

Draft Gazettement Package of the Wonegizi Proposed Protected Area



FOR SUBMISSION TO:

THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

BY:

THE FORESTRY DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

WHEIN TOWN, MOUNT BARCLAY

MONTSERRADO COUNTY LIBERIA

DATE:

July 2026

Table of Contents

List of Tables	4
List of Figures	4
List of key acronyms	5
Executive Summary	6
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Context of Conservation in Liberia.....	9
1.1 Context of Conservation	9
1.2 Historic Scientific Initiatives.....	9
1.2.1 European Initiatives.....	9
1.2.2 American Initiatives	9
1.3 Focus on Liberia's forests	10
1.4 Civil war and post-conflict governance reform	11
Chapter 2: Instruments guiding the establishment of Protected & Conserved Areas in Liberia	14
2.1 Context.....	14
2.2 International instruments	14
2.3 National Instruments.....	16
Chapter 3: Description & justification for the designation of Wonegizi as a Protected or Conserved Area.....	21
3.1 Overview of Wonegizi	21
3.2 Biodiversity.....	22
3.2.1 Faunal Diversity	22
3.2.2 Floral diversity.....	25
3.2.3 Biomonitoring	25
3.2.4 Ecosystem Profile	26
3.3 Social Context	27
3.3.1 Assessment of forest dependency, livelihoods, and projected land use changes.....	27
3.3.2 Implications on Management Planning.....	34
3.4. REDD+ Initiative in the Wonegizi PPA.....	35
CHAPTER 4: stakeholder engagement	36
4.1 Stakeholder mapping.....	36
4.2 Historic engagement 2013-2019.....	36
4.2.1 Previous Gazettement Efforts.....	36
4.2.2 Assessment of additional communities for inclusion in the gazettelement consultations.....	37
4.2.3 Gazettement Consultations at Community, District, County, and National Levels (2019 – 2020)	38
4.2.4 Sustainable Livelihoods Initiatives.....	38
4.3 Customary Land Formalisation	39
4.3.1 Understanding Land Tenure and Use.....	39

4.4 Recent Protected Area engagement 2025-2026	42
4.4.1 Participatory Land Use Planning	42
4.4.2 Engagement to Reassess Communities' Perception of Flagged Boundary (December 2025)	43
4.4.3 Further Consultation toward Consent and Re-flagging	45
4.4.5 FPIC process – iterative approach to seeking consent.....	47
4.4.6 Government Consultations.....	53
Chapter 5: Description of the proposed Wonegizi Protected Area.....	53
5.1 Multiple Sustainable Use Reserve	53
5.2 Proposed boundaries and Management	54
5.4 Environmental and Social Impact Assessments.....	55
5.5 anthropogenic and biodiversity threats	55
5.6 Participatory monitoring activities	56
Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations.....	57
6.1 Conclusion.....	57
6.2 Ongoing Actions	57
6.2.1. Introduction	57
6.2.2. Physical Boundary Flagging and Demarcation	58
6.2.4. District and County Stakeholder Consultation Meetings	60
6.2.5. National-Level Information Sharing Meeting.....	60
6.3 Recommendations.....	60
Appendix I: Draft Act	63

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Prioritization Exercise for Wonegizi-Wologizi PPA.....	12
Table 2: List of HCVs 5 & 6 in Wonegizi PPA (Source: FDA/FFI 2019)	31
Table 3: Deeded Land per Community around the PPA.....	41
Table 4: progress to date with the FPIC process – seeking final consent for the creation of a PCA in Wonegizi	48
Table 5: Species, threats, indicators, and monitoring in Wonegizi MSUR.....	55

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Location of the Wonegizi PPA.....	8
Figure 2: Declared National Forests in 1960	10
Figure 3: Map of proposed PA Network (outlined in red)	13
Figure 4: Wonegizi in the wider ZWW Transboundary Landscape	21
Figure 5: Topography and Hydrology of the wider ZWW Landscape.....	22
Figure 6: Example photos from biodiversity surveys in Wonegizi - Clockwise from top-left: Western chimpanzee; pygmy hippo, white-necked picathartes (rock fowl), and forest elephant.....	24
Figure 7: Land cover patterns for the Wonegizi Landscape in 2019	26
Figure 8: PPA boundary and location of key settlements (Source: FDA/FFI 2026)	29
Figure 9: Example of Shifting cultivation in the southern portion of Wonegizi PPA, showing the main road to Voinjama (far left) and extensive clearing/mosaic deforestation around Ziggida.....	30
Figure 10: Evidence of shifting agriculture at the edges and within Wonegizi Proposed Protected Area: (a) 2015, and(b) 2022 © 2025 Airbus and Image © 2025 Maxar Technologies)	30
Figure 11: Sample of locations of High Conservation Value 5 and 6 showing areas of basic necessities and cultural significance (Source: FDA/FFI 2019).....	34

