



Joint declaration by WWF, FSC and ATIBT

Cologne, 22 May 2025

The Congo Basin, spanning over 200 million hectares of tropical forest, is the world's second-largest rainforest and a vital reservoir of biodiversity and carbon storage. Approximately 50 million hectares—about a quarter of its forested area—are allocated to logging concessions, while only around 12% are designated as protected areas. In this context, the conservation of standing forests cannot rely on protection alone; it demands sustainable forest management that ensures ecological integrity while supporting local economies.

At the conference in Cologne on 22 May 2025, our three organisations – WWF Germany, FSC Germany and ATIBT - are joining forces to reaffirm the strategic importance of the sustainable management of tropical forests, particularly in the Congo Basin, a region that is vital for global climate protection, for biodiversity conservation and for the well-being of local communities.

1. FSC certification, a proven tool for sustainability

Next to public certification schemes in some of the countries, FSC plays a crucial role by setting and enforcing rigorous environmental and social standards, promoting legal, transparent, and responsible forestry. FSC remains the leading sustainable forest management certification system in Central Africa, credibly leading to responsible management of tropical forests, combining environmental, social and economic requirements¹.

2. Strengthening the socio-ecological model

Sustainable forest management must be part of a socio-ecological approach, integrating:

- Respect the traditional rights of local and indigenous people and ensure their genuine participation in forest governance,
- Vitalization of local and international timber markets for regional economic development,
- Effective measures for biodiversity and wildlife protection, particularly in areas rich in endemic or threatened species,
- Implementation of robust socio-environmental criteria in international funding schemes,
- Search for innovative financing to help safeguard these ecosystems.

3. Increased support for the sustainable forestry sector in Central Africa

The private forestry sector is one of the largest employers in many Central African countries, and an important source of foreign currency for governments². Alternative revenue generating approaches like Payments for Environmental Services (PES) strengthen the sustainable business model. We call on donors, public and private institutions, the banking sector and international markets to actively support companies committed to FSC certification, by for example recognising its safeguards, stimulating demand for certified timber and adapting public and private procurement criteria accordingly.



Conclusion

Faced with the major challenges of climate change, biodiversity erosion and socio-economic insecurity in forest regions, public and private certification approaches are a powerful lever for reconciling development and conservation. Through this joint declaration, we are calling for greater mobilisation of all stakeholders to make sustainable forest management a concrete and ambitious reality, for the benefit of present and future generations. Safeguarding the forests through sustainable forestry will in turn leverage additional funding like the Tropical Forests Forever Facility (TFFF) proposed by the Brazilian government.

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¹ Zwerts, J.A., Sterck, E.H.M., Verweij, P.A. et al. FSC-certified forest management benefits large mammals compared to non-FSC. *Nature* 628, 563–568 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-024-07257-8>



² World Bank – *Preserving the Forest of the Congo Basin: A Game Changer for Africa and the World* (July 2024)