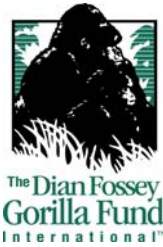


The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International (the Fossey Fund) is pleased to testify before the Congress concerning the reauthorization of the Great Ape Conservation Act. The year 2005 sadly marks the 20th anniversary of Dian Fossey's murder at the Karisoke Research Center in the Virunga Volcanoes. By the time of her death in 1985, she had founded the Fossey Fund (then called the *Digit Fund*) only seven years earlier. Now, twenty-seven years after its inception, our organization is one of Dian's legacies to the world, and we work diligently to ensure that her death, while struggling to save mountain gorillas, was not in vain.

Despite progress in great ape conservation since Dian's death, ***gorilla populations in the wild are undergoing declines of massive proportions***. Three gorilla subspecies are now ***critically endangered*** and each exists only in small, isolated populations of between 150 and 380 individuals. These are the *Virunga Volcanoes mountain gorillas* of Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Uganda made famous by Dian Fossey; the *Bwindi mountain gorillas* of Uganda; and the *Cross River gorillas* found on the border of Nigeria and Cameroon¹.

Two other ***endangered*** subspecies of gorillas, *western lowland* and *Grauer's gorillas* (also known as eastern lowland gorillas), are also critically at risk. We estimate that only 5,000 to 25,000 Grauer's gorillas exist as a series of fragmented and threatened populations². For western lowland gorilla populations -- found in the People's Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon -- we currently estimate the total population to be between 27,000 and 66,000 individuals².

Do not be deceived by what might appear to be large remaining populations of western lowland and Grauer's gorillas. First, scientists today lack the resources to even conduct the studies necessary to provide more precise estimates for their numbers, and most of us working in the field suspect the true figures are at the lower end of the range estimates. Second, declines are

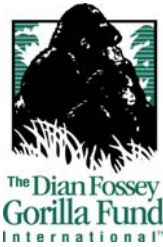


happening so rapidly it is difficult to track them. A recent study in the journal *Nature*³ has demonstrated that in Gabon, alone, the great ape population (western lowland gorillas and chimpanzees together) has plummeted by 56% in the last 18 years and similar losses are occurring in neighboring countries. Grauer's gorillas have become extinct in 25% of their previous range in the last several decades², and with recent civil wars in DRC, we suspect that their total number has suffered a large decline.

Simply put, *gorillas are disappearing from the forests of Africa at disastrous rates*. If these negative trends continue, we estimate that in only 15 years, there will be fewer than 4,000 gorillas left in Africa, surviving in pockets of fast-disappearing forests. Contrast this with 1980, when scientists estimated more than 120,000 gorillas lived on the African continent.

We know why these declines are occurring. Overall bush-meat consumption in the Congo Basin now exceeds 1 million tons a year. Estimates suggest that each year, 3,000 to 6,000 great apes end up in the cooking pot⁴. Another direct threat is tropical forest loss and degradation, resulting from agricultural and pasture clearing by local Africans, as well as the international, commercial logging industry. Recent estimates suggest that a forested area almost the size of Maryland was lost between 1990 and 2000 in tropical Africa, and remote sensing methods do not even track the effects of selective logging⁵. Mining and other extraction of resources, such as petroleum, are occurring in an unregulated fashion throughout Africa, and threaten even established protected areas and parks. The exploitation of coltan (columbite-tantalite used in electronic equipment), tin (cassiterite), gold, and diamonds is lucrative and secretive, and is creating a lawless mentality in many areas where gorillas are found.

It is now clear that Ebola has struck western lowland gorillas and is significantly implicated in the dramatic decline of gorilla populations in Gabon and the People's Republic of Congo³. Scientists do not even understand the underlying chain of transmission for this new and dramatic threat, or

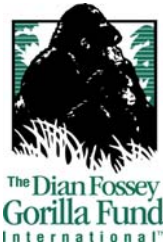


whether it will continue to spread to other populations of gorillas and chimpanzees. The cross-transmission of infectious diseases between humans and great apes is a related and newly emerging threat, as gorilla habitat shrinks and contact with human populations increases. In areas where gorillas are exposed to daily visits by tourists, the threat of disease cross-transmission is higher.

