

Are USAID Gorilla Conservation Funds Being Used To support Covert Operations in Central Africa

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Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

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On Wednesday September 19, 2007 the U.S. State Department and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) announced the provision of \$496,000 of new funds for wildlife conservation in the Virunga National Park in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. According to a State Department press release, poaching, armed conflict and “demographic pressures” are justification for the grant.

But investigations in Eastern Congo reported by these authors over the past six months indicate that USAID “conservation” funds—millions of taxpayer’s dollars—have been misappropriated, misdirected and disappeared. Evidence suggests that ongoing guerrilla warfare in Central Africa is receiving clandestine financial support in AID-for-ARMS type financial transfers.

“Our efforts are focused on conserving and protecting the habitat of these magnificent animals,” said Claudia A. McMurray, U.S. Assistant Secretary for State Oceans, Environment, and Science. “The survival of the mountain gorillas of Virunga is severely threatened by the tragic events in the region, and we will continue to devote whatever resources we can to protect the gorillas and other threatened species there.”

However, as reported by these authors, millions of dollars in USAID funds given to Virunga Park through the Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE) over the past ten years have virtually disappeared. Wildlife conservation in eastern Congo is a shambles, and “rebel” armies fighting in the region are receiving massive military support from unknown sources.

The realities on the ground in Central Africa are disturbingly different from those painted in the fundraising drives and brochures produced by the big conservation organizations, and their partners and sponsors. Are these conservation programs merely providing a smokescreen for other activities?

The Virungas region is located in North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo, also the base for long-time Rwandan-backed warlord General Laurent Nkunda.

There is evidence that the United States backs General Laurent Nkunda through both clandestine and open military program and missions in Congo, Rwanda and Uganda.

Fighting in Congo’s North Kivu province has displaced hundreds of thousands of people in the past year alone. The death toll for the region is unknown but cataclysmic—in the millions of people dead since warfare began in the area in 1996.

Playwright Eve Ensler, producer of the Vagina Monologues, recently launched a campaign to stop sexual violence in Eastern Congo that is unprecedented. Sexual violence is used as a weapon of war to sow terror and break down resistance to facilitate military occupation and conquest by invading forces. Hundreds of thousands of women and girls have suffered attacks of sexual violence in the area.

THE MISSING USAID MONEY

In 2005, after years of activity with zero oversight or program verification, the activities of Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund-International (DFGFI) and Conservation International expenditures of USAID funds ostensibly for gorilla conservation in Central Africa came under scrutiny.

A Freedom of Information Act request was submitted regarding DFGFI's failure to file required A-133 audit forms on its USAID funding. These A-133 forms are federally mandated from every non-governmental organization (NGO) receiving USAID monies, which come from U.S. taxpayers.

A Freedom of Information Act request determined that DFGFI has not filed audits for more than two years, while they received a total of at least \$4,693,384 from USAID between September 24, 2001 and September 29, 2004.

In September of 2005, US Congressman James Oberstar was contacted by a constituent who claimed that the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International had failed to file federally mandated audits (Form A-133) after receiving millions of dollars in grants from USAID.

Congressman Oberstar's informal inquiry found that, indeed, the DFGFI had failed to file required forms accounting for millions of dollars in USAID money.

"USAID is covering up for the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International," said a source close to this investigation, in January 2006. "The US government has backed off their investigation of where the million's of dollars in grants went."

The source claims that DFGFI officials working in Congo and Rwanda are using the gorilla conservation as a front for other activities. The source also provided information revealing the interesting backgrounds of top-level DFGFI directors.

"The little old lady in Iowa who sends in her five bucks to save the gorillas would freak out if she knew where her money was really going," the source said. "The gorillas are getting zip in the wild."

In 2006 Congressman Oberstar demanded that USAID produce a report on the activities of the DFGFI in Central Africa, but as of this writing there had been no substantive action by the DFGFI or USAID. Oberstar noted that the DFGFI has violated U.S. law by not filing required audit reports.

"I'm personally pursuing the matter" Oberstar told a reporter for the Rwanda-owned state newspaper, the New Times, in November 2005, "and have to make sure that USAID explains to the government why DFGFI has not been presenting their audit reports."

The Rwandan state-run newspaper New Times reported that DFGFI President and CEO Clare Richardson told their reporter that DFGFI had presented audits to USAID in March 2005. The New Times also reported that the Director General of the Office of Rwanda Tourism and

National Parks (ORTPN), Rosette Rugamba, told the New Times that she didn't understand the activities of the DFGFI.

