol throughout Africa, often used as national emblems, present in countless stories, songs and cultural traditions. In the Republic of Congo, the elephant is an integral part of the coat of arms, which appears on all official government documents and citizens' passports (See above). In Congo, the elephant symbolises memory, power and divinity.



3. Main Threats to Elephants in the Republic of Congo

a. Threat Analysis

During the workshop in February 2017, a threat analysis was undertaken to determine the factors contributing to the decline of the elephant population and their intensity in the different regions of the country.

Threats have thus been categorised according to their severity: from direct threats, such as illegal logging and ivory trafficking, to indirect threats, such as habitat loss due to agriculture, logging or mining, habitat fragmentation (infrastructure and road network development), or human-elephant conflicts.

For each landscape (West Sangha, East Sangha, Central/Plains, and South/Coastal), participants estimated the extent of the threats (1 = 0-33% distribution area; 2 = 34-65%; 3 = 66-100%), their severity (1 = Low; 2 = Medium; 3 = High), as well as the level of reversibility (1 = Easy; 2 = Medium; 3 = Hard).

The results of the threat analysis are summarised in Table 4, which summarises for each area the total of the three criteria – scope, severity & reversibility - followed by the total score for the threat. The IUCN Red List assessment process uses a similar methodology to analyse threats for a given species (see "Threat Impact": <http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes/threats-classification-scheme>).

The procedure then consists of separating direct threats (which are the direct causes of elephant mortality) from indirect threats (factors that promote or aggravate the occurrence of direct threats).

For example, one of the direct threats to elephants would be ivory poaching, while an indirect threat would be the uncontrolled opening of roads through the forest, allowing poachers easy and quick access to previously remote areas.

Table 4. Threat analysis for the different elephant landscapes in the Republic of Congo

Type of threat	West Sangha	East Sangha	Central /Plains	South/ Coastal	Total
Direct threats					
Illegal killing	9	8	4	6	27
Other causes of killing			3	3	6
Disease	4		3	3	10
Indirect threats					
Human/elephant conflict	7	7	6	9	29
Demographic growth (immigration)	4	9	3	5	21
Habitat fragmentation (Roads, Infrastructure)	3	8	3	6	20
Loss of habitat (agriculture)	3	5	3	7	18
Socio-political conflict	6		3	5	14
Climatic change					12
Loss of habitat (mining)	8		5	7	8
Loss of habitat (village development)			3	5	8
Loss of habitat (forest)	5				5
Loss of habitat (infrastructure)	4				4

Illegal killing was perceived by far as the most significant direct threat to elephants, while human-elephant conflict represents the most severe indirect threat. Other indirect threats that have a high impact include habitat loss due to agriculture and its fragmentation for road and other infrastructural developments, as well as human population growth.

Direct threats

Poaching and illegal commerce:

Elephants have been killed for their meat and ivory for thousands of years. Previous reports reveal that 167 tonnes were exported from the Republic of Congo in 1922, falling drastically to about 50-70 tonnes per year between 1974 and 1978 due to the decline in elephant numbers in the country (Douglas-Hamilton 1979).

The main threat to Congo's elephants remains poaching to sustain the illegal ivory trade. Africa loses about 9% of its elephants each year (Wittemyer et al. 2014) both in the forest region (Maisels et al. 2013a) and in the savannah (Chase et al. 2016), mainly due to poaching. It is international, coordinated and organised, combining money laundering and corruption. Recent analyses have shown that trafficking in ivory and other wildlife products is fuelled by professional global criminal networks (Wittig 2016) against which comprehensive and strategic government interventions are essential (Haenlein and Keatinge 2017).

Mainly killed by weapons and munitions of war, elephants are dispossessed of their tusks while the rest is generally not collected. Ivory is transported along forest trails, rivers and roads to major urban centres in Congo, and often passes through the DRC, Gabon, and Cameroon (identified as the primary intermediate destination (Nkoke et al. 2017) for the most abundant Congolese elephant populations).

Until recently, the leading destination of illegal ivory was China, although some of it was to be destined for Japan (Report to the CITES Standing Committee on the Status of Elephant Populations; Figures on Illegal Killing and Trade in Ivory, SC69 Doc. 51.1 Annex; (Milliken *et al.*, 2016)), given that there is a higher demand for forest elephant ivory than for ivory from savannah elephants (Nishihara 2003; Nishihara 2012). Trafficked ivory from Congo, transported by Chinese nationals, was seized three times in Hong Kong between 2014 and 2015 (Nkoike *et al.* 2017).

Trafficking in wildlife species has become the 4th universal threat, after terrorism, drug trafficking and trafficking in human beings. It poses a dangerous threat to the peace, security and integrity of states.

Other causes of mortality:

Killing elephants out of self defense is sometimes legal under national law (see section below on the human-elephant conflict), (Breuer *et al.* 2016; Nsonsi *et al.* 2017), but remains extremely rare in Congo. No cases of elephant epidemics have been documented to date in Central Africa (or any other widespread fatal disease in Savannah Africa). Viruses such as herpes (in Africa and Asia) and tuberculosis (in Asia), appear to be a low cause of death in this species (Arun Zachariah *et al.* 2017; Long *et al.* 2016).

Indirect threats

Human / Elephant conflict:

As in all elephant range states, whether in Africa or Asia, conflicts between elephants and local populations are a significant obstacle to the conservation of the species and a threat to the livelihoods of members of local communities. The different types of conflicts are generally due to the depredation of fields (which is the primary source of conflict in Congo and the sub-region (Lahm, 1996, Fairet 2012, Nsonsi *et al.* 2017), the destruction of homes, and threats to people, sometimes leading to severe injuries or human fatalities.

For elephants, the consequences of these conflicts represent an increased risk of being killed by farmers. Attempting to defend their crops or their own lives (e.g. cases of self-defence stipulated in articles 63 and 65 of the Law 37/2008 on fauna and protected areas), as well as a lack of interest in their conservation, sometimes results in direct participation in illegal poaching activities.

For local communities, the presence of elephants may imply a loss of the entire annual agricultural production, and, therefore, food and income, an increased level of activity and revenue to monitor and protect the fields, and serious risk in the most extreme cases. In the Republic of Congo, as in the rest of Central Africa, serious or deadly attacks caused by elephants remain extremely rare (Lahm 1996; Fairet 2012; Walker 2012; Nsonsi *et al.* 2017).

In order to limit the depredation of fields, several methods have been tested worldwide as well as in the Republic of Congo, including: the installation of barriers (electric, with chilli pepper, beehives, barbed wire, etc.), sound or olfactory dissuasion (pepper or chilli bricks) and guarding plantations, particularly at night. However, these methods are rarely appropriate in the Congo because slash-and-burn shifting cultivation multiplies financial and labour needs, making them unaffordable or unprofitable for the majority of farmers (Fairet 2012; Walker 2012) who are reluctant to implement them.

Also, the few studies conducted tend to show that these methods are rarely effective in Central Africa. Permanent field monitoring seems to remain the most efficient method but involves a very high cost in terms of labour (Fairet 2012, Walker 2012). However, this method remains challenging to implement in the region due to the difficulty of coordinating and maintaining group work on a regular and permanent basis (Lahm 1996; Hedges and Giunaryadi 2010; Fairet 2012; Walker 2012).

Negative attitudes towards elephants can be reduced by limiting dependence on agricultural activities, diversifying sources of income, and obtaining benefits directly from conservation (for example, support for IGAs, education and health, tourism) while promoting employment, especially in protection (Fairet 2012, Nsonsi et al. 2017). Protecting fields remains a global problem, particularly in forest areas. Methods of compensating for losses are sometimes considered and incorporated into specific laws (Decree No. 86/970 of 27 September 1986 establishing compensation scales for the destruction of forest trees or crop damage). However, their implementation is often difficult to achieve in the field, and their outcome concerning conflict reduction has not yet been adequately demonstrated.

b. Population growth, movement and immigration

The human population is increasing by 2.7% per year in sub-Saharan Africa and by 2.6% per year in Congo (World_Bank 2017). There is a clear difference in population growth between rural and urban areas. Due to the rural exodus, the urban population of Congo is growing by 3.2% per year while the rural population is only increasing by 1.4% (World_Bank 2017). The same trends are observed in neighbouring countries such as the DRC, Gabon, Cameroon and CAR.

Although 66% of the population lives in large urban centres, 300,000 households in rural communities (about 1.8 million) depend on land for their food, and will in the future be increasingly competing for space with elephants and other wild animals. Besides, there are forestry companies and new mining, agricultural and industrial concessions underway or planned in rural areas of Congo (oil palm, iron ore, and so on). These industries attract many people from neighbouring countries to previously remote areas, and sometimes even several thousands, as is the case with iron mines (e.g. Mining Project Development (MPD) near Bambama).

c. Habitat fragmentation (roads / infrastructure)

Congo is at the height of a decision-making process that confronts the concern for economic development with the concern for the preservation of forests and the species they support. Congo has more than 15 national roads (5,604 km including 3,200 km of paved roads), 33 secondary roads (2,655 km including 386 km of paved roads), as well as a multitude of dirt roads totalling 17,300 km (including 295 km paved). Over the next ten years, the country intends to continue its asphaltting work on national roads for an additional 3,085 km, and on secondary roads for more than 2,270 km.

