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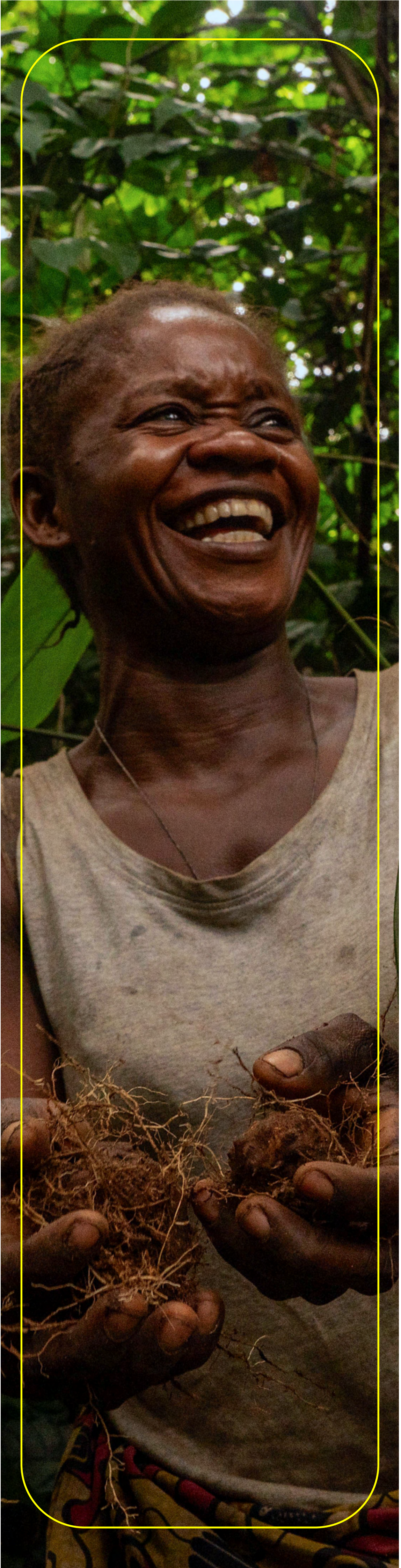
The Kivu–Kinshasa Green Corridor: Red Flags And The Urgent Need For A Moratorium On New Extractive Projects



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2. Executive Summary

The Kivu-Kinshasa Green Corridor was established in January 2025 as a flagship conservation and sustainable development initiative spanning 544,270 km² from the eastern Kivu region to Kinshasa. Designed to protect primary forests, biodiversity, and community livelihoods, the Corridor was presented as a model for a green economy and inclusive development pathway[1].

However, only months after its creation, the DRC government announced the launch of new oil licensing covering 55 oil blocks across the country. Twenty-eight of these blocks overlap directly with the Green Corridor, placing 72% of its total area, approximately 39 million hectares, under potential oil development[2].

The spatial analysis reveals a profound conflict between conservation and extractive expansion within the Green Corridor. Specifically, mining permits alone overlap with 12.3 millions hectares, representing 23% of the corridor's total area, placing 6% or 3.4 millions hectares of protected areas under critical threat. Combined with the extensive overlap of oil and gas blocks, these competing land uses create widespread conflicts between conservation objectives and extractive development. Critical carbon sinks, notably 12% of peatlands and intact forest landscapes, face critical levels of risk, while 31 million hectares of intact forest and 63% of community forests are highly exposed to these destructive extractive activities.

This brief raises profound contradictions between the Corridor's conservation objectives and the expansion of extractive industries. Areas intended to serve as a model for sustainable development and community-led stewardship are now exposed to the risks associated with oil exploration and production, as well as mining activities that will result in deforestation and habitat fragmentation.

The brief also highlights concerns over governance, land-use planning, and the long-term viability of the Corridor's conservation objectives. To safeguard the integrity of the Kivu-Kinshasa Green Corridor and ensure that it delivers on its conservation, climate, and community development goals, urgent action is needed to halt the expansion of new extractive activities and strengthen primary forest protection, biodiversity conservation, and Indigenous peoples and local communities rights recognition.