"I don't know what they are doing in Rwanda," Rugamba told the New Times. "They have been here for over three decades claiming they are doing research work but they haven't given us any results. The living conditions of the DFGFI trackers are miserable and yet the DFGFI has lots of money."

According to Congressman Oberstar's office, on March 31, 2006, Congressional Affairs at USAID told a House International Relations Committee staff-member "that an audit is being conducted by a third party auditor, but it has not yet been completed."

Also, the U.S. government Office of Acquisition and Assistance was reportedly forcing DFGFI to respond to all allegations leveled against them about finance and budget issues.

The "third-party" auditor performing a "private" audit is the Defense Contract Audit Agency, a U.S. government agency responsible for auditing U.S. Department of Defense contracts.

Why is the U.S. Defense Contracts Audit Agency auditing programs and funds designated for "gorilla conservation" in Central Africa?

"The Defense Contract Audit Agency," reads their web site, "is under the authority, direction, and control of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), is responsible for performing all contract audits for the Department of Defense (DoD), and providing accounting and financial advisory services regarding contracts and subcontracts to all DoD Components responsible for procurement and contract administration."

The Defense Contract Audit Agency completed the DFGFI/USAID audit in March 2007, but the audit has not been released due to the claimed "proprietary nature" of the audit.

We repeat the question: Why is the U.S. Department of Defense Contract Audit Agency auditing the finances and programs of a conservation organization like the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund?

While oversight and accountability for past USAID 'investment' in the region has not been achieved, even under the pressure of a U.S. Congressman, some \$496 million dollars is being directed to the ongoing black hole in Central Africa.

DIAN FOSSEY GUERRILLA FUND

Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International also receives funds from private donors, foundations and corporate sponsors, and they have regular fundraising drives where callers solicit donations from members and the general public.

Sponsors and friends listed in DFGFI documents for January to December of 2003, in the \$25,000 and above category included, Dr. and Mrs. Nick Faust and CNN, and certain mining and intelligence connected interests.

Dr Nicholas Faust has deep connection to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and the Department of Defense.

CNN's Ted Turner is an owner-shareholder in a high-tech company called Earth Search Sciences Inc. (ESSI) based out of McCall, Idaho. In 1999 ESSI loaned a state-of-the-art "hyperspectral" probe—a remote sensing instrument carried on an aircraft or satellite platform—to a DFGFI and Georgia Institute of Technology team who performed some interesting "studies" in Rwanda.

The project was directed by Dr. Nicholas Faust who is one of the key scientists with the Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc. (ESRI), Redlands, California, USA, which is directly linked to ESSI.

ESRI Corporation (www.esri.com) is self-described as "the world leader in GIS (geographic information system) modeling and mapping software and technology."

ESRI is a key contractor for the U.S. Department of Defense and Intelligence sector, providing battle theatre GIS mapping and support technologies used, for example, for "a defense-wide infrastructure, supporting fighting missions, command and control, installation management, and strategic intelligence."

http://www.esri.com/industries/defense/business/military_ops.html

Remote sensing of gorilla habitat reportedly provides essential information about food sources, like the availability of species of bamboos, or encroaching threats from slash-and-burn agriculture, or other changes to gorilla habitat. But the remote sensing arena has proliferated due to the efficacy of these technologies in identifying deposits of minerals or hydrocarbons (oil & gas)—prospecting from aerospace platforms—and the data was therefore far more significant than a few species of bamboos.

According to two independent inside sources, the 21 data CD's from the ESSI/ESRI remote sensing over-flights ostensibly for Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International were delivered directly by the DFGFI's CEO Clare Richardson into the hands of Rwandan President Paul Kagame and the Rwandan Minister of Defense.

"These guys aren't looking for habitat," comments one remote sensing expert (who has visited the facilities of ESSI), "they are looking for oil, which is what they do, and they probably got funding for habitat assessment from USAID and are using the data to provide their owners with oil, minerals and uranium info. I'm not aware of any natural resource vegetative project that they have done in the past. It strictly sounds like taking the taxpayer dollar to fatten some oil guys pockets."

The Albertine Rift area and so-called World Heritage Sites of the border zone between Uganda, Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo are at present enmeshed in massive petroleum and natural gas exploration and exploitation projects.

Some 1000 people a day die in war-torn Eastern Congo due to guerrilla warfare and covert operations. The extent of western petroleum, mining or military involvement in Eastern Congo is never reported by the international press.