In addition, priority road projects under the supervision of the Ministry of Road Equipment and Maintenance (MEER) have been included in the future National Development Plan of the Republic of Congo, which is currently being examined and validated at Government level.

- The first priority project concerns the axis linking the city of Liranga to Impfondo, up to Bétoukoumba, located on the border of the Central African Republic, with a total road length of 590 km. The Liranga - Impfondo axis is intended to remedy the problem of low water levels for six months per year, limiting transport via water.. A dry port project in Liranga will be added to the road expansion.
- The 2nd priority and imminent project concerns the Makao-Impfondo axis. The current 300 km bypass to reach these two cities will be avoided by asphaltting the current route that connects Impfondo to Makao by following the Motaba River downstream.
- The 3rd project will link the town of Mokéko to Pikounda to open up this city, whose prefecture depends on the capital of Ouessou.
- While the Sembé-Souanké-Ndama axis is currently being paved, the 4th MEER project aims to link the Mbomo-Sembé axis, which borders the Odzala-Kokoua National Park.
- The 5th road project should make it possible to connect Ekouamou to Makoua by asphaltting a 65 km section between Ekouamon and Ebongo.

In addition to the above projects, there are plans to asphaltting the existing road axis linking the city of Ouessou to Ndjamen, Chad, located 5 km from the Nouabalé-Ndoki Park, as part of the sub regional integration project, financed by the African Development Bank (ADB).

In a further development, a road project known as "The Forest Road" should be developed sustainably to improve the transport of northern timber, passing through Ewo, Okoyo, Lekana, Zanaga, Sibiti, Kibangou to the port of Pointe Noire for export.

Without regular planning and monitoring, roads are known to be potentially harmful to wildlife, thereby contributing to poachers' access to previously isolated wild areas, as has been observed worldwide (Alamgir *et al.* 2017, Laurance and Arrea 2017, Laurance *et al.* 2015a), in Africa (Laurance *et al.* 2015b, Sloan *et al.* 2016) and more particularly in Central Africa (Laurance *et al.* 2006, Vanthomme *et al.*, 2013, Vanthomme *et al.*, 2015). The more remote and road-free an area is, the higher the elephant density, provided that these sites are protected by eco-guards (Blake *et al.*, 2008; Maisels *et al.*, 2013a; Stokes *et al.*, 2010; Yackulic *et al.* 2011).

While most of the large elephant populations are far from roads in Congo, the pervasiveness of timber extraction activities provides easy access to intact forests, which leads them to entrench themselves in increasingly narrow core areas ("compression": Lewis 1986, Turkalo *et al.*, 2013).

d. Habitat loss (forestry, agriculture, mining and other)

For the past ten years or so, Congo has been engaged in the process of reviewing and strengthening its land-use planning policies. The decentralisation process launched in 2003 and the National Spatial Planning Scheme (SNAT) drawn up in 2005 thus reflect the Government's desire to place territorial action at the heart of its development strategies.

Act No. 43-2014 of 10 October 2014 on guidelines for spatial planning and development also completed this process by defining the main principles and strategic axes for a spatial planning and development policy.

With one of the highest urbanisation rates in Africa (Gazel and Harre 2010), the concentration of major economic activities in the south of the country and the instability of oil prices have prompted the government to move towards a "post-petroleum" economic development strategy based on the development of the private, agricultural and mining sectors. In 15 years (2001-2016), the Republic of Congo has lost 5,857 km² of forest or 2.3% of its forest cover. This represents an average loss of 0.15% per year (GFW-WRI 2018).

In 2016, the rate of forest loss increased sharply, with nearly 0.4% being lost in a single year. While this rate remains minimal at the international level, this loss is detrimental to elephants, forcing the species to travel longer distances, thereby increasing encounters with local people as well as poachers through the establishment of new land routes.

While agriculture is very underdeveloped with a contribution to GDP of 4%, the government intends to strengthen the agricultural sectors. For example, the oil palm industry now covers an area of 5,357 km² (WRI 2018), and cashew nut exploitation is booming (22 thousand hectares of planned exploitation in Loudima, Niari department). Thus, a three-year programme (2019-2022) provides a framework for future agricultural objectives to ensure the country's food security.

The necessary economic diversification of the country represents a real challenge concerning elephant conservation. It is now recommended to reconcile these two conflicting issues through multi-stakeholder consultation, involving both the public and private sectors for integrated land-use planning.

The 2005 National Land Use Planning Scheme for the Republic of Congo, drawn up for a period of 15 years, is in the process of being renewed. This is a real opportunity to establish a framework for reconciling conservation, agricultural, mining and forestry sectors to develop a coherent national spatial land-use plan that combines economic development with elephant habitat conservation (AfESG 2005; *et al.*, 2014, Feintrenie 2014, IUCN / African_elephant_range_States 2010).

e. Threat analysis by zone

West Sangha Zone

The West Sangha area includes Odzala-Kokoua National Park, Ntokou-Pikounda National Park, and Lossi Gorilla Sanctuary (Fig.5). About 15,000 elephants are distributed in this area, mainly concentrated in southern Odzala-Kokoua and to the west of the Ngombe Forest Concession, located east of the national park (Maisels *et al.* 2013b; Maisels *et al.* 2015).

Logging concessions cover the forests in this area, the largest of which (Ngombe) is FSC certified. Some of them have eco-guards integrated into USLAB anti-poaching monitoring units.

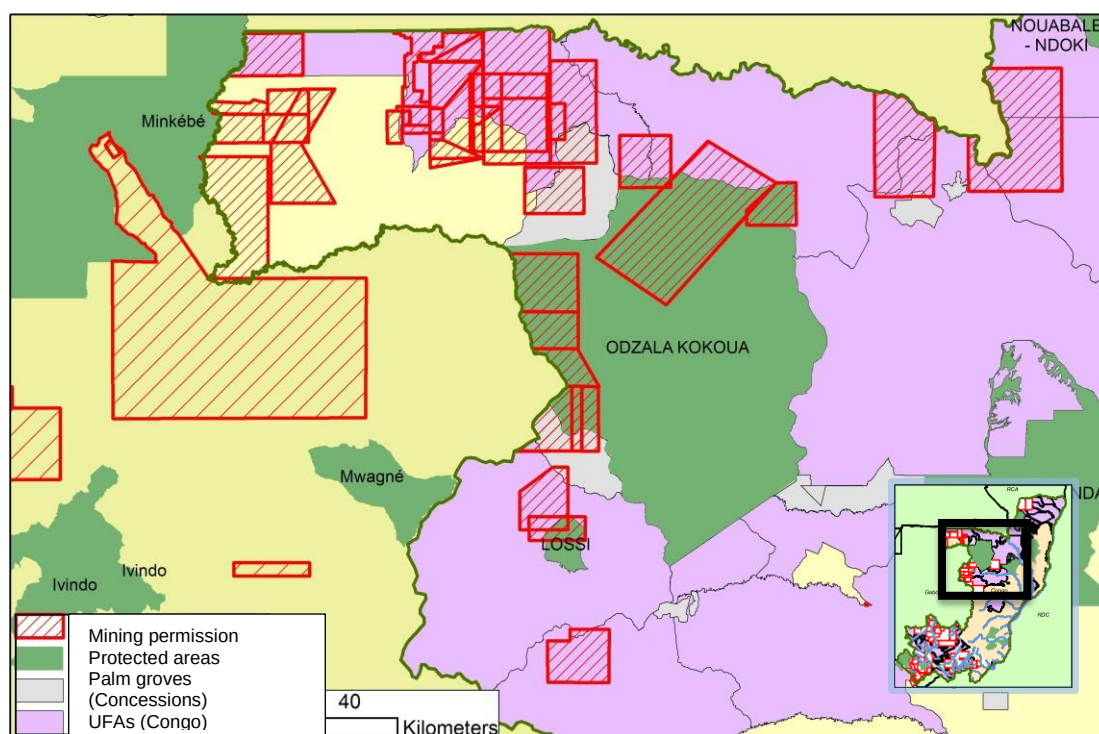


Fig. 5. Inventory of land use in the West Sangha

Source: (MEF-WRI 2016)

A large palm grove (Atama) is located between Odzala-Kokoua National Park and Ntokou-Pikounda, but only part has been cleared (16 km²) along the national road near Odzala-Kokoua National Park and Ntokou-Pikounda National Park, just south of the boundary of the Ngombe logging concession (GFW-WRI 2018).

Several mining exploration permits (gold, iron and other minerals) have been granted in part of the southwestern part of the Odzala-Kokoua National Park (PNOK) and the northern part of the PNOK on the border with Gabon and Cameroon. The Juah-Ivindo area (Garabinzani) also includes a protected area project (Messok- Dja).

