

Central African countries to monitor Congo forests

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A gorilla picks foliage to eat in a clearing on the slopes of Mount Mikeno in the Virunga National Park. Ten Central African countries have agreed to take part in a regional initiative to monitor the Congo Basin, one of the world's largest primary rainforests, the UN's food agency said.

Ten Central African countries have agreed to take part in a regional initiative to monitor the Congo Basin, one of the world's largest primary rainforests, the UN's food agency said Thursday.

"A new regional initiative will help 10 Central African countries to set up advanced national forest monitoring systems," the Rome-based Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) announced.

The 10 countries are Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#), Congo, Equatorial Guinea,

Gabon, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe, it said.

The 200 million hectares (494 million acres) or so of forests are second only to the [Amazon rainforest](#) in size, supporting the livelihoods of some 60 million people.

"The main threats to these forests include land-use change, unsustainable logging and mining," the FAO said.

The monitoring project would be managed in conjunction with the Central Africa Forests Commission (COMIFAC).

"The rates of forest cover change and the subsequent emissions from deforestation ... remain poorly understood partly due to the lack of up-to-date, accurate information on the current state of forests in the region," it said.

The gross deforestation annual rate in the Congo Basin was 0.13 percent between 1990 and 2000, but it doubled in the period of 2000-2005, COMIFAC data showed.

The monitoring system was crucial to improving the protection of forests and sustainable management, the FAO's forestry expert Eduardo Rojas said.

The agency said it would provide [remote sensing technologies](#) to so the countries can estimate forest cover and track changes, as well as estimate the amount of [carbon stocks](#) their forests contain.

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