



Wild Chimpanzee Foundation®

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**Press release**

**Creation of the Cavally Nature Reserve: A Beacon of Hope for Ivorian Forests**

Abidjan, in a monumental move to conserve one of West Africa's last bastions of biodiversity, the Ivorian government announced on 13 September 2023 the official transformation of the Cavally Classified Forest into a protected area now known as the **Cavally Nature Reserve**.

The Cavally forest, stretching across a vast expanse of 67,500 hectares, occupies a central position within the Tai-Sapo forest complex - the largest remaining forest block in West Africa, renowned for its exceptional and endemic wildlife species.

Over the years, the Cavally forest has been besieged by the grave threats of deforestation, poaching and relentless logging activities. In response to mounting concerns from numerous NGOs and discussions regarding European Union regulations on imported timber, the Ivorian government has been earnestly addressing this pressing issue since 2017. The Wild Chimpanzee Foundation has collaborated with “Société de Développement des Forêts” (SODEFOR) for more than 15 years with encouraging results; a reduction in deforestation of more than 95% between 2017, when the degradation began, and 2020. This was possible thanks to vital support from USAID, Bengo/WWF, Rettet den Regenwald and IDH.

However, this was not enough to protect wildlife and a dedicated team of ten ecoguards was deployed to safeguard the 13,500-hectare southern conservation zone. Their primary mission: to establish a safe haven for wildlife by bolstering ranger presence within the area. This operation, conducted from December 2022 to June 2023, has yielded significant results, ecoguards covering an impressive 1,653 kilometres over a span of 100 days.

In 2019, the government adopted a comprehensive national strategy for the Preservation, Rehabilitation, and Extension of Forests, aiming to restore at least 20% of the country's forest cover. This strategy includes the classification of several protected areas, including the Cavally Nature Reserve.

**State of the Cavally forest:**

Cavally Classified Forest has seen a disturbing loss of 33% of its forest cover, a reflection of the broader national trend, as 90% of Ivorian forests have vanished over the last six decades. Despite the existence of authorized logging, eight independent monitoring reports, backed by EU-FAO-FLEGT and FSPI, have demonstrated the unsustainable nature of these activities. The sale of illegal cocoa remains rampant, infiltrating cocoa cooperatives and international markets. Hunting persists at an alarming level, traversing national borders into Liberia.

The reclassification of the **Cavally Nature Reserve** brings it under the guardianship of the “Office Ivoirien des Parcs et Réserves” (OIPR), an organization that possesses the expertise and resources needed to effectively safeguard and conserve critical protected areas. Logging activities have been entirely halted within the forest, and the management of the Cavally Nature Reserve is entrusted to the OIPR's southwest zone management, ensuring future access to resources akin to the Taï National Park, for its management and specialized training of forestry officers, particularly in anti-poaching efforts. One of the OIPR's first actions upon assuming control of the reserve is to engage with local communities to raise awareness about the protected area status, associated legislation, and the long-term benefits this change will bring to the local population.

The establishment of the **Cavally Nature Reserve** signifies a resolute commitment to safeguarding the irreplaceable natural heritage of the region. It represents a collective effort to preserve the unique biodiversity and ecological significance of the Cavally forest, ensuring that it thrives for generations to come.

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**About Wild Chimpanzee Foundation:**

The Wild Chimpanzee Foundation's mission is to enhance the survival of the remaining wild chimpanzee populations and their habitat, thereby participating in saving the behavioural diversity of this fascinating species. The philosophy of the WCF is threefold: Implement projects of education, conservation, and research for and by the African people.

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