Former CNN journalist Gary Strieker became a member of the DFGFI Board of Trustees. Strieker was the CNN journalist embedded with the Rwandan Patriotic Army during the Pentagon's covert operation that overthrew the government of Juvenal Habyarimana in Rwanda in 1994.

CNN is deeply embedded with the Pentagon in reporting the U.S. government slant on military operations in U.S. military hotspots, including Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan and Sudan.

CNN reportage never establishes any connections to, or stories about, the deeper, hidden realities of western involvement in war, mining, extortion, pillage, dictatorship, arms-running, genocide, disease, or population control programs in Central Africa. Like virtually all of the western media, there is never any attention to the perpetuation of structural violence or the institutions of control and domination.

WEIDEMANN CHALLENGES CONSERVATION

In a telling memo written in December 2004, Robert Hellyer—USAID Mission Director for DRC—wrote to the USAID Africa Bureau in Washington regarding the Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE), the “principal vehicle for United States participation in the Congo Basin Forest Project.”

Buried in the February 2006 Annex of the supporting documents for the report of the Weidemann Consortium—an evaluation of the CARPE program in Central Africa—is the admission that the rationale of “overpopulation” was bogus.

“Of the more than 60 million people that live in the region,” Hellyer wrote, “about 22 million are located in urban areas. At present rates of population growth, the region is expected to contain 150 million people by the year 2025. Population density is on the whole quite low, with a regional average of 14 persons per square kilometer.”

Wildlife conservation and state department interests have repeatedly trumpeted population pressures as the reason for gorilla and habitat decline in Central Africa, yet the above report makes it clear that “population density is on the whole quite low.”

Robert Hellyer elaborates on the global demand for petroleum and timber, and on the adverse impacts of human populations in a landscape—Congo—where “it is in the self-interest of the United States government” to support “sustainable development” in the region. Hellyer confirmed that CARPE and USAID are not interested in the Congolese people, or even biodiversity protection, but only in the interests of the United States.

The Virungas National Park has become the focus of international investigations around white western mercenary operations. Top former U.S. state department officials involved in mining companies now plundering eastern Congo have turned up on the boards of some of the “conservation” organizations involved in the Virungas and other protected areas in Central Africa.

One of these conservation mercenary organizations is Richard Leakey’s Wildlife Direct, a newcomer in Congo that operates under the mantle of the Africa Conservation Fund, a tax-exempt (501-c-3) registered with the Internal Revenue Service.

Gorilla killings in the Virungas increased when Wildlife Direct appeared in the Virungas in January 2007.

One former state department official involved in the region is Walter H. Kansteiner III, an Africa Conservation Fund board member since the founding of ACF in 2004. Kansteiner was a top-level National Security Agency official in both the William J. Clinton and G.W. Bush administrations.

In 2003 Kansteiner appeared as an expert witness in the U.S. Congressional Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on International Relations titled “Saving the Congo Basin, the Stakes, the Plan.” At the time, Kansteiner was Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. He formerly served with the National Security Council as director of African Affairs and as an African specialist on the staff of the Secretary of State.

Kansteiner has been a constant presence behind the scenes in Congo’s war since 1996. Kansteiner worked on a strategic minerals task force at the Department of Defense and was Executive Vice President of a commodity trading and manufacturing company specializing in tropical commodities in the developing world: one of these was coltan, one of the mineral byproducts of warfare in DRC’s Kivu provinces today.

The Democratic Republic of Congo has the world’s purest and largest deposits of strategic minerals, such as gold, coltan, niobium, cobalt and columbite (columbium-tantalite or coltan). Niobium, coltan, tantalum and cassiterite are found in the Virungas region.

Walter H. Kansteiner III is on the Board of Directors of Moto Gold, now operating in the killing fields of the bloody Ituri district near Lake Albert.

RESOURCE WARS IN CENTRAL AFRICA

One petroleum firm involved in the great lakes region of Central Africa is Heritage Oil and Gas, a Canadian company involved in Kazakhstan, Russia, Iraq, Oman, Kurdistan, Gabon and on Lake Albert—on both sides of the war-torn DRC-Uganda border—where fighting between the Congolese FARDC army and Ugandan soldiers and Heritage Oil guards killed a British Heritage Oil subcontractor on August 3, 2007.

Heritage Oil (Canada) and Tullow Oil (London) are operating around Lake Albert in areas that recently saw major fighting. In mid-August the Uganda government commenced a build-up of troops on the DRC border. Congolese survivors in frontier towns along Lake Albert saw Ugandan military and their “rebel” allies—believed to be troops allied with Congolese warlord Jean-Pierre Bemba—marching into Congo with heavy weapons in late August.

