

# WILD CHIMPANZEE FOUNDATION



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## FINAL REPORT 2014-2016

### Protection of West African Chimpanzees in Sapo National Park: Ecoguards Save the Forest.

*Prepared by Wild Chimpanzee Foundation*

*March 2017*

## Executive Summary

The Sapo National Park was created in 1983, but concerns have arisen about the pressures put on its survival. FFI has been working with FDA for years to implement some conservation activities and FDA implemented a first move to expel all illegal hunting/mining camps in the park in 2010. However, few activities have been done on the ground, and rumors were suggesting that many hunters/miners have come back within the Sapo NP. The WCF wanted to do a mission with FDA to ascertain the real situation within the park.

Overall, the implementation of the 3-year project proved extremely difficult for the Wild Chimpanzee Foundation (WCF) due to external factors, namely the uncontrolled infiltration of illegal miners, hunters and settlers into the Sapo National Park. Despite urges from the WCF, the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) was reluctant to push forward with an eco-guard program due to the security situation inside the national park, and as such WCF supported some small patrols as well as missions led by the FDA to attempt to ease the situation in the park over the course of 3 years.

In Year 1, meetings were held between WCF and FDA at both the FDA headquarters in Monrovia as well as at the Sapo National Park headquarters in Jalay's town. At this time, illegal mining was an issue but was relatively small (an estimated 200 miners) and WCF and FDA planned to hold training of eco-guards in August 2014 to then lead patrols. However, at that point the Ebola Virus outbreak meant all activity had to cease, as the country was in a state of emergency and travel between counties was forbidden.

In year 2, after the Ebola Virus outbreak, WCF restarted discussion with FDA about how to begin the program in Sapo National Park. Due to the outbreak, the Sapo National Park had been left unmanaged for several months and reports stated that the park was being infiltrated with more illegal miners. In light of this, FDA requested that the WCF provide the support for urgent law enforcement missions to deter the miners from returning. Missions were led between April and October 2015, resulting in the arrest of 5 persons, and the confiscation of mining equipment and bushmeat.

In the final year, the situation in Sapo National Park had significantly deteriorated. Despite good intentions at the end of 2015, 2016 proved difficult to develop a law enforcement/eco-guard program. The infiltration of miners continued and escalated to a point that the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) and other partners were reluctant to push forward with community or target law enforcement until the situation was understood, and awareness raised. As such, in 2016, support was provided to reconnaissance missions that should lead to FDA re-establishing their authority there in the Sapo National Park in the near future and meetings to encourage the support from the local authorities.

## Project Activities

In 2014, the Wild Chimpanzee Foundation (**WCF**) officially established a Liberian representation, with two offices, one in Monrovia and a field office in Zwedru, Grand Gedeh, in proximity to Sapo National Park. This allowed WCF to strengthen relations with the local government body responsible for the Sapo National Park (**SNP**), the Forestry Development Authority (**FDA**), and other park stakeholders, namely Fauna and Flora International (**FFI**). Various meetings were held throughout the course of the year. Discussions were held with FFI about how to use the biomonitoring data to help guide targeted law enforcement missions, while a meeting with the SNP Chief Park Warden allowed to agree on the development of this project with a plan to hold a training workshop in August 2014. Unfortunately, the Ebola outbreak in Liberia meant that field activities could not start in 2014, as travel was restricted and the risks to staff members to high. The first field mission and training was planned for August 2014, but by this time, the president of Liberia had declared a state of emergency, meaning the work could not be completed as the WCF-team had to leave the country.

In December 2014, the WCF Liberia Director was contacted by the FDA head office regarding an urgent appeal due to the deteriorating conditions in Sapo National Park. Due to the restraints caused by the Ebola outbreak, the FDA was hindered in the management of the park, resulting in an ever increasing infiltration of illegal miners, estimated at 200 persons. At this point, after FDA management went to visit the park, it was agreed with local authorities that an eviction mission should take place, after awareness was raised with the local communities.

In 2015, year-2 of the project, the WCF team returned to Liberia to restart activities after the Ebola outbreak. An initial meeting was held between the WCF Country Director, the FDA Conservation Technical Manager, the Protected Areas Manager and the Sapo Chief Park Warden, during which preventative measures were discussed to ensure that the current situation with the illegal settled miners did not escalate to reach a point similar to 2010 when 18,000 miners were illegal settled in the park to do gold-mining. It was agreed between WCF and FDA that urgent law enforcement missions were vital. As such, WCF worked with the Chief Park Warden to plan law enforcement missions across the Sapo National Park to deter miners and hunters and increase the protection of chimpanzees and other wildlife threatened in the park (Figure 1). In total the FDA managed to do 84 days of patrolling. During patrols, the FDA collected data on key wildlife (such as chimpanzees and elephants) and also on all anthropogenic threats. In total they arrested 5 persons (1 hunter and 4 miners) and managed to collect intelligence on the mining trade.