LIST OF KEY ACRONYMS

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CEPF	Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund
CLDMC	Community Land Development and Management Committee
CLF	Customary Land Formalisation
CMC	Co-Management Committee
CMS	Convention on Migratory Species
COPAN	Consolidation of Liberia's Protected Areas Network
CRSF	Community Rights Support Facility
CSI	Community Self-Identification
EBA	Endemic Bird Area
ENNR	East Nimba Nature Reserve
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ESIA	Environmental Social Impact Assessment
FDA	Forestry Development Authority
FFI	Fauna & Flora International
FMC	Forest Management Committee
FPIC	Free Prior Informed Consent
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GIZ	German Development Agency
HCV	High Conservation Value
IBA	Important Bird and Biodiversity Area
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
KBA	Key Biodiversity Area
LLA	Liberia Land Authority
LMA	Land Management Association
LOWON	Lofa Women Network Liberia Inc.
LRA	Land Rights Act
MAB	Man and Biosphere Reserve
MSUR	Multiple Sustainable Use Reserve
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NCS	National Conservation Strategy
NFRL	National Forestry Reform Law
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
NTFP	Non-Timber Forest Product
PA	Protected Area
PCA	Protected and Conserved Areas
PPA	Proposed Protected Area
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
SADS	Skills and Agriculture Development Services
SDI	Sustainable Development Institute
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association
WPPA	Wonegizi Proposed Protected Area
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Located in Lofa County (Zorzor, Quardu-Gboni and Voinjama Districts), the Wonegizi Proposed Protected Area forms part of a globally significant transboundary forest landscape within the Upper Guinean Forest ecosystem. It is recognized as a Key Biodiversity Area and an Important Bird Area, supporting exceptional biodiversity, critical ecosystem services, and deep socio-cultural significance for surrounding communities.

Ecologically, Wonegizi is a refuge for a remarkable diversity of species, including globally threatened wildlife such as the Western Chimpanzee, African Forest Elephant, Pygmy Hippopotamus, White-necked Picathartes, and numerous endemic plant species. The landscape also serves as an important forest corridor linking conservation areas across Liberia and Guinea, supporting ecological connectivity throughout the wider Zياما–Wonegizi–Wologizi transboundary landscape. Beyond its biodiversity value, Wonegizi provides critical ecosystem services, including watershed protection for major river systems, carbon storage, climate regulation, and resources that support local livelihoods.

The social and cultural importance of Wonegizi is equally compelling. Communities have longstanding historical, spiritual, and livelihood connections to the forest. The landscape contains sacred sites, cultural heritage areas, sites of traditional ceremonies, and resources fundamental to community well-being. Local people depend on the forest for farming, fishing, hunting, non-timber forest products, medicinal plants, construction materials, and income-generating activities. Studies conducted throughout the landscape consistently demonstrate that conservation efforts must recognize and accommodate these relationships if they are to be effective and enduring.

This proposal to establish a protected area in Wonegizi is grounded in a long history of conservation policy and scientific interest in Liberia's forests, as well as the government's policy to ensure that Liberians benefit from their natural resources in a sustainable manner. Since the late nineteenth century, ecological research and successive national conservation initiatives have highlighted Liberia's Upper Guinean forests as globally important for biodiversity conservation. Wonegizi, formerly part of the North Lorma National Forest, has been recognized as a national conservation priority for more than six decades and was identified as one of Liberia's highest-priority proposed protected areas under the Protected Areas Network Strategic Plan. The establishment of a protected area in Wonegizi is supported by a strong framework of international and national commitments, including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, CITES, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and other regional and global conservation agreements to which Liberia is a Party. Nationally, the proposal aligns with the Constitution of Liberia, the Protected Forest Areas Network Act, the National Forestry Reform Law, the Community Rights Law, the Wildlife Conservation and Protected Area Management Law, the Land Rights Act, the Gbehzohn Declaration, and more recent policy commitments under Liberia's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, National Conservation Strategy, and revised REDD+ Strategy. Collectively, these instruments commit Liberia to expanding and strengthening its protected area network while ensuring that conservation is implemented through participatory, equitable, and rights-based approaches that recognize community ownership, governance, and sustainable use of natural resources.