3. Context

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is home to approximately 10% of the world's known species and nearly half of Africa's tropical forests, making it one of the most important countries for global biodiversity conservation and climate stability[3]. These ecosystems provide critical habitat for globally significant species such as the bonobo, mountain gorilla and okapi, while supporting the livelihoods, food security and cultural identity of millions of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs)[4].

Recognizing the strategic importance of these ecosystems, the DRC government launched the Kivu–Kinshasa Green Corridor initiative in 2025 as a strategic landscape for conservation, restoration and sustainable development. Stretching across 544,270 km², the Corridor encompasses vast areas of intact tropical forests, protected areas, community lands[5], including portions of the Congo Basin peatlands, one of the largest tropical peatland complexes on Earth and a globally significant carbon sink[6]. The initiative has been presented as a key contribution to biodiversity conservation, climate action and the country's commitments under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), including the 30x30 target.

Since its January 2025 launch, the Kivu–Kinshasa Green Corridor has secured major international backing. The initiative aims to mobilize $1 billion in private-sector investment to drive sustainable development. With $100 million already secured, including a €78.6 million support package from the European Commission through the Global Gateway initiative, this strong financial momentum underscores the necessity to strictly align all investments with the corridor's conservation goals.

However, the long-term success and credibility of the Green Corridor will depend on the government's ability to address competing land-use pressures and ensure policy coherence across conservation, development and natural resource sectors. The corridor overlaps with existing and proposed mining, oil, gas and logging concessions, as well as community forests, Indigenous Peoples' traditional territories, and protected areas including most of DRC's World Heritage Sites. These competing land uses raise important questions regarding governance, land-use planning, biodiversity conservation, forest protection and the future development pathway of the Corridor.

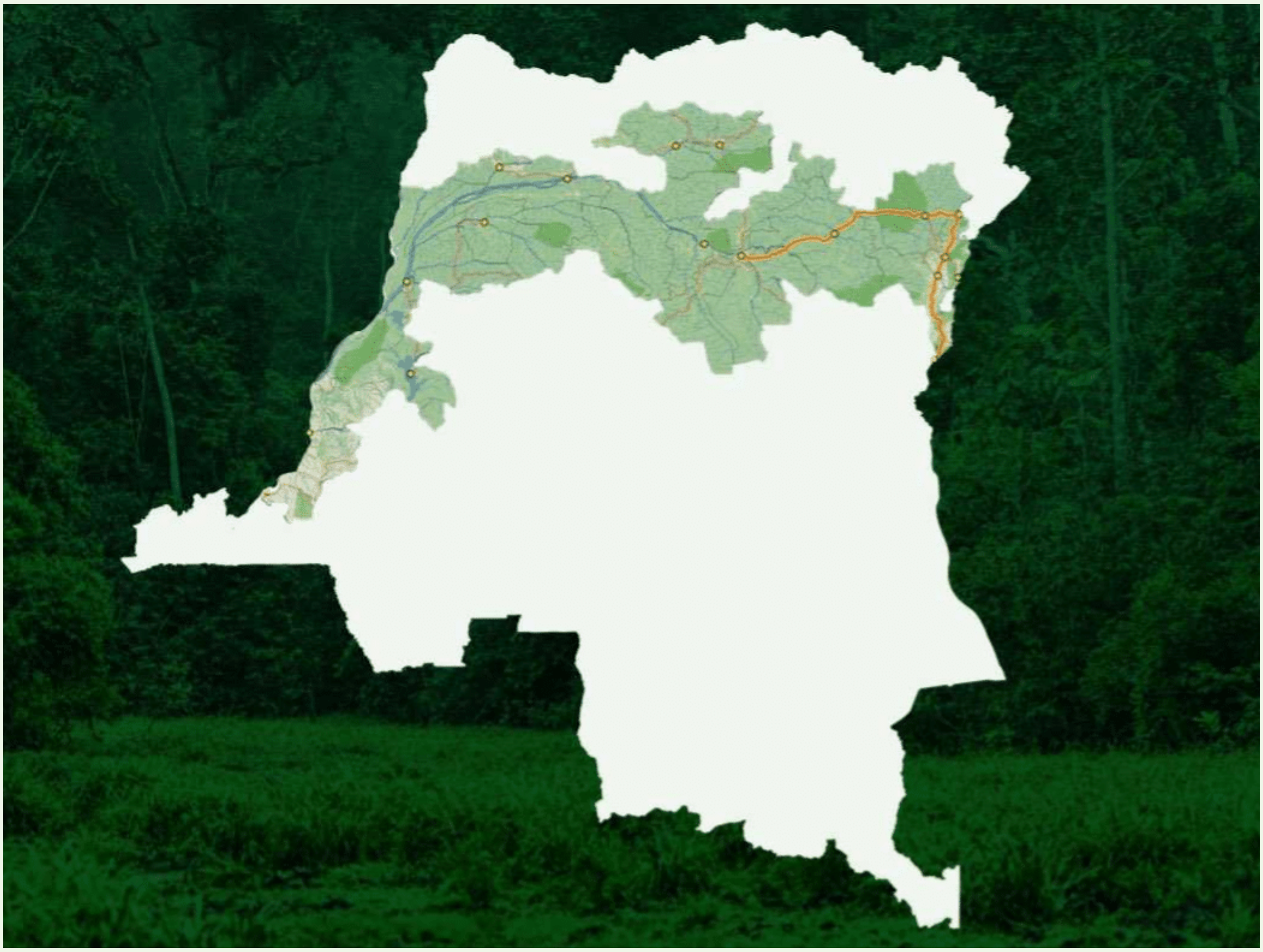
This policy brief examines the extent of these overlapping land uses and their implications for biodiversity, climate objectives, and the rights and livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs). It aims to inform decision-makers and support policy actions that safeguard forests, biodiversity, community lands, and traditional territories from growing extractive pressures within one of the Congo Basin's most important ecological landscapes.