Despite the recent Ebola outbreak, it was also apparent that poaching inside the park was on the increase. During the patrols, FDA confiscated and burned the meat of 40 animals. When possible the meat was brought to the magistrate courts and burned in front of the communities to show that FDA would no longer tolerate the hunting of wildlife in the Sapo National Park. At this point, FDA did not find any active mining camps within the park, showing the positive impact the rangers are having on ensuring the protection of the park. Due to the urgency of the situation with the miners in the park, it was agreed that time-wise it would not be worthwhile to devise and train the rangers with a new law enforcement strategy. The FDA rangers have been trained in the past by other partners and they followed that protocol to lead their patrols, but also used a targeted approach to deter the miners from returning to their known camps. When the mining equipment was found (Figure 2), it was removed from the park and destroyed by the FDA.

*Figure 1. Team of FDA rangers entering the Sapo National Park to lead a law enforcement mission*



*Figure 2. Mining equipment confiscated from miners found inside the Sapo National Park by the FDA law enforcement rangers*



In year-3, the situation worsened. Some push back to lead law enforcement missions to evict the miners without a lot of awareness done beforehand meant the miners continued to settle and mine and poach inside the park. Realizing the potential extent of encroachment, FDA requested WCF to assist in trying to understand the situation and to gather support from partners and authorities.

FDA had led a high level mission at the end of 2015 which they reported to WCF and FFI in 2016. The mission comprised participants from other ministries such as the Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy, to the three counties where Sapo National Park is situated: Grand Gedeh, Sinoe and River Gee. There, meetings were held with all local authorities, including the Superintendent, County Inspector and Immigration Officials, to discuss the rapidly deteriorating situation in the Sapo National Park. FDA explained the authorities about the infiltration of illegal mining camps that was hindering FDA's work in the park as the situation was becoming dangerous, while also having a highly negative impact on the flora and fauna of the park. FDA explained that they wanted to evict all the illegal settlers, but that this could only be done with the support of the local authorities. All authorities agreed, but requested that awareness be carried out in the communities before any action is taken. Radio interviews were thus held in each of the counties to send a message to both the communities outside the park but also to those inside. Following this, each county held a County Security Council sitting to further spread the message about the situation in the Sapo National Park with other local authorities and agencies, including community leaders. In addition to this, it was agreed that a joint security team be organized for a reconnaissance patrol in the park. The joint security of Sinoe County was chosen by FDA and its partners to carry out this patrol, as all the mining camps earmarked for this operation were situated in Sinoe County especially the Jadebo District.

FFI at this point conducted a Social Assessment for Protected Areas (SAPA) in all the communities around Sapo National Park: They found the communities be be unhappy with the national park or the FDA and were frustrated by the lack of benefits they felt they were receiving from living next to the park. As such, FDA and other partners were reluctant to lead any law enforcement missions until more awareness was carried out.

After much discussion during regular meetings held between WCF, FFI and FDA, the next reconnaissance mission was planned, but this time to go into the park, as agreed prior, with support from WCF and FFI. A joint security team comprising of twenty men (see Table 1) departed the city of Greenville on December 10th, 2016 for a patrol within and around the southern portion of the Sapo National Park. The objective of the mission was as follows:

- ▶ To collect GPS coordinates of all illegal mining and hunting sites
- ▶ Document all illegal settlements within the Park
- ▶ Record the number of persons at each sites by gender and nationality
- ▶ Record the activities of those at various sites/settlements within the park
- ▶ Record the name of various leaders at each illegal site within the park and if possible their funders and host and
- ▶ Record the coordinates of major entry points to the SNP used by the miners

*Table 1. List of participants on the Reconnaissance mission in the SNP*

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Number of persons</b>
Liberia National Police	5
Bureau of Immigration	5
Drug Enforcement Agency	2
National Security Agency	1
Liberia National Fire Service	1
Office of the County Attorney	1
FDA	5

The figure below (Figure 3) shows a map of Sapo National Park and highlights some of the locations of the mining camps encountered by the team during the reconnaissance mission. A total of 8 camps were found, with an estimated 700 people. However, it was clear that many people had fled before the FDA team had arrived so it is still not possible to provide a clear idea of how many people are really living and mining in the park.