For more than a decade, the Government of Liberia, local communities, and conservation partners have worked together to lay the foundations for the conservation and sustainable management of Wonegizi. Since 2013, substantial investments have been made in biodiversity research, biomonitoring, REDD+ readiness, livelihood improvement programs, conservation agriculture, village savings and loan associations, agroforestry, community governance, and awareness-raising initiatives. These efforts have directly benefited communities while strengthening the evidence base for long-term conservation. They have also demonstrated that conservation and rural development can be pursued together, rather than as competing objectives. The Wonegizi landscape, therefore, represents one of Liberia's most important opportunities to advance a new generation of conservation that is firmly rooted in community rights and local stewardship, to advance long-term sustainable development.

The journey toward establishing a protected area has, at times, been long and complex. However, this has been both necessary and appropriate. The adoption of Liberia's Land Rights Act in 2018 fundamentally changed the conservation landscape by recognizing and protecting customary land rights. In response, the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) and partners paused previous gazettelement efforts to ensure that any future protected area would be developed in a manner consistent with the law and with emerging national commitments to rights-based conservation. Significant effort was invested in Customary Land Formalization (CLF), participatory land governance, and community-led decision-making processes.

The completion of key stages of the CLF process marks a major milestone for Wonegizi. Through extensive community engagement, self-identification processes, participatory mapping, boundary harmonization, establishment of Community Land Development and Management Committees (CLDMCs), and issuance of customary land deeds, ownership and governance arrangements have been substantially clarified. This process has strengthened, rather than weakened, the case for conservation by creating a clear legal and institutional foundation for a protected area that respects community ownership while advancing national biodiversity objectives, in line with the Global Biodiversity Framework 30 X 30 Target.

Wonegizi now presents a unique opportunity for Liberia to establish a protected area that reflects Liberia's commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Global Biodiversity Framework, and to align the National Wildlife Conservation and Protected Area Management Law with the Land Rights Act. The proposed Multiple Sustainable Use Reserve (MSUR) model offers a practical pathway to protect biodiversity while maintaining sustainable community use, safeguarding cultural values, and promoting equitable benefit-sharing through collaborative governance arrangements.

Importantly, the current stage of the process is characterized by considerable momentum and broad support among affected communities. Recent consultations indicate strong recognition of the value of conservation and widespread support for establishing the protected area in Wonegizi. Communities generally view the creation of protected areas as a question of how and when it should occur, rather than whether it should occur at all. There is also strong support for a co-management model that combines community leadership, customary governance structures, and the FDA's technical mandate.

At the same time, this document recognizes that several important actions remain outstanding before the gazettelement process can be considered complete. Most significantly, boundary negotiations and harmonization are still ongoing, meaning the final boundary and map have yet to be finalized. While the previously flagged boundary is broadly accepted as the basis for the future protected area, many communities have requested adjustments to accommodate

livelihood needs and future farming requirements. The final protected area map, coordinates, and total area, therefore, remain subject to completion of these community-led negotiations.

Similarly, while substantial progress has been made through the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) process, consultations remain ongoing. Communities have been engaged through an iterative FPIC approach designed to ensure that decisions are made with adequate information and sufficient time for deliberation. To date, communities have signed, or are in the process of signing, provisional consent documents expressing support for the creation of a protected area. Many of the issues and concerns raised during consultations, including the co-management arrangement, will be addressed by developing a participatory management plan following gazettement. This plan will provide the framework for sustainable resource use, governance, access rights, cultural protections, livelihood support, monitoring, and benefit sharing. However, some matters require resolution before gazettement and before final consent is secured. Consequently, the FDA and partners intend to return to communities in the coming weeks to share outstanding information, complete boundary-related discussions, and supplement the provisional consent process with the information necessary for communities to make fully informed decisions. The next steps include wider consultations with stakeholders at the district, county, and national levels, to be carried out during the 60-day public consultation.

This gazettement package brings together extensive ecological, social, cultural, legal, and governance information that collectively demonstrates the exceptional importance of Wonegizi and the strong justification for its long-term conservation as a protected area. With customary land rights now substantially clarified, strong community engagement already achieved, and a broad consensus emerging around a co-managed rights-based approach, Liberia is now closer than ever to securing the future of one of its most important forest landscapes. The immediate priority is to maintain this momentum, complete the remaining consultation and boundary processes, and ensure that the eventual protected area is built on a foundation of community rights, transparency, shared governance, and lasting conservation outcomes.



