

Countries renew plan to protect mountain gorillas

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Credit: [naturepl.com/Bruce Davidson](http://naturepl.com/Bruce%20Davidson) / WWF

The three countries home to mountain gorillas have agreed on new measures to conserve the critically endangered animals, and to maximize

the economic benefits they bring to local communities.

National park officials from Rwanda, Uganda and Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have renewed their joint commitment to protect gorilla habitat spanning their shared borders, and recognized the importance of attracting tourists for lucrative gorilla treks.

Mountain [gorillas](#) are the only type of [great ape](#) in the world that are experiencing an increase in number, yet only about 880 individuals were counted at the last census. Gorilla family groups in each of the range countries have been habituated to the presence of people, and can be visited on carefully controlled tours.

"A portion of the revenue from gorilla tourism is shared with the communities surrounding the animals' habitats. This creates a strong incentive to protect the animals and the natural setting where they live," said David Greer, WWF's African great ape expert. "Visitors also spend money elsewhere during their trip, and that helps the national economy as a whole."

In Rwanda and Uganda the tourism industry, largely linked to [mountain gorillas](#), accounts for about 8-9 percent of total gross domestic products, World Bank data shows. Gorilla tourism in DRC's Virunga National Park recently reopened after a period of instability wracked the region. An independent economic analysis of the park commissioned by WWF found that tourism in Virunga has the potential to reach an estimated value of US\$235 million per year.

Alarming, 85 per cent of Virunga National Park has been allocated as oil concessions. Mountain gorilla habitat has been spared, but if oil extraction were to occur, the park's critical ecosystems and rare species could be put at risk, research indicates.

WWF strongly opposes the exploration plans of UK oil company Soco International PLC, which intends to start seismic testing in the park this month.

Provided by WWF

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