In Africa, the indirect causes underlying these direct threats are clear. Human population expansion, lack of economic development, poverty, disease, malnutrition, unemployment, lack of education, lack of capacity, corruption, and war all create a disastrous matrix in which unregulated land use and short-sighted profit-taking are often the result, rather than protection and sustainable, rational use of natural resources.

The trends are clear. Gorillas and other great apes, and the African ecosystems in which they live, are headed for disaster. Is this the global heritage we wish to leave our children? As Americans, with a strong tradition of national parks and grass-roots conservation action, we can reverse these trends – our leadership as a nation can catalyze efforts around the globe. On the continent of Africa, where many of the world's great apes still exist, we can make a difference. ***This is a call for action.*** There are only a few years remaining to counteract these trends.

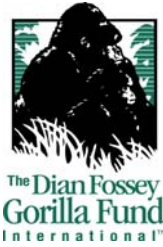
We strongly believe that the reauthorization of the Act, as well as a significant increase in its funding, will be critical for conservation action focused on great apes in Africa. Although the Fossey Fund has not received funds through the Great Ape Conservation Act, we have received funding from a related and similar appropriation, the Congressional Gorilla Directive (administered by USAID) from October, 2001 through September, 2004. Also, via our strategic partner in the Congo Basin Forest Partnership, Conservation International, we have also received USAID CARPE II funding from October, 2003 until the present.



With the Gorilla Directive Funding, the Fossey Fund was able to develop and strengthen several models for targeted, on-the-ground, and rapid interventions. First, gorillas are an animal icon in many human cultures. They are the largest primate on the planet with silverback males reaching 600 pounds in size. They share about 97% of their genetic material with humans. The Fossey Fund uses the gorilla as a *flagship species* -- an animal icon to generate an appreciation of nature, to increase awareness of general conservation principles, and to catalyze broader conservation action for all fauna and flora.

With local stakeholders, the Fossey Fund has used this approach in a grass-roots program for community conservation outside of national parks, in which local people manage their own natural resources and are empowered to protect their biological heritage. In eastern Congo (DRC), we used Gorilla Directive Funding to develop and support a federation of eight community-managed nature reserves, in which local people use the gorilla as a flagship species to increase conservation awareness and generate grass-roots action. At present, these projects provide gorilla and overall conservation protection and education in a region of nearly 2.5 million acres and reach about 750,000 local inhabitants through village meetings, printed materials, and radio programs. Gorilla Directive Funding was used to support one community-based reserve, the Tayna Gorilla Reserve, which has received government authorization and recognition, and is a new, first-of-its-kind protected area in Congo (DRC), providing complete protection for all fauna and flora in a zone of more than 222,000 acres.

Gorilla Directive Funding enabled us to provide direct support for the protection of mountain gorillas at the Fossey Fund's Karisoke Research Center in Rwanda, and for Grauer's gorillas in Congo (DRC), through our community conservation initiatives and a rehabilitation program for Maiko National Park. With this funding, we provided capacity building and training for our Rwandan and Congolese partners by supporting the development of a GIS Center at the National University of Rwanda and creating the Tayna Center for Conservation Biology in Congo (DRC).

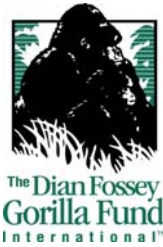


This community-managed college, specializing in biology and conservation training, is a field-based, government-sanctioned university that provides complete scholarships for more than 80 students who will become the next generation of Congolese conservationists.

Gorilla Directive Funding permitted the Fossey Fund to develop and support integrated interventions in health and development for local communities practicing grass-roots conservation. In our Ecosystem Health program in Rwanda and Congo (DRC), we were able to touch the lives of more than 30,000 individuals living near protected areas, by treating them for intestinal parasites and educating them about hygiene and healthy ecosystems. The funding, allowed us to use state-of-the art scientific methods, such as GIS techniques, hormone analyses, behavioral animal sampling, and microscopic parasitic analyses, for example, and to export these techniques to our host-country colleagues.

What has become clear to us is that targeted funding for great apes, such as the previous Gorilla Directive, and now, the Great Ape Conservation Act, provides the American people an opportunity to support initiatives that have as their focus on-the-ground action and rapid results.