4. Methodological note

Quantitative figures were drawn from Earth Insight's geospatial analysis as presented in Forests to Frontlines (2025), which used publicly available GIS datasets including the Ministry of Hydrocarbons 2025 Cuvette Centrale Oil Block Map, JRC TMF forest cover, WorldPop population estimates, WDPA protected areas, and MEDD community forest data. Risk classifications reflect the severity, scale, and irreversibility of documented overlaps, weighted by legal protection status and human rights implications.

The polygon for the Green Corridor used in this analysis is from the EU Biodiversity4Life (2025). The mining concessions were intersected with the Green Corridor polygon to calculate the area of overlap. Community Forests were also intersected with the Green Corridor polygon to calculate the area of overlap.

Peatlands were calculated by intersecting the CIFOR Tropical and Subtropical Peatland Distribution dataset (v21, 2016) with the extent of the Green Corridor using Zonal Histogram.

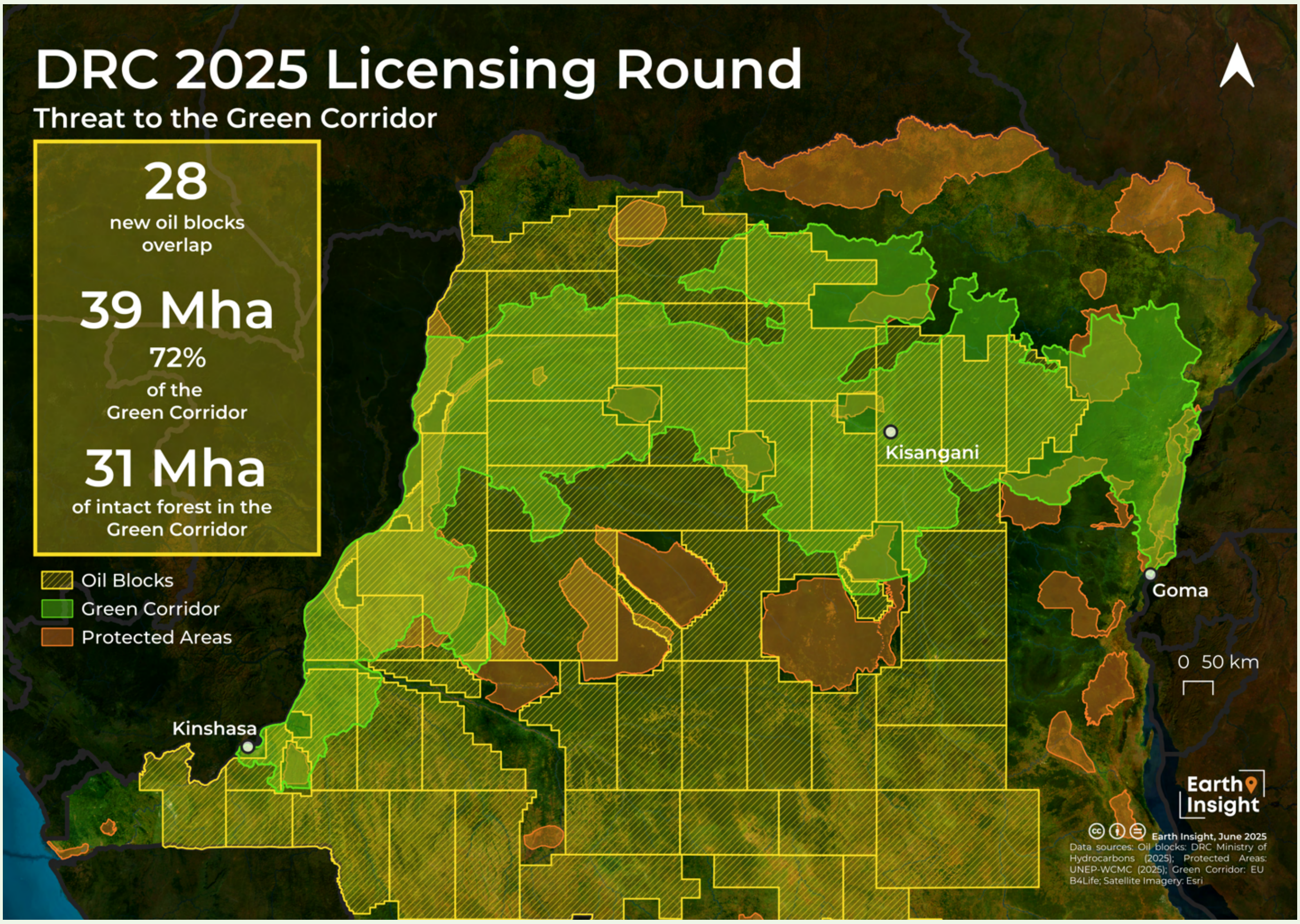


Map of the Kivu–Kinshasa Green Corridor in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Source: ICCN (2025)

5. Key findings

a) Oil & Gas Threat

- **Licensing overlap:** 72% of the corridor is overlapped by the 2025 oil licensing round (55 total blocks: 52 new + 3 previously licensed).
- **Conservation risk:** 8.3 million hectares of Protected Areas and 8.6 million hectares of Key Biodiversity Areas DRC-wide are at risk from active licensing.



Map 1: DRC 2025 Licensing Round (Earth Insight 2025)