The most significant threats to elephants, identified by participants at the planning workshop for the West Sangha area, are poaching for ivory, human-elephant conflicts and habitat loss due to mining (Table 4).

Zone Sangha-Est

Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park (Fig. 6) is an unspoilt area, free of habitation for the past 800-1000 years. This site is part of the Sangha Tri-National World Heritage Site (since 2012). About 10,000 elephants are present (Thouless *et al.* 2016), some of which are "shared" between the Dzanga-Sangha protected area complex in neighbouring CAR (Blake *et al.* 2008).

Various types of forest concessions cover the surroundings of the NNPN, three of which (Kabo, Pokola and Loundougou-Toukoulaka) are led by CIB/OLAM, FSC certified and known to be areas of vital importance for the presence and conservation of elephants (Thouless *et al.* 2016). Other Un-FSC-certified forest concessions are also located in the north. This area is cross-border with CAR, Cameroon and DRC.

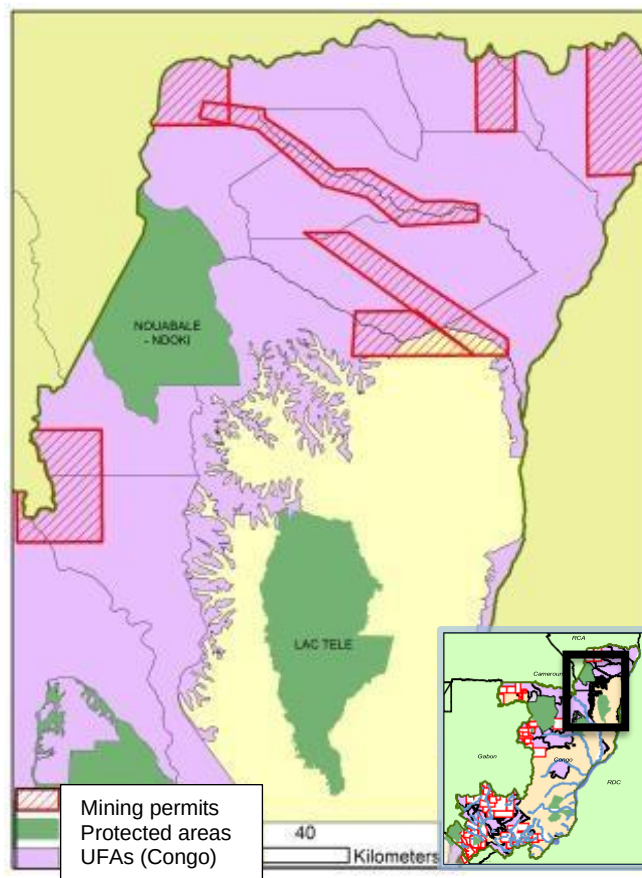


Fig. 6: Status of land use in East Sangha

Source: (MEF-WRI 2016)

The Lac Télé community reserve and the Likouala-aux-Herbes marshes constitute the rest of this preserved heritage. Some artisanal diamond mines are located in the north, on the border with CAR.

The most significant threats to elephants identified by participants at the planning workshop for the East Sangha area are poaching for ivory, human-elephant conflicts, immigration of people from outside the region (attracted by employment opportunities that industrial logging can offer - or due to civil unrest in CAR and DRC), habitat fragmentation, but also road and infrastructure construction (Table 4).

Central / Plain Zone

Two major wildlife reserves (Lésio-Louna and Léfini) are located in the central-eastern part of the country, a few hours north of Brazzaville on the main road, as well as a project for a National Park (Ogooué-Lékéti) in the western part of the country, on the border with Gabon and adjacent to Bateké Trays National Park in Gabon (Fig. 7). At least 70 elephants have been identified in Léfini (Inkamba Nkulu *et al.* 2017) and 300 others within Ogooué-Lékéti (Inkamba-Nkulu *et al.* 2016).

Logging concessions cover the entire western part of this expanse of continuous forest. The three logging concessions currently overlap the future park. The Léfini and Lésio-Louna reserves and their buffer zones form a mosaic of gallery forests along rivers and pristine savannah formations.

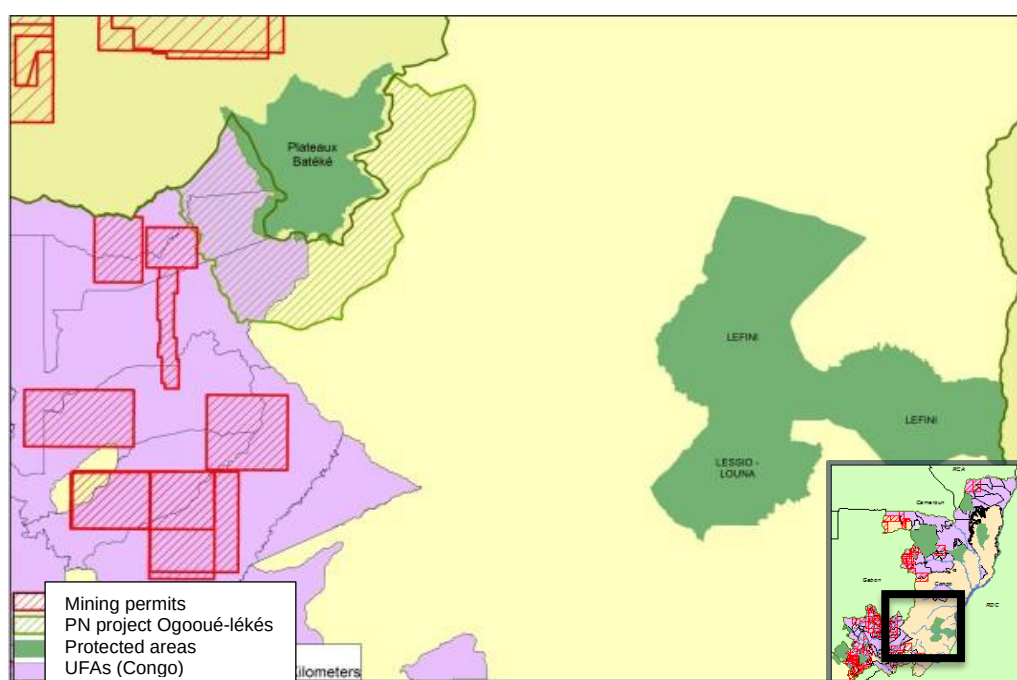


Fig. 7. Inventory of land use in the Central Area/Plains

Source: (MEF-WRI 2016)

An iron mining project (MPD Company) borders the future Ogooué-Lékéti National Park in the west, covering approximately 2,500 km². The most significant threats to elephants, identified by participants at the Central Zone / Plains planning workshop, are poaching for ivory, human-elephant conflicts and habitat loss due to mining (Table 4).

South / Coastal Zone

The largest elephant population in this area is found in the Conkouati-Douli National Park, which has about 1,000 elephants (Fig. 8). The park is protected by eco-guards, and the elephant population has recovered remarkably after ten years of good management (Vanleeuwe 2014). Nearby logging concessions are exempt from FSC certification but can provide essential elephant habitats. Several mining permits are located to the southeast and east of the national park, with some overlap (Sintokoula Potash, 1,594 km², Sino Congo, 3,461 km², and Yuan Wang, 4,749km²).

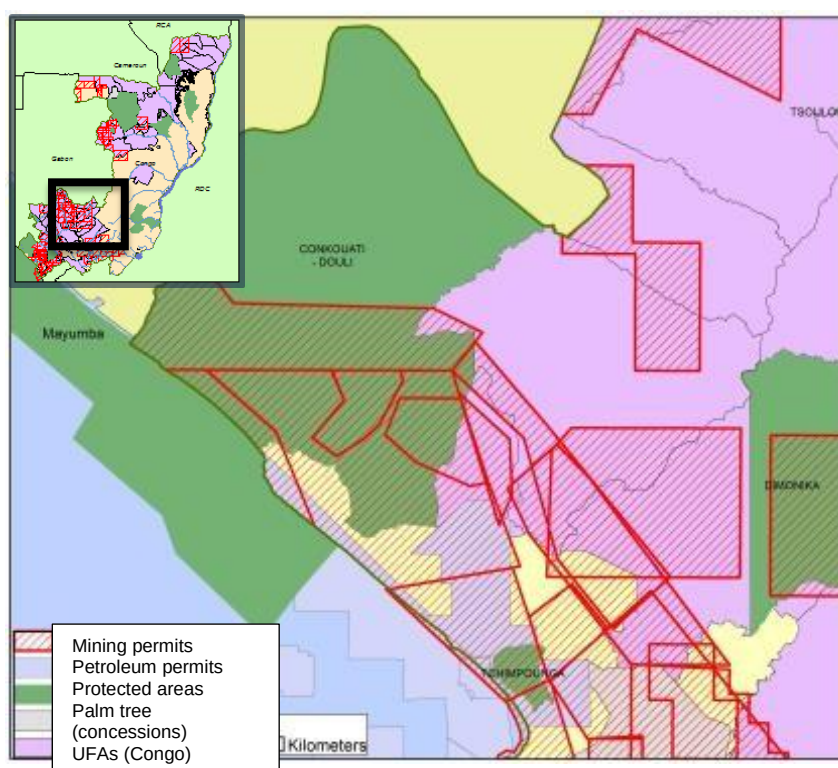


Fig. 8. Land use plan in the South/Coastal Zone

Source: (MEF-WRI 2016)

The most significant threats to elephants, identified by participants at the South / Coastal Zone planning workshop, are poaching for ivory, human-elephant conflicts, and habitat loss and fragmentation due to the development of mines, agriculture, infrastructure and roads that result directly or indirectly from these developments (Table 4).

