

Massive Destruction of Great Ape Habitats Likely Over the Next 30 Years Unless Current Trends Reversed

News Comes as UK Government, United Nations Foundation and International Fund for Animal Welfare Give Cash Backing to GRASP Partnership

30 Years UNEP: Environment for Development: People Planet Prosperity

Johannesburg/Nairobi, 3 September 2002 - Less than 10 per cent of the remaining habitat of the great apes of Africa will be left relatively undisturbed by 2030 if road building, mining camps and other infrastructure developments continue at current levels a new report suggests.

Findings for the orangutans of South East Asia appear even bleaker. The new report indicates that in 28 years time there will be almost no habitat left that can be considered “relatively undisturbed”.

The results have come from study by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which is co-ordinating the Great Apes Survival Project partnership (GRASP), and scientists from Norway and the United States.

They are based on a pioneering new method of evaluating the wider impacts of infrastructure development on key species which, in this study, are the chimpanzee, bonobo or pygmy chimpanzee, the gorilla and the orang-utan.

The report, whose findings were announced today at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), has looked in detail at each of the four great ape species to assess the current, remaining, habitat deemed relatively undisturbed and thus able to support viable populations of apes. The experts have then mapped the likely impact and area of healthy habitat left in 2030 at current levels of infrastructure growth.

While most studies focus on the actual area of land taken by a new road, mining camp or infrastructure development, the GLOBIO method also factors in the wider impacts such as habitat fragmentation and noise disturbance.

Klaus Toepfer, the Executive Director of UNEP who is a special advisor to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the Summit, said: “ This report suggests the possible fate of the great apes and their habitats. Roads are being built in the few remaining pristine forests of Africa and South East Asia to extract timber, minerals and oil. Uncontrolled road construction in these areas is fragmenting and destroying the great apes’ last homes and making it easier for poachers to slaughter them for meat and their young more vulnerable to capture for the illegal pet trade”.

“It is not too late to stop uncontrolled exploitation of these forests. By doing so, we may save not only the great apes, but thousands of other species. Saving the Great Apes is also about saving people. By conserving the Great Apes, we will also protect the livelihoods of the many people that rely on forests for food, medicine and clean water. Indeed the fate of the Great Apes has great symbolic implications for humankind’s ability to develop a more sustainable future. I call on all nations here, on all sectors of society, to join our Great Apes Survival Project partnership. Without concerted action, without political will, we are all the poorer,” he said.

Mr Toepfer added: ”Here, near the close of WSSD, we have an agreement to significantly reduce biodiversity loss by 2010. This is an important agreement. The Great Apes, our closest living relatives will be the litmus test of whether the world succeeds in this important goal or not”.

Gorilla

The study estimates that around 28 per cent, or some 204,900 square kilometres of remaining gorilla habitat, can be classed as relatively undisturbed.

If infrastructure growth continues at current levels, the area left by 2030 is estimated to be 69,900 square kilometres or just 10 per cent. It amounts to a 2.1 per cent, or 4,500 square kilometre, annual loss of low-impacted gorilla habitat in countries including Nigeria, Gabon, Rwanda and Burundi.

Chimpanzee

The study estimates that around 26 per cent, or some 390,840 square kilometres of remaining chimpanzee habitat, can be classed as relatively undisturbed.

If infrastructure growth continues at current levels, the area left by 2030 is estimated to be 118,618 square kilometres or just eight per cent. It amounts to a 2.3 per cent, or 9,070 square kilometre, annual loss of low-impacted chimpanzee habitat from countries including Guinea, Cote D’Ivoire and Gabon.

Bonobo

The study estimates that around 23 per cent, or some 96,483 square kilometres, of remaining bonobo habitat, can be classed as relatively undisturbed.

If infrastructure growth continues at current levels, the area left by 2030 is estimated to be 17,750 square kilometres or just four per cent. It amounts to a 2.8 per cent, or 2,624 square kilometre, annual loss of low-impacted bonobo habitat from the Democratic Republic of the Congo—the only country in which they are found.

Orangutan

The study estimates that around 36 per cent, or some 92,332 square kilometres, of remaining orangutan habitat, can be classed as relatively undisturbed.

If infrastructure growth continues at current levels, the area left by 2030 is estimated to be 424 square kilometres or less than one per cent. It amounts to a five per cent, or 4,697 square kilometre, annual loss of low-impacted orangutan habitat from areas such as Sumatra (Indonesia) and Borneo which includes Kalimantan, Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam and Sarawak and Sabah, Malaysia.

The report, *The Great Apes—the road ahead*, is edited by Dr Christian Nellemann of UNEP Grid-Arendal in Norway and Dr Adrian Newton of UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre in Cambridge, UK. It was launched at the WSSD as governments and other supporters of GRASP announced more cash backing for the project.

More funding was announced from the Government of the United Kingdom and new money from the United Nations Foundation (UNF) and the wildlife charity the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW).

Robert Hepworth, Deputy Director of the UNEP Division of Environmental Conventions and a biodiversity expert, also unveiled the organization's GRASP strategy document which will build on the work carried out by the wide range of partners since the pioneering initiative project was launched in 2001.

The strategy aims to cover all of the two dozen range states of the Great Apes and draw up national recovery action plans in collaboration with the governments concerned, wildlife groups and local people.

A key feature is the role of the specially appointed "Ape Envoys" in raising the profile of the cause. Two of the three GRASP envoys—Jane Goodall and Russ Mittermeier, spoke personally about the unique partnership at today's event at the IUCN Centre in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Mr Hepworth said: "An international, collaborative effort, has been urgently needed which was why GRASP was born. The strategy will guide and assist UNEP and UNESCO and our other partners to target conservation effort, while helping to join p and marshal the efforts of other international agencies and conventions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species as well as governments and civil society. This can be only realistic when local communities have a stake in conservation, when they can reap benefits from sustain ably harvesting forests for food, fuel, building materials and medicines or from ecotourism".

He said he was also delighted to announce that, along with IFAW and the UNF, other new partners include the Dian Fossey Gorilla Foundation (Europe), the World

Conservation Society, the Institute of Tropical Forest Conservation and the Pan African Sanctuaries Alliance.

UNESCO, a co-partner in the GRASP initiative, are also working with the European Space Agency to image and map ape habitats in the Albertine Valley of Africa's Central Rift region.

Notes to Editors-Governments, the private sector, non governmental organizations and the public can learn how to donate money to GRASP by accessing <http://www.unep.org/grasp/Help.asp>

The full report, **The Great Apes-the road ahead**, is available from today (3 September 2002) at www.globio.info

GRASP has three special ape envoys who are Jane Goodall, the celebrated primate conservationist, Russ Mittermeier of Conservation International and Toshisasa Nishida of Kyoto University.

A list of GRASP partners can be found at www.unep.org/grasp/partners.asp

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