b) Mining

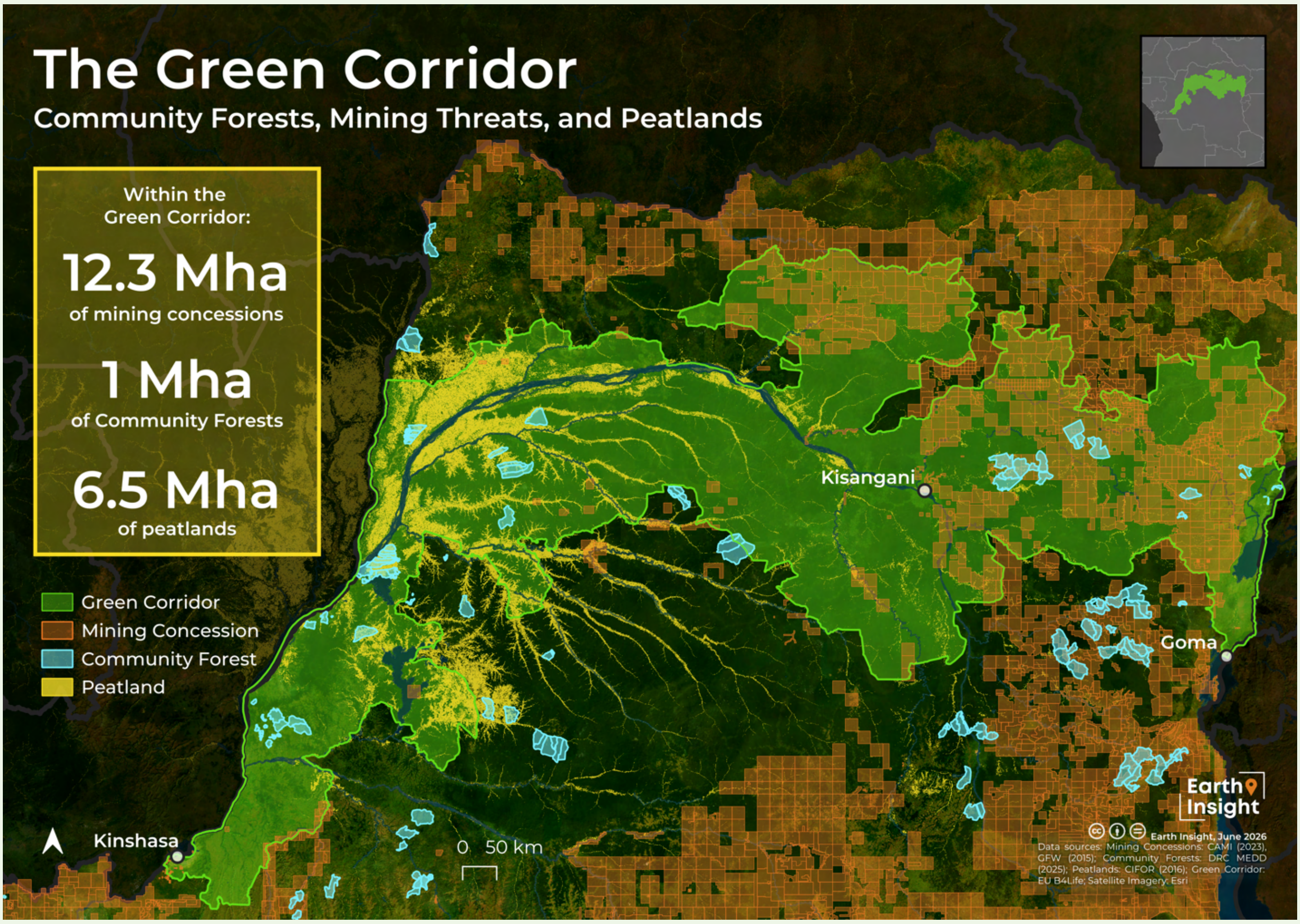
- **Mining permits:** 12.3 million hectares, representing 23% of the Corridor's total area, exposing 3.4 million hectares of protected areas to critical risks

c) Peatlands & Carbon Storage

- **Total peatland area:** 6.5 million hectares within the green corridor representing 12 of the total surface under extractives threats.

e) Community Forest

- **Community forests:** 63% of community forests fall within designated oil blocks. 1 million hectares or 2 % overlaps with the Green Corridor and other extractive threats



Map 2: Community forest, mining threats and peatlands in the Green Corridor (Earth Insight and Greenpeace Africa 2026)

f) Governance and Legal Contradiction

The simultaneous existence of Decree No. 25/04 of 15 January 2025 establishing the Green Corridor and the new 55-block oil licensing round launched in May 2025 represents a fundamental contradiction in DRC environmental governance. The Corridor was formally established to support the DRC's commitments under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, REDD+ agreements, and the Paris Agreement. The oil licensing round, covering 72% of the Corridor's total area, directly undermines all three agreements.

- **Article 4: A structural legal loophole**

The clause meant to protect communities instead shields extractive rights, indefinitely. Article 4 of the decree states that its creation "does not create, modify, or extinguish any pre-existing right held by local communities or any other third party, until the allocation and assignment of zones has been carried out, following in particular the public inquiry." This clause is implicitly presented as a protection for community rights. But it produces the opposite effect. By preserving intact the rights of "any other third party", a category that explicitly encompasses holders of oil, mining, and forestry licences, the decree establishes a transitional protection regime in which a petroleum company holding an exploration permit enjoys legal guarantees identical to, if not stronger than, those of a community whose forest has been customarily occupied for generations.
The pivot of this loophole is the public inquiry: it is this process that must trigger the allocation of zones and thereby resolve the legal ambiguity. To date, no official timeline for this inquiry has been published.