By September 5, 2007, UPDF troops—and rebels reportedly aligned with Jean-Pierre Bemba—had occupied the DRC’s oil- and gold-rich Semliki Basin on the western shores of Lake Albert. Heavily armed foreign forces occupied the villages of Aru, Mahagi, Fataki, Irengeti and the Ruwenzori mountains. The international press and the United Nations Observers Mission in DRC (MONUC) remained completely silent about the Ugandan incursions.

By September 8, 2007, Ugandan troops were heavily massed on the DRC border while Kabila and Museveni were signing oil and gold sharing agreements in Tanzania. UPDF forces and “rebel” troops alleged to be Bemba’s remained in DRC as of September 15.

Heritage Oil and Gas is tied to mercenary companies and a long list of shady operators and offshore subsidiaries and partner companies.

Bechtel Corporation subsidiary Nexant is involved in the oil pipeline being constructed across Uganda to the U.S. military port at Mombasa Kenya.

The Ugandan People’s Defense Forces and Museveni government genocide against the

Acholi people of northern Uganda is driven by transboundary petroleum and gold concessions linked to foreign corporations like Heritage, Tullow, and Bechtel.

Uganda and Rwanda are two of the Pentagon's premier military partners in Africa: some 150 U.S. Special Forces were added to the Pentagon's Uganda arsenal in March 2007 and U.S. and U.K. military have been training UPDF troops.

Heritage has already reported pumping some 13,000 barrels per day from its "Kingfisher" 1-A site on Lake Albert.

In March 2007, the government of Rwanda awarded massive oil concessions to Vangold Resources. The 2700 square kilometer Vangold concession—named "White Elephant"—is believed to be part of the underground basin connected to the Heritage and Tullow Oil fields in the Semliki basin of DRC/Uganda.

Vangold Resources is a Canadian Company with Canadian and US principals.

The "White Elephant" concession is located in northern Rwanda in areas where the Rwandan Patriotic Army has led massive military operations, driving forced displacements premised on depopulating the area of Hutu villagers, since their initial invasions in 1990.

COVERT ALLIANCES WITH LAURENT NKUNDA

Congolese warlord Jean-Pierre Bemba met with Rwandan-backed General Laurent Nkunda during his Vice-Presidency (2003-2006) and he is now one of General Nkunda's secret backers in the ongoing bloodletting in eastern Congo.

Jean-Pierre Bemba's brother-in-law Anthony "Tony" Teixeira deals in blood diamonds, criminal networks and mercenary operations. Tony Teixeira is one of three pivotal businessmen who, along with Jacques Lemaire and Victor Bout, were cited in 2000 for sanctions busting by supporting the UNITA rebels in Angola's war. Bout and other businessmen with U.S. connections have been involved in weapons transfers to Congo.

According to insider MONUC sources, Jean-Pierre Bemba has been buying off high-level MONUC officials. This would partially explain MONUC's unwillingness to challenge or dislodge General Nkunda.

Congolese people in the Kivu province have been throwing stones at MONUC vehicles because they believe MONUC is not serious about "peacekeeping" in eastern Congo but is pursuing a political agenda.

On September 17, 2007 a "resource hungry" China signed an agreement to invest five billion dollars in Congo's infrastructure. Anglo-European interests are now using the military occupation of General Laurent Nkunda—backed by client regimes in Uganda and Rwanda, by Jean-Pierre Bemba and MONUC—to leverage their position with Kabila.

General Laurent Nkunda earns at least \$100,000 a month in extortion and minerals theft, and he is buying officials. Most important, General Laurent Nkunda is the "insurance policy" for the U.S. and German companies preventing Congo's access to the Lueshe niobium mines and other mineral bonanzas, including coltan, cassiterite and, allegedly, uranium, under Nkunda's control.

Over the past decade, USAID has become closer and closer to Pentagon interests. While originally a “soft” instrument of U.S. foreign policy around the world, the Pentagon has openly sided with USAID in recent military programs. One of these is AFRICOM, the Pentagon’s new Africa Command, which count USAID as a major partner.

[Note from Wildlife Direct] Editor.

“Wildlife Direct, doing business in the U.S. as the non-profit Africa Conservation Fund, is not in any way associated with African Conservation Fund (<http://www.africanconservationfund.org>), a non-profit established in 2003 to support longtime conservation projects in Kenya, including the African Conservation Centre.”

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