Figure 1: Location of the Wonegizi PPA

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE CONTEXT OF CONSERVATION IN LIBERIA

1.1 CONTEXT OF CONSERVATION

Liberia covers a land area of 9.58 million hectares (111,000 square kilometers), bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the south, the Republic of Sierra Leone to the north-west, Guinea to the north, and the Republic of the Ivory Coast to the south-east. Geographically, Liberia lies between 4°30' and 8°30' northern latitude and 7°30' and 11°30' western longitude. Liberia has the highest forest cover in West Africa. Liberia's forests lie entirely within the Upper Guinean Forests Ecosystem (UGFE), which extends from Guinea through Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, and Ghana to Togo. The UGFE is a global biodiversity hotspot, recognized by conservation biologists as a landscape rich in endemic species at risk of extinction. In 1999, the West African Conservation Priority-Setting Exercise for the UGFE designated Liberia as the highest-priority country in humid West Africa for biodiversity conservation. Liberia, which contains the largest remaining forests in the region (over 40%), has 41% of its territory designated as exceptionally important for biodiversity. The forest is situated in two major areas in the northwest and southeast of the country, featuring highly diverse ecological communities, unique flora and fauna, and a mosaic of forest types that serve as habitats for several endemic and rare species.

The past two decades have been a period of recovery and reform for Liberia. Recent legislative changes have opened new opportunities to implement rights-based conservation approaches that can empower rural communities while fulfilling the ambitions of both national forest conservation policy and the Global Biodiversity Framework.

1.2 HISTORIC SCIENTIFIC INITIATIVES

Ecological research in Liberia during the late nineteenth century focused primarily on museum-based natural history, with the forest entering scientific understanding through mobile collecting, specimen cataloging, and field biological observations tied to specific rivers and coastal areas.

1.2.1 European Initiatives

A German Naturalist, Schweitzer, carried out the first scientific collection of specimens from Liberia between 1875 and 1877, followed by a group of Swiss naturalists who collected Liberian biological specimens from 1879 to 1890. Another notable example is the Leiden Museum's pioneering expedition led by Swiss biologist Johann Büttikofer. His two extended stays in Liberia (1879–82 and 1886–87) produced one of the earliest comprehensive zoological records from the country and popularized Liberia's wildlife.

1.2.2 American Initiatives

The Americans followed the Europeans, with Harvey S. Firestone sponsoring the first shipment of 500 plant specimens from Harbel to museums in the United States of America. Firestone's 1926 expedition included the shipment of a pygmy hippo from Liberia as a gift to the US president, Theodore Roosevelt. From 1926 to 1927, four Harvard zoologists, led by Glover Allen, conducted field studies on Liberia's mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and insects. Firestone Tire and Rubber Company sponsored a collection expedition to Liberia conducted by the director of the Smithsonian Zoological Park, Dr. William Mann, for the US National Museum. Finally, in 1951, a US Army officer, Karl Meyer, published the first estimate

of the national forest estate, based on his interpretation of aerial photographs, which reported an estimated 8.95 million acres of forested land.

1.3 FOCUS ON LIBERIA'S FORESTS

These European and American-led expeditions set the stage for global conservation concerns in Liberia. In November 1951, President William V. S. Tubman submitted a draft bill to the National Legislature to govern Liberia's forests, drawing heavily on the recommendations of the American forester Karl Mayer. As the Forest Products Specialist for the US-supported Liberian Forest Survey, he drew on forest reconnaissance work he led from 1947 to 1949 for his 1951 publication. The report titled *Forest Resources of Liberia* marked a significant milestone in the adoption of scientific forestry practices. The passage of the 1953 Forest Conservation Act translated this technocratic diagnosis into law. The Bureau of Forest and Wildlife Conservation, created under the act, was Liberia's first official forestry administration. The Act signaled a clear shift in the status of the forested interior: from a space that had largely escaped direct administrative control to a national asset that could be legally classified, reserved, and managed in the service of economic development. At the heart of the 1953 Act was a new legal geography of forests. The law authorized the creation of Government Forest Reserves and Native Authority Forest Reserves, as well as communal forests and potential national parks. The 1953 Act was followed by more detailed regulatory instruments. In 1957, the government issued a "Supplementary Act for the Conservation of the Forests of the Republic of Liberia." A central pillar of this regulatory framework was the creation of a network of national forests. Building on Mayer's maps, the Bureau of Forest Conservation demarcated twelve large national forests across the country during the late 1950s, posting boundary markers and guards to keep out farmers and control hunters. These forests were conceived as the core of a permanent forest estate on which scientific forestry would be practiced, and over which the state would have exclusive authority to grant utilization rights.