In the absence of that trigger, Article 4's transitional regime is de facto permanent. Pre-existing extractive rights therefore remain fully protected, indefinitely, by the very text that establishes the protected area.

- **"Community": a label without legal substance**

The Corridor, which is not managed by communities, does not primarily benefit communities, and was not designed with them. The designation of "protected area with a community reserve vocation" sits at the heart of all official communication on the Green Corridor. The word "community" implies that local communities and Indigenous Peoples are the primary beneficiaries of the area, or even its managers. A close reading of the decree reveals a fundamentally different architecture.

Communities do not manage the Corridor. Article 8 entrusts operational management to a public or private organism or consortium, selected on the basis of "financial capacity and proven experience in conservation and sustainable development," under a public-private partnership contract. Local communities are not mentioned among the possible managers. Their role is limited, under Article 9, to being "consulted" by the delegated body in the preparation of the management plan, as stakeholders, not decision-makers.

Communities are not guaranteed to be the primary beneficiaries. Article 6 opens the Corridor's fiscal and customs advantages to "conservation or development projects and activities carried out within the Green Economy framework", that is, primarily to national and international private investors. Community benefit is conditional: Article 6(d) provides that "a percentage of net profit shall be allocated to the financing of basic public services for the benefit of surrounding and entitled populations", without fixing that percentage, defining its modalities, or granting communities any right of oversight over its determination. This is a potential trickle-down, not a right.

Communities were not the architects of the Corridor. The decree was signed on the initiative of the President of the Republic, on the proposal of the Minister of Environment, following deliberation by the Council of Ministers, and announced at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2025, in a setting oriented toward international investors. Article 3 states that the Corridor is created "by actively involving local communities", but this involvement is neither defined, nor dated, nor equipped with binding mechanisms in the decree itself. It is deferred to future governance instruments provided for under Article 9, whose development is entrusted to the delegated management body.

In short, the word "community" describes the Corridor's declared purpose, not its legal reality. Local communities and Indigenous Peoples are neither the managers of the Corridor nor its guaranteed primary beneficiaries. They are consulted by stakeholders within a framework designed by and for external actors, state and private, whose pre-existing rights are, under Article 4, better protected than their own.

6. Priority Conservation hotspots

The analysis identifies four priority hotspots where oil blocks and mining areas overlapping with conservation areas, community lands, and critical ecosystems create significant risks to the integrity of the Kivu–Kinshasa Green Corridor. These hotspots represent areas where extractive expansion is most likely to undermine biodiversity conservation, climate objectives, and the rights and livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs).

- **Cuvette Centrale Peatlands**

The single most severe conflict hotspot in the entire corridor is the Cuvette Centrale, which covers over 145,000 km² and stores an estimated 30 gigatons of carbon accumulated over millennia. First scientifically confirmed as a massive carbon sink in 2017 , it is now recognised as one of the most globally important ecosystems for climate stability. The Earth Insight 2025 report confirms that the 2025 licensing round overlaps nearly the entire DRC portion of the peatland. Seismic testing, drainage, or road-building in waterlogged carbon-rich soils triggers irreversible decomposition releasing enormous CO_2 and methane. Once degraded, tropical peatlands are extremely difficult to restore within human timescales[7]. Moreover, the legal gap in Article 4 of Decree 25/01[8] (which preserves third-party rights including oil licences pending public inquiry) leaves the peatland exposed to wanton destruction.

- **Intact Forest Landscape**

The Green Corridor contains 31 million hectares of intact tropical forests, all of which overlap with the 28 oil blocks located within the Corridor. Nationally, oil blocks overlap with 64% of the DRC's remaining intact forests, exposing these critical ecosystems to deforestation, fragmentation, and infrastructure development associated with extractive activities. This threatens the capacity to store carbon, conserve biodiversity, and maintain climate resilience.

