



OPEN LETTER TO ALL PARTICIPANTS OF THE FIRST INTERGOVERNMENTAL MEETING ON GREAT APES AND THE GREAT APES SURVIVAL PROJECT (GRASP) HELD IN KINSHASA - September 05th – 09th 2005.

Brussels, December 13th, 2005

Destructive logging practices in the Ebo/Ndokbou forest of Cameroon

Dear Madam,
Dear Sir,

Greenpeace welcomes the continuing high level interest in the conservation of our closest relatives, the Great Apes. The organisation of a high level intergovernmental meeting on Great Ape Conservation, (Kinshasa, September 2005) was the most recent indication of the commitment of the international community to intensify efforts to prevent our closest relatives from going extinct. We congratulate the government of Cameroon with its nomination as GRASP council chair.

We also read with great interest the conclusions and recommendations formulated in the “*Regional Action Plan for the Conservation of Chimpanzees and Gorillas in Western Equatorial Africa*”¹. The report contains important recommendations that, if properly implemented, could make a difference to the survival of Great Apes in this region. We also appreciate the fact that this report clearly identifies commercial logging as a major threat to the survival of Great Apes; an issue which unfortunately does not seem to have been seriously addressed at the GRASP conference itself.

Greenpeace wants to draw your urgent attention to the destructive logging activities that threaten the ecological integrity of a rainforest area which is identified in your regional action plan as a priority area for Great Ape surveys: the Ebo/Ndokbou conservation complex located in Southwest Cameroon. This note is meant to provoke some further debate amongst specialists of Great Ape conservation before the conservation options in this forest block are lost. We invite relevant authorities to act and to prevent further destruction of this Ebo/Ndokbou complex and other key forests for Great Apes.

Ebo/Ndokbou forest: a priority for biodiversity conservation

The above mentioned action plan identifies the Ebo/Ndokbou conservation complex as a priority survey area for Great Apes. The forest block is one of the largest intact remaining forest blocks in Cameroon. Ebo forest holds a significant chimpanzee *Pan troglodytes vellerosus* population and a recently discovered gorilla population of uncertain taxonomic affinity.

¹ Tutin, C. E.G. et. al. 2005. Regional Action Plan for the Conservation of Chimpanzees and Gorillas in Western Equatorial Africa. Conservation International. Washington DC. Based on a workshop held in Brazzaville in May 2005.

The forest has a unique primate fauna with no less than ten diurnal primate species including several species threatened with extinction. Ebo forest harbours one of the largest population of drills (*Mandrillus leucophaeus*) anywhere. Other threatened primate species such as the Preuss's Guenon (*Cercopithecus preussi*) the red-eared guenon (*Cercopithecus erythrotis*) and Preuss' Colobus Monkey (*Ptilocolobus preussi*) also occur in good numbers.

Despite increasing hunting pressure following the expansion of commercial logging activities,- the forest in this area still holds other large mammals species such as forest elephants, red river hogs and forest buffalos. As noted in the action plan, priority areas for the conservation of Great Apes are often also priority regions for biodiversity conservation in general: the Ebo/Ndokbou conservation complex overlaps to a large extent with the Yabassi Important Bird Area (IBA) – an area identified by Birdlife International as important for bird conservation in Cameroon.

Ebo/Ndokbou forest area: opened up to industrial logging

Ebo forest: logging before conservation ?

The Ebo forest has been proposed by the government as national park but gazettment is not yet complete. The World Wide Fund for Nature is assisting the Government of Cameroon with gazettment of the Ebo forest. Greenpeace recently (October 2005) visited the region and was very concerned to observe industrial logging activity inside the Ebo forest, in the same area where the proposed national park is scheduled to be gazetted. A 2,500 hectare cutting permit ("Vente de Coupe" n° 07-02-32) has been allocated in the Ebo forest to the company S.F.W., Société Forestière de Wandja. According to the local forestry officials, the actual logging was subcontracted to the company BTA. We understand that, since then, logging activities have again switched to another subcontractor.

