MINTOM COUNCIL FOREST GORILLA HERITAGE AREA ACTION PLAN

INTRODUCTION

Tropical humid forest of central Africa bounded to the south and East by the Congo River and the north by the Sanaga River in Cameroon entails the world's Gorillas habitation. This action plan focuses on the western lowland gorilla of the council forest of the Mintom community.

Central Africa in general and Mintom gorilla in special has one of the lowest human population densities of any tropical forested area in the old world; even so, the great ape population is experiencing dramatic declines since the 1970s. This is obviously due to three direct threats: poaching, disease and habitat loss. Indirect threats include increasing demand for bushmeat, lack of law enforcement, corruption, poor governance and lastly forest exploitation (logging).

Conservation strategies and action must be designed to respond to these pressure if the great ape population is to be maintained.

1-PROBLEMATIC AND THREAT TO THE MINTOM COUNCIL FOREST GORILLAS

The following are threats and problems faced by the gorillas of the Mintom council forest.

1- Poaching
2- Diseases
3- Habitat loss

1-1 POACHING

The Mintom council forest is facing a constant poaching practice which is becoming more cumbersome and hence leaving the population of gorillas on great risk of extinction. Hunters around the local villages depend mostly on

hunting and agriculture for their livelihood. Both activities are a threat to gorillas' existence. Gorillas are classified as endangered species in Cameroon forestry and wildlife regulations, hence their hunting is strictly forbidden. Despite all the measures put in place by the government to protect these Apes, their illegal hunting in the Mintom council forest keeps increasing. The hunters kill these gorillars for commercial purposes. They use the money to cater for their families. The hunting of these gorillars are destined for sale in in big urban cities like sangmelima, Ebolowa ,Yaoundé and Douala. The forestry law enforcement agent (Eco guards) do not carry constant patrols, roadblocks and market inspections. Bribery and corruption at a certain level have been observed leaving gorillas of the Mintom council forest exposed to extinction.

1-2 DISEASE

Recent studies have shown that diseases have been a natural component of wildlife ecology, proven evidence has illustrated and suggested endemic diseases, Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) being the most recent. These are cases in general and the gorillas of the Mintom council forest have not been an exception passes through cartographic effects. Even though scientific research on such has not been carried out in the Mintom council forest Gorillas, the potential long-term evidence are being proven. We notice cases of dead gorillas being found in the forest. We have been unspecific to determine the causes of the death. We attribute such cases to diseases. EVD is obviously the greatest imminent disease threat to central African apes in general and Mintom council gorillas in particular. The loses of the great ape population around the 1990's and mid 2000 with the EVD outbreaks have also been felt around the Mintom council forest.

Epidemiological modeling of the combined effects of EVD and poaching on persistence of gorillas have predicted that, under current harvest,practices and using the estimated EVD epizootic rate, Western lowland gorillas would undergo a 97% decline within 100years, concluding that the control of bushmeat hunting will not be enough to prevent extinction of frequen EVD outbreaks ot occur.

1-3 HABITAT LOSS

The Mintom council forest is undergoing logging and agriculture and mining (gold) expansion. The rate of deforestation through logging has increased recently, leaving the forest forest gorillas in total loss of ecosystem. Forest logging companies in this forest, like the Cameroon United Forest (CUF) has elaborated management plans for wildlife protection and conservation which is under suspension. Logging in this zone is usually rampant, reducing species diversity, especially mammals, collateral damage in reference to the volume of timber extracted per unit area. Mining is also presently practiced in the forest. We observe that local gold miners target areas of high conservation value like swampy areas and water bodies. The gold is being sold to buyers outside of the community. Though mining in the Mintom council forest has a relatively small impact on the ecosystem, studies have shown that the effect on the ecosystem is estimated at about 42% (Edward et al 2014). Agriculture is also a major factor as we notice constant felling of trees around the Mintom council forest to create farms increasing on yearly basis.

The indirect impact of small-scale industries, which include migration, increase access along new roads and the mbalam railway project around the forest. Disease risk, bushmeat hunting, agricultural expansion and hydropower production. In-migration of workers to logging and mining camps results in forest clearing to build houses, but more significantly, typically results in an anarchic expansion of deforestation for small scale agriculture to feed workers, families and miners here tend to view eating bushmeat as their right. Thus, addressing the widely occurring form resource extraction much more complicated building of the Mintom Ngoyla stretch of road, and the ongoing railway project is clearly integral to export of wood and mineral, but such activities bring the commercial bushmeat trade into forest once isolated for hunting to be practical and profitable.

PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

1. Short-term (Year 1)

Immediate, foundational actions focused on awareness, community engagement, and planning.

- **Engage the local hunters in the protection of gorillas**, i.e., recruit them as a way of limiting their intention to hunt these gorillas.
- **Create a sensitization day every week**, whereby the population will be educated on the importance of wildlife conservation.
- **Integrate volunteers amongst the regional authorities** in the Mintom subdivision to raise awareness of gorilla conservation.
- **Conduct a feasibility study of tourism potential** in the Mintom Council Forest.
- **Control poaching and monitor impacts of artisanal gold mines** on gorillas.
- **Continue conservation education awareness and outreach programs** in local Mintom communities.

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2. Medium-term (Years 1–3)

Capacity building, infrastructure development, and implementation of key initiatives.

- **Create a touristic site**, while localizing those areas where gorillas could be seen by visitors and raise money for the community.
- **Propose a control post** on the forest roads in the Mintom Council Forest.
- **Encourage sustainable land-use practices** that can avoid the destruction of gorilla habitat.
- **Develop and communicate a management plan** in the Mintom Council Forest.
- **Strengthen research capacities** to respond to threats to great apes: integrate research, support farming, collect and analyse data, and implement field protocols.

- **Reinforce capacity and structures for effective law enforcement**, including creating, training, and developing eco-guards; ensure transboundary protection efforts.

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3. Long-term (Years 3–5)

Sustainable systems, strategic planning, and financial mechanisms for ongoing protection.

- **Establish a long-term financial mechanism** for Mintom Forest protection through collaboration with forest exploitation companies operating in the zone.
- **Land-use planning to designate strict conservation and non-hunting zones.**