- **Community Forest**

Over 4 million hectares of community forests are formally recognised DRC-wide, with 1Mha within the corridor. As a matter of fact, 63% of all DRC community forests fall within oil block boundaries. Many communities have not been consulted on corridor design or oil licensing[9], facing dual legal exposure, exclusion from land governance under conservation frameworks and environmental degradation from oil/mining without their Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). This likely violates DRC national legislation and international law, including Law No. 22/030 of 15 July 2022 on the rights of Indigenous Pygmy Peoples.

- **Protected Areas and Key Biodiversity Areas**

The Kivu–Kinshasa Green Corridor contains 12 Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) covering approximately 297,771 km² and overlaps with landscapes that support some of the Congo Basin's most iconic and threatened species, including Grauer's gorilla, forest elephants, chimpanzees and the Congo peafowl. Across the DRC, approximately 8.6 million hectares of KBAs[10] and 8.3 million hectares of protected areas overlap with the 2025 oil licensing round, exposing critical habitats and ecological corridors to increasing extractive pressures. While the exclusion of Virunga National Park from the latest licensing round is applauded, many oil blocks remain adjacent to protected areas, increasing the risks of habitat fragmentation, biodiversity loss, and ecological degradation, threatening the ecological connectivity that the Green Corridor is designed to maintain.

7. Mining Concessions and Cumulative Extractive Pressures

Mining permits cover approximately 12.3 million hectares, representing 23% of the Kivu–Kinshasa Green Corridor. These mining concessions increase pressure on forests, biodiversity and community lands, particularly in the eastern part of the Corridor where mining activities are already widespread. This growing extractive footprint poses significant challenges to the Corridor's conservation and sustainable development objectives.

Climate Home News 2025 : DRC communities excluded from corridor consultation; [10] BirdLife International. (2024). World Database of Key Biodiversity Areas

8. Conflict and Risk Hotspots

The table below synthesises all available spatial data from the reviewed documents for each requested layer. Risk levels reflect the severity of documented or highly probable conflict, weighted by ecological irreversibility, legal protection status and human rights implications.

Layer/Feature	Quantity	Oil block/Mining overlap/notes	Risk
Intact forest landscapes	31 Mha within the corridor	99% entirety within 28 oil blocks	**CRITICAL**
Cuvette Centrale peatlands	6.5 Mha within the corridor	Overlapped by oil blocks	**CRITICAL**
Protected areas (PAs)	110,993 km² in the corridor	3,4 of millions hectares of protected areas	**HIGH**
Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs)	12 features; 297,771 km²	8.6 Mha DRC-wide overlapped by oil blocks	**HIGH**
Community forests	1 Mha within the green corridor	Overlapped by oil blocks and mining concessions	**HIGH**

Table 2: Cumulated Risk data (source: Greenpeace Africa 2026)

7. Recommendations

To prevent irreparable damages to the environment, biodiversity and the infringement of the rights of IPLCs, the brief puts forward the following recommendations:

- **Establish an immediate moratorium** on new oil, gas and mining projects within the Kivu-Kinshasa Green Corridor and declare the corridor as a no-go zone for extractives projects.
- **Maintain the moratorium** on the granting of new logging concessions to preserve the Kivu-Kinshasa Green Corridor and ensure consistency with the DRC's international commitments.
- **Cancel overlapping oil blocks** and exclude extractive activities from high-integrity forests, peatlands, protected areas, and community lands.
- **Recognize and secure Indigenous Peoples' and Local Communities' land rights** by ensuring the full implementation of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).
- **Adopt and publish the investment exclusion list** to prevent public and private finance from supporting extractive activities within the Corridor.
- **Ensure inclusive governance** by guaranteeing the meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples, Local Communities, and civil society in decision-making processes.
- **Align conservation and development investments** with biodiversity, climate, and human rights commitments, including the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and the IUCN Resolution 140 on avoiding irreversible ecological damage and tipping points in the congo Basin

Glossary / Acronyms

1. **FPIC :** Free, Prior and Informed Consent
2. **IPLCs :** Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities
3. **KBA :** Key Biodiversity Area
4. **PA :** Protected Area
5. **GBF :** Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
6. **DRC :** Democratic Republic of the Congo
7. **ICCN :** Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature
8. **IUCN :** International Union for Conservation of Nature
9. **WHS :** World Heritage Site

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