

Wildlife Conservation Society- Rwanda Program

Program description

Title: Institutional Capacity Building

Funded by: GEF / PAB, USAID, MacArthur Foundation, USFS, IISD

Partner institutions: RDB, INECN

Overall term: 2010 to 2013

Contact: Dr. Michel Masozera – Country Director

Context: The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) has played a pivotal role in the history of Nyungwe over the course of the last 25 years. WCS scientists led the way in understanding and sharing the biodiversity importance of the sub-montane Nyungwe forests with government agencies and others, and put in place a number of actions that secured the creation of Nyungwe as a National Park in 2005.

The Government of Rwanda now manages Nyungwe through the auspices of the Rwandan Development Board (RDB). The role of WCS has increasingly become one of developing the capacity of park staff at different levels and through various management programmes to manage the park effectively. As part of this process, many former WCS staff have been recruited by RDB to assist with this process.

Capacity building also extends to our relationship with the Institut National Pour l'Environnement et la Conservation de la Nature (INECN), the government institution responsible for the management of Kibira National Park in Burundi, which is contiguous with Nyungwe National Park. WCS has worked with INECN to re-establish effective park management in Kibira.

Objective of the program:

To build the capacity of both the Rwandan Development Board (RDB) and Institut National Pour l'Environnement et la Conservation de la Nature (INECN) to protect and manage the biodiversity of the Nyungwe-Kibira Landscape in collaboration with local communities, partners and other stakeholders.

Approach:

WCS draws on the wide range of expertise available in Rwanda and, where necessary, works with other regional WCS programs and external agencies to provide essential skills through capacity building programs and activities. Capacity building is aligned with the various management programs of the park, as outlined in the General Management Plans for both Nyungwe and Kibira National Parks. Additionally, capacity-needs assessments have helped guide capacity building interventions.

WCS firmly believes in adaptive management, based on the ever-changing conditions on the ground. Monitoring and evaluation of activities ensures that an on-going mechanism exists to evaluate and adapt actions based on their effectiveness and impact.

Wherever possible, WCS follows the principal of training capacity builders to ensure that new skills are firmly embedded in partner institutions.

Achieved Results:

WCS Rwanda has led capacity building interventions in a variety of aspects of park management. These efforts have more recently been extended to Kibira National Park in recognition of the fact that Kibira is only now starting to find its footing after a long period of unrest and lack of support.

The management of any protected area is typically provided through the provision of a General Management Plan. WCS has played a leading role in helping to revise this guiding document for both Nyungwe and Kibira National Parks (the latter as of 2009). In addition, we have forged a partnership with the US Forest Service (USFS), which has resulted in the production of a Fire Management Plan for Nyungwe, a blueprint for how to reduce the risk of wild fires severely damaging the park.

Key to the sustainable management of any protected area is the mitigation of various human threats. To address this issue, WCS has led the process of introducing Ranger-Based Monitoring (RBM) to protection staff working in Nyungwe and Kibira National Parks. In Nyungwe, the technical process of gathering, analysing and adapting protection planning of illegal activity findings is being fully transitioned to RDB.

Given the fact that Nyungwe is surrounded by some of the highest population densities in Africa (~500 people km²), the likelihood that conflicts will arise between various local stakeholders is high. Working with the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), we have been building the capacity of park wardens, rangers, local communities and District representatives to understand and resolve conservation-based conflicts as they occur.

WCS is committed to supporting mechanisms that secure the long-term financial sustainability of the park. Tourism is a growing source of revenue in Rwanda, with tourism figures in Nyungwe increasing steadily each year. Primate viewing is one of the major draws of Nyungwe's tourism portfolio. WCS currently works with chimpanzee trackers and guides to encourage them to adhere to the highest levels of professionalism when managing the visitor experience. As it is also important to minimise the impact of tourism activities, WCS is also training park wardens and tourism staff to monitor tourism impacts.

A second strategy to ensure financial sustainability is linked to the development of various Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES). WCS works with RDB and other national partners to build local capacity related to both valuing and marketing these services (carbon storage, watersheds, etc.). This is quite a technical subject, governed by various international guidelines and processes, that WCS is well positioned to provide leadership on as a number of WCS country programs have PES components under development. The services of international specialists (e.g. USFS) and regional partners (e.g. ECOTRUST, based in Uganda) have also been sought where needed.