4. Legislation, Regulations and Policies Concerning Elephant Conservation

a. CITES

The Republic of Congo is a member of CITES by Law 34/82 of 7 July 1982. CITES provides an essential international framework for the control and regulation of international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora. Except for the populations of Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, the African elephant populations are listed in Appendix I of CITES, thus prohibiting all international trade except where the import is not for commercial purposes (e.g. scientific research). In this context, the Republic of Congo developed a National Ivory Action Plan (NIAP) in 2015, approved and validated by the CITES Secretariat, putting into perspective six priority areas to combat elephant poaching in the country and the resulting illegal ivory trade.

This plan is implemented across the country and progress is monitored through the submission of an annual report to the CITES Secretariat. Adherence to CITES also requires Parties to take many measures, including legal actions. Adequate national legislation that meets the basic requirements of the Convention is a *sine qua non* for the effectiveness of CITES Article VIII of the CITES Convention and Resolution 8.4 (Rev. CoP15). National laws for the implementation of the Convention stipulate that national legislation must at least designate a management authority and a scientific authority, prohibit trade in specimens in violation of the Convention, penalise such trade or possession of such specimens, and confer on the competent authorities the power to confiscate or return such specimens to the exporting country. Congo is significantly involved in this legislative transposition process, which constitutes an essential primary element in the fight against the illegal exploitation of elephants.

As a representative member of the CITES Standing Committee, the Republic of Congo has for several years occupied a prominent place on the international scene and, with the support of the Member States of the Coalition for the African Elephant, submitted a set of documents to the 69th meeting of the Standing Committee. These documents concern, among other things, the protection of elephants and the implementation of aspects of Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev CoP17) on the closure of national ivory markets (SC69 Doc. 51.2), as well as the application of provisions on the management of ivory stocks (SC69 Doc. 51.3).

b. Other regional and international regulations

Other international conventions, protocols and agreements have been ratified by the Republic of Congo and remain relevant for the protection of elephants in the country. These include:

- The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC);
- The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC);
- The African Convention on Nature Conservation and Natural Resources;
- The Convention on Biological Diversity ratified in the Republic of Congo by Act No. 29/96 of

25 June 1996;

- The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals approved in the Republic of Congo by Act No. 14-99 of 3 March 1999
- The Agreement on Cooperative Enforcement Operations Directed at the Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora, also known as the "Lusaka Agreement". The Republic of Congo acceded to this agreement by adopting Act No. 32/96 of 22 August 1996. Through this agreement, African States have recognised the importance of wildlife conservation for the conservation of all biological diversity in Africa and the sustainable development of the continent. The objective of this agreement is to reduce and eliminate illegal trade in wildlife and to establish a permanent task force dedicated to this mission. It thus responds to the concern related to the intensification of poaching, which has led to the decline of some wildlife populations, including African elephants.

The Republic of Congo is a co-signatory of the London Declaration on Illegal Trade in Wildlife as well as a member of the Coalition for the Protection of the African Elephant, while it joined the Elephant Protection Initiative (EPI) in 2015 alongside 18 other countries. Thus, Congo is becoming a key country for the development and application of a National Elephant Action Plan among other commitments, including the observance of a moratorium on domestic ivory sales and the placing of ivory stocks outside of economic use.

As a member of COMIFAC, the Republic of Congo is also a stakeholder in the COMIFAC Sub regional Action Plan for Strengthening Law Enforcement (PAPECALF) developed in 2012 and intended to be implemented until 2017. In addition, while the Emergency Action Plan for Poaching Control (PAULAB) established in 2015 within the framework of ECCAS has initially been initiated to combat poaching in the savannah areas of Central Africa (Cameroon, Chad, CAR), PAULAB measures have been extended to the region's forest area including the Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Gabon, DRC and CAR. Developed over a period of 2 years, the overall objective of PAULAB was to reduce illegal elephant hunting in Central African forest areas by at least 25%.

The subsequent Programme to Combat Poaching in Central Africa (PROLABAC) appears in the declarations issued by the ECCAS Conference of Ministers in May 2015 on anti-poaching and is a variation of PAULAB, but with a duration of more than five years.

In this context, the Republic of Congo organised the International Conference on the Illegal Exploitation and Illegal Trade in Flora and Fauna in Africa from 27 to 30 April 2015 in Brazzaville. This led to the preparation of a draft "Joint African Strategy on Combating the Illegal Trade in Fauna and Flora", accompanied by a roadmap and a draft action plan, adopted by the Heads of State in June 2015, in Johannesburg (South Africa), at the 27th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council of the African Union. Long involved in the fight against the illegal ivory trade, 4.5 tonnes of ivory were incinerated on the side-lines of this Conference. This Conference subsequently initiated the development and finalisation of the African Strategy on Combating Illegal Exploitation and Illegal Trade in Flora and Fauna, which was finalised in May 2015 within the framework of the African Union. In this context, the Republic of the Congo is in the process of implementing this strategy at the national level, which will lead to the development of the first National Strategy to Combat the Illegal

Exploitation and Illegal Trade in Wildlife Species and Products in the Republic of the Congo.

c. National legislation

Since 1991, absolute protection of elephants throughout the Republic of Congo has been provided for by Order No. 3282/MEFPE of 18 November 1991. This order was issued under Act No. 114/91/CNS/P/S of 24 June 1991 prohibiting the killing of elephants in the Republic of Congo, except for administrative killings which are authorised under specific and exceptional circumstances. The main provisions relating to the protection of wildlife resources in the Republic of Congo, including elephants, are defined by Act 37/2008 on the conservation of fauna and protected areas, supplemented by Order No. 6075/MDDEFE of 9 April 2011 determining fully and partially protected animal species. Under these provisions, full protection is granted to the elephant, knowing that the slaughter of this species or the marketing of its trophies is punishable by penalties ranging from 100,000 to 5,000,000 CFA francs and 2 to 5 years' imprisonment. While this law offers potentially extensive protection to many species, including elephants, some gaps have been observed under CITES. A legislative overhaul is being initiated at the MEF level to fully comply with CITES mandates and adequately protect the country's elephant populations.

Other cross-cutting legislation is relevant for the protection of elephants in the Republic of Congo, including that relating to the fight against money laundering, corruption and the proliferation of weapons: Law number 5-2009 of 22 September 2009 on corruption, misappropriation, fraud and similar offences; Ordinance 62-24 of 16 October 1962 on war material and firearms regimes in Congo, with particular reference to issues of illegal possession of firearms and ammunition.

5. Institutional and National Instruments for the Management of Protected Areas and the Fight against Poaching and Trafficking of Ivory

a. Protected Areas

Congo has 16 protected areas covering an area of 38,854 km², or 11.51% of the national territory. Among these protected areas are national parks (Odzala-Kokoua, Nouabalé-Ndoki, Conkouati Douli and Ntokou Pikounda), wildlife and forest reserves, an area of hunting interest, a community reserve (Lac-Télé), hunting grounds, a biosphere reserve (Dimonika), and wildlife sanctuaries (Lesio- Louna gorilla natural reserve, Lossi gorilla sanctuary, Tchimpounga) (Fig. 9).

b. Institutional Instruments

Moreover, the country has several institutional instruments specifically dedicated to the management and preservation of protected areas as well as to the fight against poaching and trafficking of protected species or parts thereof, including elephants.