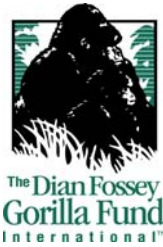
This is an excellent opportunity for our country to diversify its conservation portfolio. In addition to complementing other conservation initiatives -- such as the Congo Basin Forest Partnership, administered by USAID's Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE), in which the United States supports large-scale, landscape approaches to conservation, development and resource-use planning throughout the Congo Basin -- the Great Ape Act can fund initiatives that are palpable and can be seen and felt by local Africans, who ultimately will play a significant role in solving this century's conservation crisis.



First, the reauthorization of the Act can channel funding to action- and field-oriented initiatives that directly address the looming extinction crisis faced by great apes, through supporting state-of-the-art scientific techniques, and transferring this capacity to African institutions. For examples, the Fossey Fund and the Jane Goodall Institute maintain the Karisoke and Gombe Research Centers. These centers have studied mountain gorillas and chimpanzees since the 1960's; between our organizations, we have the two largest and longest databases on great apes in the world. We now have developed a joint initiative to combine our work, reinforce scientific capacity in Rwanda and Tanzania, and through satellite communications and remote learning techniques, export this knowledge and capacity to four developing African research centers for gorillas, chimpanzees, and bonobos in the Congo (DRC).

Second, by strengthening the Great Ape Conservation Act, we keep the world's attention focused on conservation. Initiatives focused on the charismatic great apes are a doorway into people's minds and hearts that ultimately leads them to consider larger conservation issues and increases their awareness about the ecosystems these great apes inhabit. In Africa's Congo basin, for example, great apes are found in complex ecosystems many of which we believe contain 10,000 species of plants, 1,000 species of birds, 700 species of fish and 400 other species of mammals. These ecosystems play a critical role in regulating global climate patterns. Conservation initiatives for great apes can serve as a portal to sensitize stakeholders, government authorities, and international bodies that larger-scale, multi-national efforts are needed to address the complexity of our conservation crises.

Our experience at the Fossey Fund is clear. We have seen that support from the American people for local action to save great apes inspires and motivates Africans – it directly touches the lives of local people, who are struggling with everyday survival, and who are only remotely aware of national, regional, and international actions to address environmental issues. This brings the conservation struggle to their doorstep, focuses on an animal icon they themselves respect, and



empowers them to do something meaningful for their forests, for their mountains, and for their communities. This grass-roots approach directly links African and American hearts and minds in a common goal – in the future, we can make room on our planet for our children, for gorillas and other great apes, and for the majestic forests in which they live.

Clare Richardson
President & CEO
Atlanta, Georgia

Patrick Mehlman, Ph.D.
Vice President, Africa Programs
Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo

¹ There are only 380 of the Virunga mountain gorillas (made famous by Dian Fossey, and later by the film *Gorillas in the Mist*) left in three very small connected national parks in Rwanda, DRC, and Uganda. This was determined by a census was carried out jointly in 2003 in the Virunga Volcanoes Range by the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN), the Office Rwandaise du Tourisme et Parcs Nationaux (ORTPN) and the Ugandan Wildlife Authority (UWA), with the support of the International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP), Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International (DFGFI), Institute of Tropical Forest Conservation (ITFC), Max Plank Institute of Evolutionary Anthropology (MPIEA), Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund Europe (DFGFE), and Berggorilla & Regenwald Direkthilfe (BRD). Research scientists estimate that there are about 320 Bwindi mountain gorillas and between 150-200 Cross River gorillas left in their respective habitats.

² These new estimates will appear in a publication, now being finalized and edited by DFGFI scientists, *Conservation in the 21st Century, Gorillas as a Case Study*, Chapter 1, “Current Status of Wild Gorilla Populations”, by P.T. Mehlman, eds. Stoinski, Steklis, Mehlman. This book should be available in late 2005, but excerpts can now be made available.

³ “Catastrophic ape decline in western equatorial Africa.” *Nature* vol 422 10 April 2003, by Peter Walsh and colleagues.

⁴ “The African great ape bushmeat crisis”. *Pan Africa News* 3:1-6 1996, by A.L. Rose.

⁵ The percentage loss of forest from 1990-2000 for Cameroon, Central Africa Republic, People’s Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon together was 3%, representing close to 3 million hectares of mature forest, with Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea leading the list with 11% and 6% respectively. This is calculated as a ratio of net change of total forest area (1990-2000) to extent of forest with >50% canopy cover (2000) for these countries (World Resources Institute www.wri.org)