

Western lowland gorilla, *Gorilla gorilla gorilla*

Project Title: Goualougo Triangle Ape Project: Securing the Future of Gorillas and Chimpanzees in a Changing Landscape

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Organization: Goualougo Triangle Ape Project

Location: Republic of Congo

Project Summary:

Northern Republic of Congo has long been considered a stronghold for the conservation of western lowland gorillas and central chimpanzees, but these apes reside in a rapidly changing landscape. Most great ape populations in this region are likely to experience alteration of their habitat, the pressures of commercial bushmeat hunting, and/or emergence of disease. Due to these threats and a lack of knowledge of the central subspecies of chimpanzee, the Goualougo Triangle Ape Project (GTAP) was initiated in the forestry concession adjacent to the southern portion of the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park (NNNP). The overall goal of the GTAP is to promote the long-term conservation of both gorillas and chimpanzees in the Congo Basin through applied conservation research, enhanced protection of important ape populations and their habitats, and strengthening of local capacity to implement conservation programs. This is achieved by documenting the behavior and ecology of these ape populations, continuing to monitor the densities of gorillas and chimpanzees in the study area, and evaluating the effect of timber exploitation and associated activities on apes. The involvement of Congolese government officials, wildlife biologists, university students and local residents in training activities and conservation efforts ensure the success of this project and its long-term impacts for great ape conservation.

Together with a strong cohort of local and international collaborators, we are implementing a long-term conservation and research project to increase the conservation status of apes and their habitats in northern Republic of Congo and develop recommendations to improve ape survival prospects in the region. This involves collecting many different types of information on great apes and their habitats, including density estimates, behavioral monitoring, analysis of social organization, and noninvasive physiological monitoring. Further, forging collaborations with the local logging company has provided access to forest inventory data which will allow us to assess forest quality characteristics that underlie ape habitat use and how timber exploitation impacts wildlife. This applied conservation research has the potential to improve certification standards on behalf of apes and other wildlife in northern Congo, and provides a model to forge such relationships with industry in other ape habitat countries. Ape health surveys in the region are also providing new insights into emerging diseases and possible mitigation strategies. Our multidisciplinary approach within this particular conservation scenario has the potential to address some of the long-standing questions about ape behavioral ecology, particularly with regard to anthropogenic influences, but also indicates the rapidly changing context of primatological research and its intersection with conservation efforts in habitat countries.

GTAP personnel have demonstrated a strong commitment to providing immediate and continuous protection for gorillas, chimpanzees and other wildlife in the Goualougo Triangle. For more than ten years, the GTAP

has maintained a continuous conservation presence across the 385 km² study area. This long-term research presence compliments the efforts of the Congolese government's *Ministere de l'Economie Forestiere et de l'Environnement* (MEFE) and Wildlife Conservation Society's Congo Program (WCS) to protect the wildlife in and around the National Park.

