

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER, OCEANS, AND WILDLIFE

REMOTE OVERSIGHT HEARING

October 26, 2021

10:00 a.m. ET

Oversight Hearing on “Protecting Human Rights in International Conservation.”

Questions for the Record for Ms. Ginette Hemley, Senior Vice President, Wildlife Conservation, World  
Wildlife Fund - US

Questions from Rep. Steve Cohen, TN

Question #1 - Are there countries that seem more eager to adopt the additional training and escalation protocols you have established than others? Have these plans been met with resistance in any country?

In our experience, conflict-affected states are often among the most receptive to training and other support offered to help professionalize conservation law enforcement. These same governments are also often very open to establishing escalation protocols.

We have experienced, however, that implementation of these protocols systematically is often hindered due to a number of conditions. Weak governance makes it difficult to effectively roll out larger-scale programs. Difficulty in accessing communities in remote locations, lack of access to technology, repressive political regimes, corruption, and limited institutional capacity are additional barriers. Finally, in many of these countries, even when cases are escalated, the legal processes are often slow and difficult to monitor and track.

At the same time, we have been encouraged that some countries with greater institutional stability and capacity have not only embraced new rights-based trainings and protocols but have applied them systematically across multiple regions. In Nepal, for example, WWF has partnered with the National Human Rights Commission and the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation to develop a human rights training curriculum to be implemented nationally. In India, the WWF office has coordinated a project to embed a module on human rights in rangers training curricula in colleges across the country. Projects like these are important because they help institutionalize human rights-based approaches to conservation law enforcement. In addition, these countries often also have greater judicial capacity and already have protocols in place for escalating complaints.

Question #2 - What were some of the biggest takeaways the stakeholder workshops that were held in Cameroon and the Republic of Congo earlier this year? Was there anything you learned from those that you plan to adapt to improve operations in other countries?

WWF conducted a series of consultations in the Republic of the Congo and Cameroon to discuss the findings of the Independent Panel report and to hear concerns and recommendations from a variety of stakeholders including local communities, Indigenous Peoples communities, leaders from these communities, and civil society organizations. Each conversation involved a unique context related to

local issues we are working to address. However, we identified three main takeaways from these discussions: (1) communities want to be part of the conservation process; (2) communities shared ideas to better work with law enforcement authorities and reduce potential abuses; and (3) conservation efforts must create opportunities to improve local livelihoods.

First, many community members expressed a desire to be better informed about the work of conservation. There was interest in participating in activities like monitoring and evaluation of changes in the natural environment and ecological monitoring.

Second, recommendations were shared on ways to limit conflict between rangers and communities. These include establishing greater opportunities for communities to participate in patrolling and monitoring, adopting codes of conduct, providing human rights training, and finding ways to create more open dialogues between communities and rangers. We also heard that rangers need to be better trained to understand the access rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and we received recommendations related to strengthening local grievance mechanisms.

Third, communities told us how important it is for conservation efforts to provide opportunities for local livelihoods. One recommendation was to identify opportunities to hire people more directly from these communities for conservation efforts and to engage community organizations in these efforts. There were also requests for broader support to communities, including supplementing local education and greater access to health care.

The insights from these consultations are consistent with engagements WWF has had with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities over the past several years. While WWF has already been working on these issues generally, the emphasis and local perspectives are invaluable in helping shape these efforts going forward.

Question #3 - Have there been any incidents of human rights abuses – including rape, torture, or murder – by park police at Salonga National Park since the ranger code of conduct was put into place in April 2019? If so, please provide details of any incidents.

WWF-US is not aware of any incidents of human rights abuses by rangers at Salonga National Park since April 2019. It is our understanding that no rangers previously accused of human rights abuses are currently working in Salonga National Park.

From April 2019 to present, WWF-US is aware of one allegation that rangers were involved in a death. In November 2019, there was an alleged murder of a village hunter whose body was found on the banks of the Iyenge River while rangers were on patrol in the same area. WWF International immediately suspended all support for field patrols in Salonga National Park until the case was referred to appropriate authorities. (WWF-US has not provided support for rangers in Salonga National Park since the end of 2018.) Following an investigation, the DRC government concluded that the individual died as a result of drowning, and in May 2020 the case was dismissed. WWF International's public statement can be found here:

[https://wwf.panda.org/wwf\\_news/press\\_releases/?357073/WWF-statement-on-Salonga-National-Park-in-the-DRC](https://wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/press_releases/?357073/WWF-statement-on-Salonga-National-Park-in-the-DRC).

Additionally, in 2020, there were reports of inter-ethnic clashes between Nkundo (Bantu) and Batwa communities in the Bianga sector, Monkoto territory in Tshuapa province, outside Salonga National Park. Although we understand that these reports do not implicate rangers, WWF International called on the DRC government to (1) urgently conduct an independent inquiry to identify and prosecute those responsible for any criminal acts and (2) urgently ensure the safety of the communities and their property. WWF International's public statement can be found here: [https://www.wwf-drc.org/en/our\\_news/latest\\_news/?33582/Joint-Statement-on-inter-ethnic-clashes-near-DRCs-Salonga-National-Park](https://www.wwf-drc.org/en/our_news/latest_news/?33582/Joint-Statement-on-inter-ethnic-clashes-near-DRCs-Salonga-National-Park).

For additional background, the Guide of Conduct for Salonga National Park rangers was successfully adopted and signed in August 2020 by the Director General of the Congolese Institute for Nature Conservation (ICCN) and subsequently presented at a national workshop in June 2021. Following its adoption, the Guide of Conduct was shared with rangers within the park who were required to sign and accept its terms.

To help operationalize this Guide of Conduct and further support the protection of human rights in Salonga National Park, WWF has also taken the following steps:

- WWF negotiated a new Partnership Agreement that met conditions laid out in the Management Response, including that all law enforcement operations and activities comply with WWF's Principles for Enforcement and Rangers and that the Guide of Conduct applies to all ICCN staff responsible for law enforcement. The agreement places a strong emphasis on the protection of human rights and stipulates measures to professionalize law enforcement to meet human rights provisions in line with international standards and to create a third-party grievance mechanism and support system, to be managed by a local human rights NGO. WWF will explore with ICCN and other stakeholders over the coming eighteen months the feasibility of establishing a foundation to manage Salonga National Park to help advance inclusive conservation, sustainable development for local communities, and respect for human rights.
- WWF has partnered with Chengeta Wildlife, which has been training ICCN staff in the field on the guide of conduct, human rights laws, safe and ethical apprehension of armed poachers, and community engagement and rights, among other topics. Chengeta Wildlife has experience across Africa of professionalizing ranger teams, including by addressing human rights. Going forward, a major focus will be working with the government to reconfigure law enforcement to reduce risks of human rights abuses. Beyond training, Chengeta Wildlife will explore how to build more equity and inclusiveness in ranger teams (e.g. increase the number of female rangers and rangers from Indigenous communities). Building on the existing Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) program, Chengeta Wildlife will also work with ICCN to help monitor ranger activities on the ground and increase ranger accountability, including through the use of control rooms, data collection and analysis, and spot checks.
- As mentioned above, WWF has also entered into a partnership with the local NGO Juristes pour l'Environnement au Congo (JUREC) to manage a third-party grievance mechanism. JUREC initiated community consultations in July 2021 to ensure the system meets local needs and expectations. While this is being finalized and rolled out across the park, grievances can be lodged within the country-level grievance mechanism.