At each of the camps, the team tried to talk to the the people that were present to explain that they were illegally settled in the park and doing illegal activities such as mining and hunting (see

figures 2-6). The team documented what they found on site and it is evident that mining is quite extensive in the Sapo National Park. The team also discovered, worryingly, the local chiefs and traditional authorities of Jadepo district in Sino County regularly visit the illegal mining and hunting sites within the park to collect cash from the miners and hunters, thereby suggesting they are paying to live in the park. The team also discovered that some FDA also regularly visit these sites to also collect cash. The FDA volunteers have subsequently been fired. Lastly, the team also observed that many of the persons there were armed with single barrel shot guns for hunting, with some of the hunters are government staff from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. As such, it is evident that the situation in the Sapo National Park goes much further than FDA originally thought and that many of the liners are supported by outside funders, and that a lot more than an eviction is needed. Nonetheless, the Chief Park Warden wishes to move forward with law enforcement patrols, but FDA management is adamant to conduct more awareness prior to any action within the park.

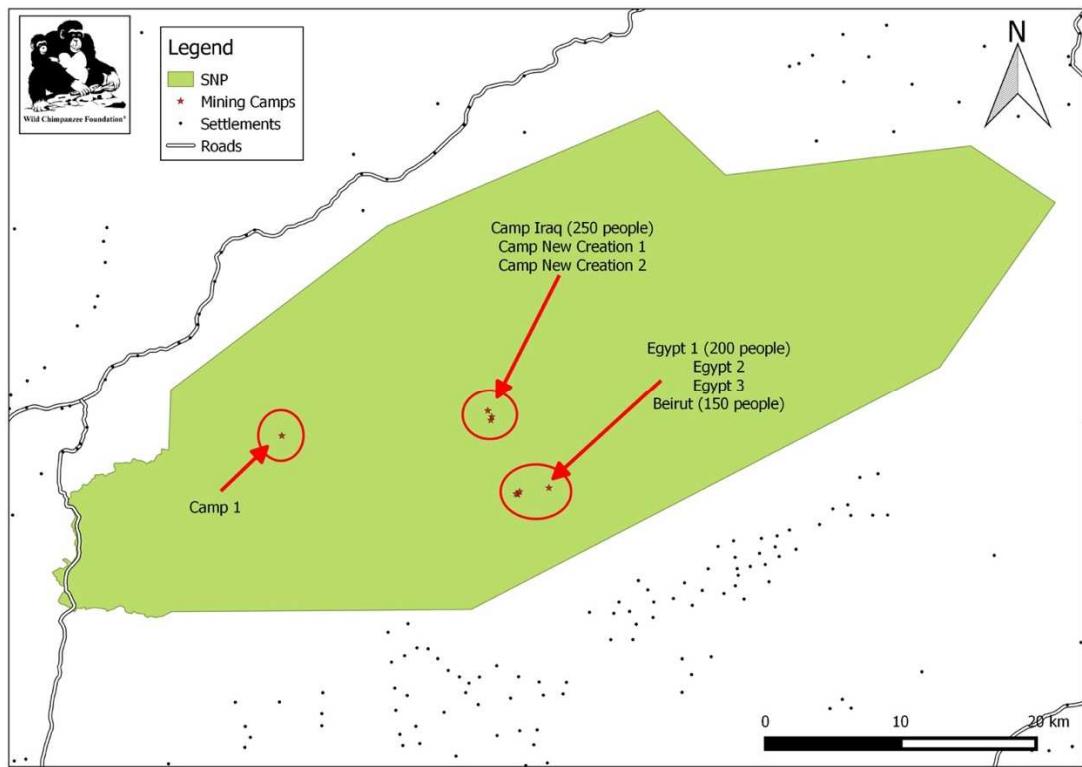


Figure 3. Map of Sapo National Park showing the location of the illegal mining camps



Figure 4. Mining equipment found at Camp 'New Creation One'



Figure 5. Mining site at Camp 'New Creation Two'



Figure 6. Illegal miners at Camp 'Iraq'



Figure 7. Settlement at Camp 'Beirut'



*Figure 8. Mining Site at Camp 'One'*

Much to our disappointment, WCF was unable to establish an en eco-guard program but did manage to support FDA in a difficult period to try to re-establish authority across the park. FDA has recognized the importance of developing a law enforcement strategy for the park, and as such WCF, with other partners, has established a law enforcement committee to develop law enforcement actions and strategies on a national basis, but with emphasis on areas in dire need such as the Sapo National Park.