Greenpeace has copies of maps indicating the boundaries of the cutting permit that are held by the forestry officials in the area. Unfortunately, these maps do not correspond with the boundaries of the same cutting permit as announced when the cutting permit was up for auction. This indicates that the Vente de Coupe may have been relocated. The practice of relocating Ventes de Coupe after a public auction has taken place is illegal but not uncommon in Cameroon.

Another related cutting permit is active in the same forest area: Timber Recovery Authorisation (TRA) n° 1843, allocated to the company GAU Service and also logged by BTA. TRA's are permits that are not specifically addressed by the Cameroon law nor any other legal document. Typically these permits serve as "salvage logging" permits – to authorise tree cutting in areas where the forest is bound to disappear anyway (roadbuilding, forest conversion to plantations, ...) or to authorise the collecting of trees that have been logged and abandoned illegally. Such permits are almost universally abused in Cameroon for illegal logging operations. Furthermore, it is suspected that the beneficiaries of such salvage logging permits are, in most cases, those responsible for cutting and abandoning the wood – and that this method of extracting timber is pursued as an effort to avoid paying the Annual Forest Licence Fee and felling tax².

² Global Witness. April 2005. Forest Law Enforcement in Cameroon. 3rd Summary report of the Independent Observer July 2003 – February 2005.

In the case of cutting permit TAR 1843, we noted that logging has occurred in a area that is larger than the forest area needed for the building of the road – indicating that this permit has been abused for illegal logging purposes.

Finally, Greenpeace has also received the information that another part of the Ebo forest near the village of Iboti is planned to be logged under a community forest regime. As with salvage logging permits, community forests permits often serve as a façade for quick access to forest areas for large scale illegal industrial logging in Cameroon³. For this reason, the proposed logging activities in the Iboti community forest deserve urgent investigation.

Ndokbou forest: The Ndokbou forest is currently a large scale logging concession (Forest Management Unit 00.004 held by a Dutch logging company). A Birdlife International briefing⁴ warned that the “reopening of logging concessions and roads locally in some valleys will not greatly affect the birdlife but will have disastrous consequences for the large mammal fauna as numbers of commercial hunters are increasing”. Also, the proposed regional action plan rightly points out that “Protecting this area’s habitat will not only ensure the survival of many endangered primate, mammal and plant species but also contribute to the protection of biodiversity in this important area of the Cameroon coastal forest”.

Unfortunately, logging is already well on its way in the Ndokbou concession – a tragedy which we believe to be the result of poor land use planning in Cameroon. In Greenpeace’s view, a forest area which has such outstanding potential for biodiversity conservation should not have been allocated to industrial logging in the first place. We now need a thorough assessment what can still be done to reduce, to the maximum extent possible, the growing threats to the fauna of this forest block.

Greenpeace understands that the concessionary of the Ndokbou concession is interested in eco-certification and prepared to take certain anti-poaching measures. Experience with ecocertification in Cameroon is however extremely limited and it yet remains to be seen whether it will turn out to be a sufficiently adequate tool to ensure biodiversity conservation inside logging concessions. Anti poaching experiences in Cameroon also show that effective poaching control is extremely difficult once new settlers attracted by the new logging operations move into the area. Poaching activity in the entire area is already dramatically increasing.

It is also disturbing to note that while on the one hand the concessionary of the Ndokbou forest claims to be concerned about sustainable forest management, has on the other hand purchased significant amounts of logs this year from the destructive logging operations in the neighbouring Ebo forest. Logs from both areas are then processed in the same sawmill in Cameroon and exported to Europe where the company promotes its intentions to invest in sustainable forest management practices.

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³ Government of Cameroon. Ministry of Environment and Forests. Community forestry unit. Etat des lieux de la foresterie communautaire au Cameroun. December 2003. 145 p.

⁴ Birdlife International. Important Bird Area factsheet: Yabassi.