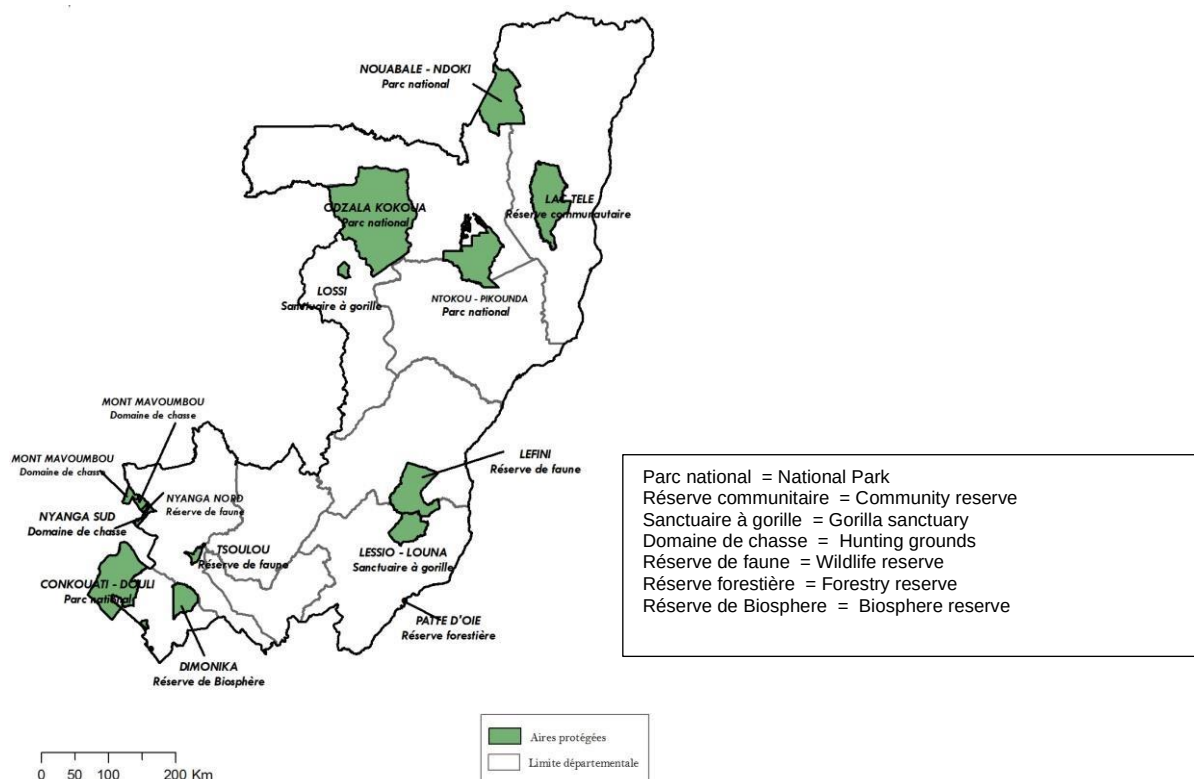


Fig. 9. Protected areas, Republic of Congo

- The General Directorate of Fauna and Protected Areas (DGEF), within the Directorate of Fauna and Protected Areas (DFAP) and the Departmental Directorates, are the technical bodies responsible for assisting the Minister of Forest Economy in the exercise of his functions concerning wildlife and forestry. In accordance with the provisions of Decree No. 98-175 of 12 May 1998 on the powers and organisation of the General Directorate of Forest Economy, its mission is to design and technically monitor the implementation of programmes relating to forests, fauna and protected areas, and to maintain cooperation relations with national, regional and international specialised bodies.
- The Congolese Agency for Wildlife and Protected Areas (ACFAP), under the supervision of the Ministry of Forest Economy, was established by Law No. 34 - 2012 of 31 October 2012, with a mandate to implement national wildlife and protected area management policy. ACFAP is responsible for habitat conservation and sustainable biodiversity conservation, national coordination of the protected area network, anti-poaching monitoring and control units (USLAB), and cooperation and partnerships with institutions at the national and international levels. ACFAP is also responsible for the promotion of the economic development of protected areas through ecotourism, hunting tourism and environmental services.

c. Forest Concessions

The Republic of Congo has about 60 forest concessions (or Managed Forest Units - FMUs). While the operating companies, through the adoption of the decrees approving the development agreements, undertake to ensure the establishment and operation of the USLABs, only eight have been set up and are operational to date (Fig. 10).

Under the supervision of the MEF, a Committee to Combat Poaching and Illegal Trade in Fauna and Flora Species was established by Decree No. 2015-261 of 25 February 2015 creating, organising and operating the said Committee. Pending its operationalization, this Committee will study mechanisms for strengthening the implementation of the Wildlife Act at the national and sub-regional levels. Its various tasks will include planning and coordinating public awareness actions and measures to enhance the forest police concerning wildlife protection.

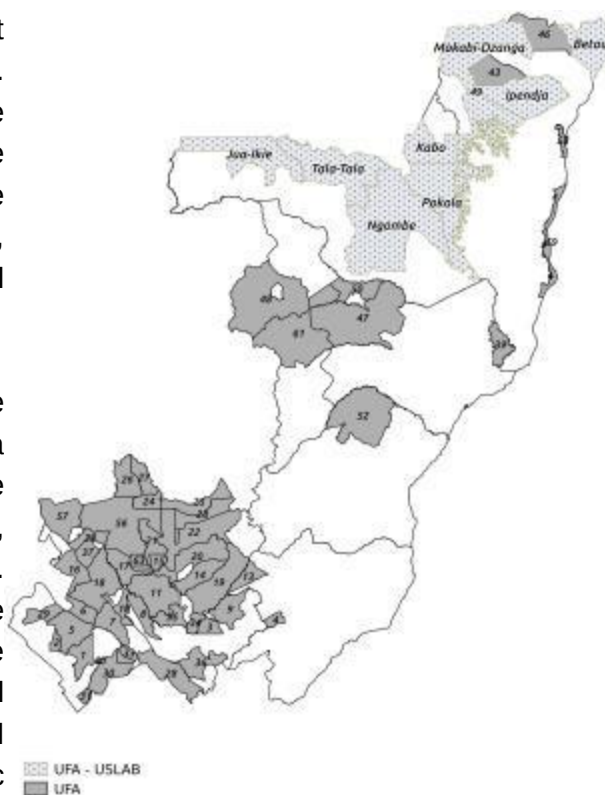
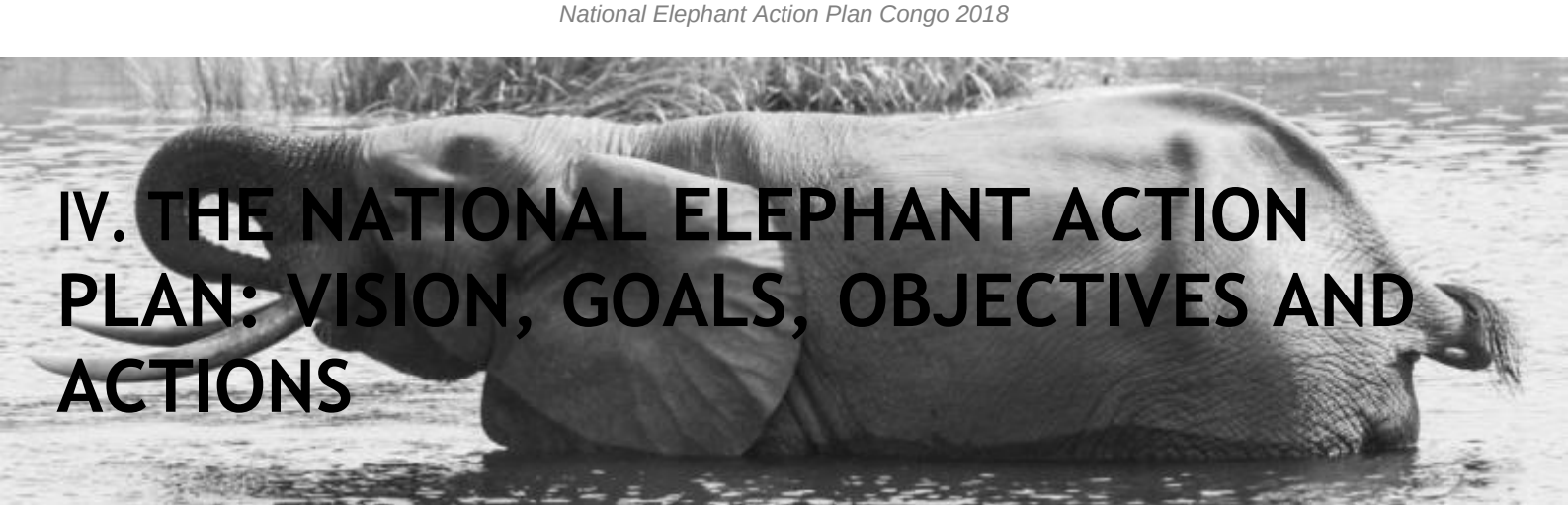


Fig. 10. Breakdown of FMUs and LABUs in the Republic of Congo

d. Law Enforcement

National and cross-border agencies specialise in dismantling organised crime networks, such as the National Bureau of the Lusaka Agreement (BNAL), which represents, under the supervision of the MEF, the government entity dedicated to handling cases relating to wildlife crime. Interpol's National Central Bureau works to strengthen regional and international police cooperation by combating cross-border crime, particularly in the areas of cybercrime, international fraud and money laundering.

These agencies conduct joint operations with technical partners such as PALF (Project to Support the Enforcement of the Wildlife Law), WWF, WCS and APN. Several professional partners work on a daily basis with the Ministry of Forest Economy to strengthen the fight against wildlife crime. Since 2010, PALF (Project to Support the Enforcement of the Wildlife Law) has been supporting the Government in the investigation and arrest of wildlife offenders and contributing to the overall fight against corruption in the judicial system. Since 2016, this multidisciplinary approach has been adopted by many NGOs in the north of the country, where the last strongholds of forest elephants remain.



