

**Forum:** Special Conference on Environmental Sustainability

**Issue:** Protecting great ape populations

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**Position:** President of Special Conference

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## Introduction

In recent years, the great ape population has declined at a drastic rate. There are four main great ape species – the chimpanzee, bonobo, gorilla, and orangutan – and they reside mainly in Africa, Southeast Asia, and South/Central America. It is estimated that the population numbers of the great ape has declined by at least half, earning these species an *endangered* status from the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). Scientists believe that the great ape population may become extinct in the next 50 years. "The clock is standing at one minute to midnight for the great apes," says Klaus Toepfer, the former executive director of UNEP. "Local extinctions are happening rapidly. Each one is a loss to humanity, a loss to a local community, and a hole torn in the ecology of our planet."

## Definition of Key Terms

### Endangered

Of a species, seriously at risk of extinction

### Environmental Sustainability

The process in which human activity only uses natural resources at a rate at which they can be replenished naturally.

### LEDC

Lesser Economically Developed Countries – the politically correct version of “third world nations”.

### Poaching

To illegally hunt or catch.

### Conservation

The preservation, protection, or restoration of the natural environment, natural ecosystem, vegetation, and wildlife.

## General Overview

### How did this problem originate?

The decline of the great ape population is mostly a result of human activity and unsustainable development.

#### *Destruction of habitats*

The habitats of great apes often contain many valuable economic resources, such as timber, minerals and oil. Extensive logging, mining and infrastructural development have all led to the fragmentation of great ape habitats.

#### *The bushmeat trade/ poaching*

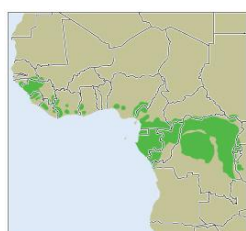
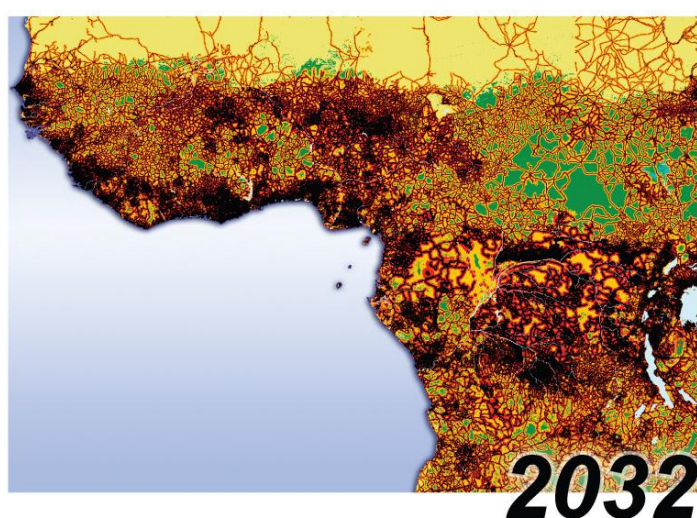
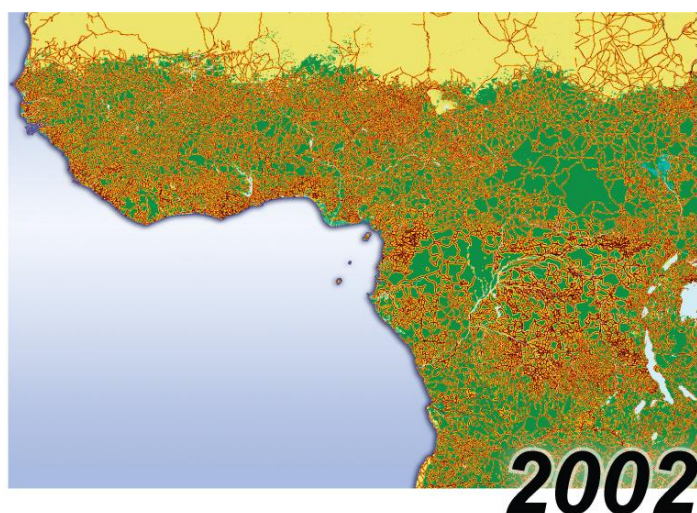
The bushmeat trade is especially prevalent in Africa, where poverty-stricken villagers see this illegal practice as a source of food and income. Body part are also used in traditional medicine, and great ape infants are often sold illegally as pets in the market. Although there have been laws prohibiting poaching and the bushmeat trade, the government is often unable to enforce them due to inadequate resources.

#### *Disease*

Great apes are also extremely vulnerable to diseases. For example, in recent years, the Ebola virus has wiped up to 90 percent of the largest populations of western lowland gorillas in Northern Congo and Gabon. Frequent exposure to humans also make great apes increasingly vulnerable to human diseases.

#### *Other causes*

Some other threats to the great ape population include civil wars, which force refugees to move into great ape territory, thus increasing chances of human-ape conflicts. In Uganda, for example, chimpanzees raid crops such as banana, maize, and sugar cane, and have been known to attack human infants. In response, affected farmers put out traps, snares, or poison to kill them.



Current distribution of African great apes (Chimpanzee, Bonobo and Gorilla).

- High impact
- Medium - high impact
- Low - medium impact

Source: The Great Apes - the Road Ahead. UNEP 2002.

**Caption #1: The Predicted Loss of Great Ape Habitat (2002 – 2032) in Africa**

## Possible Solutions to Consider

### *Establishing relevant conservation policies and laws*

Policies that address the primary threats facing the great ape population, such as laws focusing on illegal poaching as well as unsustainable forest practices, can be an important step in the great ape conservation effort. Remember to keep these policies feasible, and to give governments/companies incentives to follow them.

### *Raising awareness and increasing public support*

Keep in mind that raising awareness can be difficult in certain places, such as LEDCs, which may lack technology and resources. Also remember that the media is not your only option. Regarding public support, remember to include incentives – for example, what incentives would an impoverished villager have to turn away from poaching great apes, which may have been the source of their only income?

### *Lessening negative impact on the environment*

Further efforts should be made in regulating human activity that may negatively effect the environment where great apes reside in. How can we promote environmental sustainability and keep the forests as pristine and untouched as possible?

### *Improved protection and management*

Laws regarding the bushmeat trade and forest practices are often times already in place – the main question is how we can enforce these laws. Providing adequate technology, collecting sufficient data, and conservation programs are also things you may want to consider.

## Timeline of Events

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description of event</b>
1986	The orangutan population is determined to be endangered by the IUCN
1996	The gorilla, chimpanzee and bonobo populations are determined to be endangered by the IUCN
May 2001	GRASP is created and sponsored by UNEP
September 2002	GRASP is joined by UNESCO and registered as a World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) Type II Partnership, a multi-sectoral international initiative.

## UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

In May 2001, Dr. Klaus Toepfer, the Former Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), created GRASP (Great Apes Survival Partnership), meant to save great ape populations from extinction. Later sponsored by UNESCO, GRASP is a partnership that “brings together governmental and intergovernmental, UN institutional, non-governmental, scientific and academic foundations, local community and private sector interests.”

Some significant regarding this topic include:

- The Kinshaha Declaration on Great Apes, 9 September 2005
- CITES Resolution Conf. 13.4 "Conservation of and trade in great apes"
- IUCN-SSC: Best Practice Guidelines for Reducing the Impact of Commercial Logging on Great Apes in Western Equatorial Africa

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