IV. THE NATIONAL ELEPHANT ACTION PLAN: VISION, GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

Vision

"Forest elephant populations and their habitats are secured in peaceful coexistence with humans, to perpetuate their role in maintaining ecological balance as well as their contribution to the national economy through the development of ecotourism".

Goals

The goals of the NEAP make it possible to present the vision of the NEAP under operational conditions, with long-term objectives and targeted actions. After consultation, the participants agreed on the following goals:

1. Secure elephant strongholds by reducing poaching and ivory trafficking;
2. Ensure the management of important elephant habitat (by preserving or creating large areas of forest);
3. Ensure peaceful coexistence between elephants and the local population, including the development of economic opportunities compatible with elephant conservation, including ecotourism;
4. Strengthen institutional capacity in research, protection and management of elephants and their habitats.

1. Strategic objectives

The goals of the NEAP will be implemented through the achievement of the following strategic objectives over a 10-year period:

1. Reduce the illegal killing of elephants and illegal trade in elephant products;
2. Maintain elephant habitats and ensure their connectivity throughout large forest blocks;
3. Reduce human-elephant conflict through the implementation of an effective national strategy;
4. Intensify awareness of elephant conservation among government institutions and the public at large;
5. Strengthen the knowledge and capacity of managers in elephant management;
6. Strengthen regional/trans boundary cooperation on elephant conservation;

7. Strengthen capacity and partnerships with local communities and local populations for elephant conservation;
8. Ensure that the National Elephant Action Plan is effectively implemented;

Objective 1a: Reduce illegal killing of elephants and illegal trade in elephant products

Enforcement efforts are at the basis of reducing the illegal killing of elephants, mainly through the establishment of eco-guard patrols, but also through improved intelligence and investigations. While in some conservation areas the action of field teams has significantly reduced poaching, in others, the impacts remains irregular due to the lack of qualified personnel, equipment or an appropriate intelligence system. Thus, a series of complementary actions is needed in and around protected areas and within forest concessions to strengthen the capacities of eco-guards, including the establishment of a comprehensive information system while promoting information sharing between sites, in synergy with Public Institutions.

An adaptive management system will make it possible to monitor and evaluate patrols through regular data analysis to adjust the measures and operational procedures undertaken by protected area managers.

Target to be attained in 10 years:

The PIKE indicator (proportion of elephants killed illegally) for the Republic of Congo is below 50% (PIKE < 0.50).

Targets to be attained in 3 years:

- 150 eco-guards recruited, equipped, trained and registered with ACFAP;
- 50% of protected areas and LBU have an intelligence system in place;
- At least three workshops are organised to promote the exchange of experience between cross-border sites;
- A cross-border strategy is put in place, and joint patrols are operational;
- The SMART system is operationalized in and around protected areas and in forest concessions, which is of significant importance for the protection of elephants;
- Forest concessions of substantial significance for elephant protection have operational USLABs;

Objective 1b: Reduce illegal trade in elephant products

Due to its geographical position, Congo is a nerve centre for ivory trafficking. Located in the heart of neighbouring countries such as Gabon, Cameroon, Central African Republic and the DRC, its position makes it a favoured route for exporting large volumes of ivory, favoured by the political climate, corruption and lack of legal deterrents to address organised crime as a whole. Therefore, a multilateral approach is needed to first intercept elephant products at previously porous borders (freight areas, ports, airports), while mobilising public institutions and the private sector such as land, air or port companies.

Secondly, the optimisation of the legal arsenal (adoption of laws on international organised crime, training of judges, and the establishment of administrative databases) is essential for the efficiency of the judicial process, from arrest to the execution of sentences.

Target to be attained in 10 years:

The conviction rate with maximum sentences for major ivory traffickers is above 80% in Congo.

Targets to be attained in 3 years:

- A new project updating legislation for the protection of elephants taking into account the aspects of the fight against organised crime is being prepared;
- A pilot project of specialised prosecutors for wildlife offences is being implemented;
- A mechanism for managing and monitoring wildlife litigation and a database is set up within the institutions;
- Judicial records related to offences committed against elephants are systematically transmitted to the prosecutor's office;
- A national database on the movement of weapons and ammunition referred to wildlife crime is established;
- Collaboration between the law enforcement services, the MEF and the authorities located in the entry and exit zones of the territory is strengthened by the signing of a memorandum of understanding;
- Two training courses are provided for Customs officers at the main entry and exit points for illegal wildlife products;
- Air, sea and land companies are identified, undertake and officially prohibit the transport of any elephant products.

Objective 2: Maintain elephant habitats and ensure their connectivity through the use of large forest blocks

Fragmentation and habitat loss are a real challenge for the sustainable preservation of elephant populations in Congo. Confined mostly within protected areas, deforestation, mining, agricultural expansion and land conflicts have eroded the habitat available for elephant populations and disrupted internal or cross-border migration corridors.

While there are large areas of forest in Congo that are favourable to long-term elephant conservation, particularly in the north of the country, within protected areas and buffer zones, it is vital to maintain and preserve the balance of these habitats. As the country's economic development is reflected in the expansion of roads and the construction of new infrastructure, wider ecological landscapes must be taken into account in the land-use planning process to minimise impacts on elephant movements between protected areas and cross-border areas.

To this end, a better knowledge of the areas that are favourable to the sustainable conservation of elephant populations is essential, as is the establishment of a framework for consultation between the public sectors (Ministries of Equipment and Road Maintenance and, of the development of the territory) and private (agricultural, mining, forestry

companies...) to formally integrate elephant habitat into the national land use and development process.

Target to be attained in 10 years:

Elephant habitat in the Republic of Congo is identified, secured and integrated into the national land-use plan for Congo.

Target to be attained in 3 years:

A national land use plan is developed, taking into account areas and habitats important to the long-term conservation of elephants.

Objective 3: Reduce human-elephant conflict through the implementation of an effective national strategy

Local communities living in the vicinity of large elephant populations are likely to be more exposed to human-elephant conflict. This conflict is particularly aggravated by the lack of local land-use management around protected areas. Regrettably, anti-poaching efforts can increase the risk of human-elephant conflicts, as they are gradually overwhelmed by their fear towards people and occupied territories. The consequences can range from the destruction of crops to material and human losses. In the face of these challenges, several uncoordinated attempts have been made in collaboration with the communities (electrical barriers, use of chilli peppers, installation of hives, and so on) without having sustainably addressed the problem. Also, the current centrally managed compensation mechanism has found its limits due to the remoteness of communities, and the difficulty in reporting and assessing destruction or allocating compensation.

It is now necessary to identify the factors conducive to elephant crop damage and to seek solutions adapted to the Congo context. Besides, this strategy favours the implementation of a decentralisation mechanism to compensate communities and thus restore a climate of trust between the people and the administration on the one hand, and serenity between people and elephants on the other hand.

Target to be attained in 10 years:

Elephant crop destruction has decreased by 70% by 2028.

Targets to be attained in 3 years:

- Crop damage generating factors as well as security and compensation/insurance mechanisms are identified and assessed;
- A national action plan for the management of human-wildlife conflicts is developed and validated;
- A project is submitted for mitigation and compensation based on the results of the assessment;
- A pilot project based on the evaluation recommendations is being piloted on site;

- Communities are made aware of elephant protection, as well as mechanisms to mitigate human-elephant conflicts.

Objective 4: Intensify awareness of elephant conservation among government institutions and the general public at large

The general public, but also members of local communities, traditional leaders, political and public authorities, are generally unaware of the seriousness of the situation and are poorly informed of the benefits of preserving elephant populations for the country. The last public and national action were taken in 2015, when 4.5 tons of ivory were incinerated during the International Conference on the Illegal Exploitation and Illicit Trade in Fauna and Flora in Africa, under the high patronage of His Excellency President Denis Sassou Nguesso.

A nationwide awareness-raising programme is required over the next three years, targeting primarily the new generation and schoolchildren, but also the general public through the mobilisation of audio-visual media at entrances and exits from the territory.

Target to be attained in 10 years:

- Elephant conservation has become a symbol of national public pride in Congo.

Target to be attained in 3 years:

- At least one elephant-conservation awareness event is organised on a nationwide scale by local authorities and other stakeholders.

Objective 5: Increase the knowledge and capacity of the managers in elephant control management.

Monitoring elephant population trends and mortality is an essential element in the decision-making of managers, as is regular evaluation of the measures implemented. While much data is currently available within public and private institutions, there is a real need to compile and capitalise on this information to make it accessible and usable at the central level.

Over the next three years, efforts will focus on building a database to compile and organise all available information on the distribution of elephants in the Republic of Congo, their abundance and trends. Also, study and training programmes will aim to strengthen the capacities of future and current managers at the central and decentralised level.

Target to be attained in 10 years:

Training in wildlife management and conservation is fully integrated into the national programme for MEF students and staff, and the Congo has a database and information portal on the status, monitoring and management of elephant populations.

Targets to be attained in 3 years:

- A national database on elephant populations in the Republic of Congo (and other wildlife) will be established;
- A database on the eco-ethological status of elephant populations is being set up;
- A master's degree course and exchange programmes on wildlife management and conservation are integrated into the national university programme;
- A scholarship program and exchange of studies program are in place for MEF officers on wildlife conservation and management.

Objective 6: Strengthen regional/trans-boundary cooperation for elephant conservation

The mobility of elephant populations across borders and the increasing involvement of traffickers from foreign states require a more global approach to conservation at the regional and international levels. Despite significant cooperative efforts to combat poaching, these initiatives remain very localised (for example, the Tri-National of the Sangha (TNS) located in the north-western Congo Basin, at the meeting point between the Republic of Cameroon, the Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic, and the TRIDOM project for the Dja Odzala-Minkébé Interzone between Cameroon, the Congo and Gabon). Strengthened regional policy dynamics are required. The Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC) thus represents a political and institutional tool for engaging States in elephant conservation as a whole.

Accordingly, over the next three years, the planned activities will make it possible to initiate the harmonisation of legislation between countries in the region and the signing of regional legal cooperation agreements for the exchange of information on investigations and law enforcement in general.

Target to be attained in 10 years:

Congo is a leader in cross-border and regional cooperation in Central Africa to combat the illegal trafficking of elephant products.

Targets to be attained in 3 years:

- A dossier is submitted to COMIFAC for the harmonisation of legislation on illegal trafficking in elephant products;
- A judicial cooperation agreement is signed between the Republic of Congo and a cross-border country of particular importance for the unlawful trafficking of elephant products.

Objective 7: Strengthen the capacity and collaboration of local communities and the native population for elephant conservation

Previously marginalised, local communities are now an essential asset in the fight against poaching. Real opportunities exist which, when combined with alternative livelihood systems,

provide tangible benefits at the household level (for example, ecotourism sites through the construction of watchtowers and the training of tourist guides within communities). Because there is a need to restore dialogue between protected-area managers, administration and local communities, a new communication system involving community leaders will be encouraged (simple multi-stakeholder forum to discuss conservation, wildlife management, and related conflicts). At the same time, the development of national standards for the benefit of local communities and indigenous peoples will ensure an equitable redistribution of tourism revenues.

Target to be attained in 10 years:

Communities directly benefit from elephant conservation through the mechanism of income-generating activities that are consistent with national policy.

Target to be attained in 3 years:

In 2022, national standards are developed for the redistribution of tourism revenues to local communities.

Objective 8: Ensure that the National Elephant Action Plan is effectively implemented

To ensure the effective implementation of the NEAP, the Technical Commission on the NEAP, assisted by the designated Focal Point, will continue its role of monitoring and evaluating activities, meeting at least twice a year. A workshop to transcribe, monitor and evaluate activities will also be organised to capitalise on the experiences learned, readjust activities in response to changing threats, and mobilise new sources of funding.

Target to be attained in 10 years:

The NEAP is effectively implemented on a national level.

Targets to be attained in 3 years:

- The Technical Commission on the NEAP has been convened at least twice a year;
- At least two sources of funding are secured for the realisation of activities;
- At least one workshop to monitor the implementation of the NEAP is organised annually.

2. Priority actions

In order to achieve the Vision, Goals and Strategic Objectives of the National Elephant Action Plan, a series of priority activities have been defined over three years, with indicative targets to be achieved over different time frames.

The National Elephant Action Plan thus constitutes a framework for prioritising and organising the implementation of concrete measures related to elephant conservation in the Republic of Congo, in accordance with the established strategic objectives.

OBJECTIVES	TARGETS 10 YEARS (2028)	TARGETS 3 YEARS (2021)	#	ACTIVITIES (3 YEARS)	PANI	JOINT AFRICAN STRATEGY
OBJECTIVE 1A: REDUCE ILLEGAL KILLING OF ELEPHANTS	<i>By 2028 the PIKE indicator <0.5 (Proportion of Illegally Killed Elephants)</i>	<i>By 2022, 150 eco- guards and 50 eco- Instructors are recruited, equipped, trained and registered with ACFAP.</i>	1A.1	Recruit and train 150 eco- guards and 50 eco-instructors in protected areas and in USLABs within the high-density forest concessions of elephants.	X	
			1A.2	Reinforce operational paramilitary capacities of the eco-guards by means of training.	X	
			1A.3	Register the eco-guards and commissioned agents, with ACFAP.		
			1A.4	Reinforce the operational capacities of the ACFAP.	X	
		<i>50% of protected areas and USLAB have an intelligence system established.</i>	1A.5	Establish an intelligence network around large elephant populations including: -The introduction of a system of data collection and analysis, -The training of agents in this system	X	X
		<i>At least three workshops are organised to promote the exchange of information between cross-border sites.</i>	1A.6	Organise three workshops to promote the exchange of information and of experience between the trans-boundary zones selected and of particular importance for the protection of elephants.	X	X
		<i>Protocols of the agreement are signed and joint patrols are operational.</i>	1A.7	Proceed with the signing of cross-border protocols of agreements (bi-national/mixed patrols) and operationalize joint patrols.	X	X
		<i>The SMART system is operational in and around protected areas and within forest concessions of vital importance for the protection of elephants.</i>	1A.8	Implement the SMART system for monitoring LAB activities in all protected areas and USLABs within forest concessions of significant importance for elephant protection.	X	X

		<i>Forest concessions of significant importance for elephant protection have their own operational USLAB.</i>				
OBJECTIVE 1B: REDUCE ILLEGAL TRADE IN ELEPHANT PRODUCTS	<i>In 2028, the maximum sentencing rate for major ivory traffickers in Congo is above 80%.</i>	<i>A new proposal for a law for the protection of elephants that takes into account aspects of the fight against organised crime is being prepared.</i>	1B.1	Establish a technical committee to review the legislative framework for the protection of elephants. Prepare a draft law to be submitted to the Government, incorporating aspects of the fight against organized crime (United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime) and United Nations Resolution 69/314 on the fight against trafficking in wild species Popularize the CITES Transposition Act at a national level	X	
			1B.2	Initiate discussions with the Ministry of Justice Conduct a viability study for the creation of an environmental chamber in certain courts of the country Develop and implement a pilot project of specialised magistrates including their recruitment and training.		X
			1B.3	Develop a mechanism for managing and monitoring wildlife litigation and implement it on a pilot site. Implement this tool at the national level within the specialised institutions dedicated to the fight against wildlife crime.	X	
		<i>A pilot project of specialised prosecutors for wildlife offences is being established.</i> <i>A mechanism for managing and monitoring wildlife litigation and a database is set up within the Institutions.</i> <i>Court cases related to Offences committed against elephants are systematically reported to the prosecutor's office.</i>				

		<i>A national database on the movement of weapons and ammunition related to wildlife crime is established.</i>	1B.4	Establish a national file of weapons and ammunition seizures related to wildlife crime.	X	
		<i>Collaboration between the law enforcement agencies, MEF, ACFAP and authorities located in the entry and exit zones of the territory is strengthened by the signature of a protocol agreement.</i>	1B.5	Organise a roundtable to initiate discussions between the MEF (including the National Office of the Lusaka Agreement) and the authorities responsible for controlling entry and exit to and from the territory to strengthen collaboration in terms of Detecting illegal transport of unauthorised wildlife products. Sign a protocol of cooperation agreement on monitoring and control between the MEF (including the National Office of the Lusaka Agreement), ACFAP, and the authorities in charge of the control at entry and exit areas (ports, airports, airlines) for the detection of illegal transport of elephant products.	X	
		<i>Two training courses are provided for Customs officers at the main entry and exit points for illegal wildlife products.</i>	1B.6	Select the main entry and exit points for illegal wildlife products in the Republic of Congo. Identify an expert to train Customs officers in the detection of illegal wildlife products, and the application of CITES provisions. Establish specialised units for the detection of illegal products within customs at ports and airports. Popularise the guide for identifying species listed in the CITES Appendices with officials.	X	

		<i>Airlines, shipping companies and others are identified, committed and officially prohibit the transport of any product derived from the elephant.</i>	1B.7	Identify airlines, maritime and land transport likely to have a significant impact on the transport of fully protected species in the Republic of Congo Continue to urge these companies to undertake to prohibit all transport of elephant products to and from the Republic of Congo.	X	
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OBJECTIVES	TARGETS 10 YEARS (2028)	TARGETS 3 YEARS (2021)	#	ACTIVITIES (3 YEARS)	PANI	JOINT AFRICAN STRATEGY
OBJECTIVE 2 : MAINTAIN ELEPHANT HABITATS AND RESTORE CONNECTIVITY	<i>By 2028, elephant habitat in the Republic of Congo is identified, secured and integrated into the national land use plan for the Congo.</i>	<i>By 2022, a national land use plan is developed, taking into account areas and habitats important to elephants.</i>	2.1	Update elephant conservation areas through spatial and national analysis.	X	
			2.2	Establish a framework for consultation with the National Spatial Planning Commission: -Bring together the mining, forestry, land use planning, equipment and road maintenance, biodiversity and other sectors that have an impact on elephant conservation; -Formally integrate spatial analysis of elephant habitat (and other biodiversity) into the national land use and planning process.	X	

OBJECTIVES	TARGETS 10 YEARS (2028)	TARGETS 3 YEARS (2021)	#	ACTIVITIES (3 YEARS)	PANI	JOINT AFRICAN STRATEGY
OBJECTIVE 3: REDUCE HUMAN/ELEPHANT CONFLICT	<i>The destruction of crops by elephants has declined by 70% by 2028.</i>	<i>The factors that cause crop damage and the methods of mitigation and compensation are identified and assessed.</i>	3.1	Hire a consultant to conduct a study to: -Compile better practices in crop safety (including IGA practices), and compensation/insurance measures; -Develop tools for crop security, and compensation/insurance adapted to the context (e.g. creation of a village monitoring committee on a key site, and so on). -Study the feasibility of a decentralisation mechanism for the compensation of communities and the use of private or community insurance;	X	
		<i>A national action plan for the management of human-elephant conflicts is developed and validated</i>	3.2	Organise a workshop for the development of a national action plan for the management of human-elephant conflicts: -Develop a national action plan for managing human-elephant conflict on the basis of the strategy developed in 2009 by COMIFAC, taking into account the tools developed by FAO and the results of the study. In particular, it will take into account the establishment of a database on existing conflicts. -Organise a workshop to endorse the national action plan for the management of human-elephant conflicts, and the organization of its distribution and enforcement.	X	
		<i>A proposed regulation is submitted to the government on compensation mechanisms related to the destruction of crops by elephants.</i>	3.3	Prepare a set of proposed regulations to be submitted to the Government on mitigation and compensation measures, taking into account the results of the study.	X	

		<i>A pilot project for crop security and compensation/insurance is being tested on one site.</i>	3.4	Select a key site for human-elephant conflict Implement a pilot mitigation and compensation project including the development of income-generating activities, as recommended in the initial study.	X	
		<i>Communities are made aware of elephant protection, crop security and compensation measures.</i>	3.5	Develop a Communication, Awareness and Outreach Plan on elephant valuation for communities, practices and mitigation procedures.	X	

OBJECTIVES	TARGETS 10 YEARS (2028)	TARGETS 3 YEARS (2021)	#	ACTIVITIES (3 YEARS)	PANI	JOINT AFRICAN STRATEGY
OBJECTIVE 4: STRENGTHEN THE AWARENESS OF THE INSTITUTIONS, GOVERNMENTAL AND PUBLIC ABOUT THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF ELEPHANTS	<i>By 2028, the conservation of elephants has become a symbol of national pride</i>	<i>At least one event of awareness of the conservation of elephants is organised annually on a national scale by the various stakeholders.</i>	4.1	Celebrate at a national level World Elephant Day, August 12, each year by the organisation of conferences, or competitions and games.	X	
			4.2	Produce audio-visual materials on elephant conservation efforts in the country and posters for distribution at points of entry and exit from the country.	X	
			4.3	Develop awareness-raising programmes in schools (e.g. carnivals) and organise school visits to protected areas to showcase work on elephant conservation.	X	
			4.4	Raise awareness of the Act among the general public by publishing articles in a local newspaper at least twice a year, through the Directorate of Communication and Extension (MEF).	X	

OBJECTIVES	TARGETS 10 YEARS (2028)	TARGETS 3 YEARS (2021)	#	ACTIVITIES (3 YEARS)	PANI	JOINT AFRICAN STRATEGY
OBJECTIVE 5: STRENGTHEN THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS OF MANAGERS IN ELEPHANT MANAGEMENT	By 2028, training in wildlife management and conservation is fully integrated into the national program for MEF students and staff, and Congo has a database and information portal on the status, monitoring and manageme nt of elephant populations.	A national database on elephant populations in the Republic of Congo is set up	5.1	Centralise and capitalise on all existing information on the elephant population and distribution in the Republic of Congo Distribute this information to ministries directly or indirectly involved in elephant protection.		
		A database on the eco-status ethological analysis of elephant populations is being implemented.	5.2	Conduct a study on elephant population dynamics (migration corridors) including epidemiological surveillance.		
		A master's degree course and exchange programmes on wildlife management and conservation are integrated into the national university programme.	5.3	Develop master's degrees dedicated to elephant research within universities, and the promotion of theses.		
			5.4	Identify partnerships with international academic conservation institutions and promote exchanges and training in wildlife conservation and management.		
		A scholarship program and an exchange of studies program are in place for MEF officers on wildlife conservation and management.	5.5	Identify partners and set up a scholarship system, and exchanges for courses and diplomas within regional institutions (such as the Garoua Wildlife School, Mweka College and ERAIFT, in Kinshasa, DRC) specialised in wildlife management and conservation for the benefit of MEF officials.		

OBJECTIVES	TARGETS 10 YEARS (2028)	TARGETS 3 YEARS (2021)	#	ACTIVITIES (3 YEARS)	PANI	JOINT AFRICAN STRATEGY
OBJECTIVE 6: REINFORCE REGIONAL/CROSS- BORDER COOPERATION	By 2028, Congo is a leader in cross-border and regional cooperation in Central Africa in the fight against the illegal trade in elephant products.	A dossier is submitted to COMIFAC for the harmonisation of legislation on illegal trafficking in elephant products.	6.1	Promote regular dialogue with COMIFAC/African Range States to harmonise positions on elephant trade, policy and legislation issues.	X	X
		At least one legal cooperation agreement is signed between the Republic of Congo and other cross- border countries of particular importance for the illegal trafficking of elephant products.	6.2	Initiate talks by the organisation of a roundtable on regional cooperation for the dismantling of organised criminal networks. Sign legal cooperation agreements or mutual assistance cooperation agreements between neighbouring countries to simplify the dismantling of organised criminal networks.	X	X

OBJECTIVES	TARGETS 10 YEARS (2028)	TARGETS 3 YEARS (2021)	#	ACTIVITIES (3 YEARS)	PANI	JOINT AFRICAN STRATEGY
OBJECTIVE 7: STRENGTHEN THE CAPACITY AND COLLABORATION OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL PEOPLE AND PROMOTE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	By 2028, local communities and the native populations will benefit directly from elephant conservation by engaging in income-	By 2022, national standards are developed for the redistribution of tourism revenues to local communities and their inhabitants.	7.1	Organise riverside communities to create community partnerships by setting up consultation platforms.	X	
			7.2	Set up an anti-poaching hotline on a pilot site, and train communities in the use of this tool.	X	

	<i>generating activities that are consistent with national policy.</i>		7.3	Select, coordinate and implement a pilot eco-tourism project related to elephants as an income-generating species at a national level (in compliance with the tool box).	X	
			7.4	Build or renovate observation stands, identify tourist guides among the communities.	X	

OBJECTIVES	TARGETS 10 YEARS (2028)	TARGETS 3 YEARS (2021)	#	ACTIVITIES (3 YEARS)	PANI	JOINT AFRICAN STRATEGY
OBJECTIVE 8: ENSURE THAT THE NEAP IS EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENTED	<i>By 2028, the NEAP is effectively implemented</i>	<i>The Service Notice for the establishment of the Technical Commission by the Regulatory Authority is signed.</i> <i>The Technical Commission on the NEAP has convened at least twice a year.</i> <i>At least two sources of funding are secured for the implementation of activities.</i> <i>At least one workshop to monitor the implementation of the NEAP is organised.</i>	8.1	A Technical Commission is set up to monitor and follow up the progress of the NEAP.		
			8.2	Schedule a meeting of the Technical Commission at least twice a year.		
			8.3	Identify internal and external funding sources for the development of activities and submit funding programmes to technical and financial partners.		
			8.4	Establish a joint schedule for the development of activities.		
			8.5	Organise a workshop in 2022 to report on the development of activities and develop a new 3-year timetable.		

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACFAP	Congolese Agency for Wildlife and Protected Areas
AGR	Revenue Generating Activity
BAD	African Development Bank
BNAL	National Office of the Lusaka Agreement
CEEAC	Economic Community of Central African States
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CNIAF	National Centre for the Inventory and Management of Forest and Wildlife Resources
EPI	Elephant Protection Initiative
FSC	Logo of Certification by the Forest Stewardship Council, MEER Forest Support Council Ministry of Equipment and Road Maintenance
MEF	Ministry of Forest Economy
MPD	Mining Project Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PALF	Project to Support the Enforcement of Wildlife Law
NEAP	National Elephant Action Plan
PANI	National Ivory Action Plan
GDP	National gross domestic product
PROLABAC	Anti-Poaching Programme in Central Africa
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
CAR	Central African Republic
PAPECALF	Sub-regional action plan for COMIFAC countries to strengthen the implementation of legislation
FMU	Managed Forest Unit
UNOTC	United Nations against Transnational Organised Crime
UNCAC	United Nations against Corruption
USLAB	Poaching Control Monitoring Units
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society

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