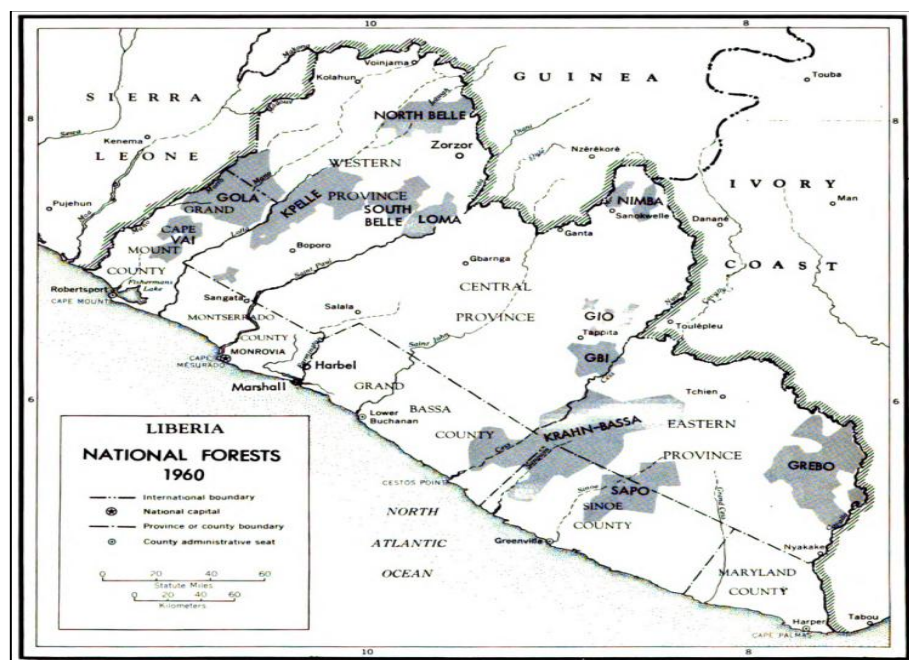


Figure 2: Declared National Forests in 1960¹

¹ Source: Holsoe, T. . 1961. *Third report on forestry progress in Liberia, 1951-1959, United States Operations Mission to Liberia*. Washington: International Cooperation Administration.

Initiated at the end of 1960 and completed in 1967, the German–Liberian national forest inventory, led by Manfred Sachtler, was the most comprehensive early attempt to quantify Liberia’s forests. The inventory focused on the twelve declared national forests and adjacent areas, covering 1.6 million hectares, combining aerial photography with extensive ground sampling. The inventory detailed very important characteristics of the Liberian forest, including endemic, vulnerable, endangered, and threatened animal and plant species. One of the surveyed areas was the North Lorma National Forest (created by the Government of Liberia in 1959), which was later split into Wonegizi and Wologizi Proposed Protected Areas. In 1969, working as a consultant for the IUCN, Kai Curry-Lindahl called for the establishment of a nature conservation and national parks program.

The high-priority areas included Sapo National Forest, Krahn–Bassa National Forest, Grebo National Forest, the Gola National Forest, and North Lorma National Forest (Wonegizi). The heightened interest in conservation prompted the creation of the Act establishing the Forestry Development Authority in 1976. This Act gives the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) responsibility for conservation, recreational, and wildlife resources. The FDA has received financial and technical assistance from numerous initiatives from inception to date. These initiatives and interventions offered promising outcomes from 1977 to 1989.

1.4 CIVIL WAR AND POST-CONFLICT GOVERNANCE REFORM

Liberia shares forest resources with its neighbors in the west, north-east, and south-east. These cross-border resources provide many benefits, including critical ecosystem services such as water and carbon. However, unfortunately, these forests also became the site of rebel insurgencies between 1989 and 2002. As a result of the civil crisis, forest sector governance collapsed between 1990 and 2003. However, as part of the post-conflict forest governance reform process, international conservation initiatives have increased exponentially, placing Liberia in a favorable position to formulate a state-of-the-art reformed conservation agenda and roadmap. The impacts of these initiatives are the emergence of more than six conservation nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the establishment of five Protected Areas in Liberia today.

To support the revival of conservation across the country as part of its 3Cs policy, the Wologizi-Wonegizi Proposed Protected Area ranked among the top three protected areas to be created for the proposed protected area network. Toward this end, the FDA received Global Environment Facility (GEF) support through the World Bank to finance biodiversity conservation through the Consolidation of Liberia's Protected Areas Network (COPAN), which aimed to expand and effectively manage Liberia's protected area network. The COPAN project, which ran from 2008 to 2013, sought to consolidate Liberia's protected areas, increase community participation in wildlife management, enhance community awareness of forest conservation issues, and develop sustainable livelihoods to reduce rural dependence on forests and wildlife.

Table 1: Prioritization Exercise for Wonegizi-Wologizi PPA²

Threats	Opportunities
1. Iron ore mining that produces erosion and contamination of watercourses 2. Increased subsistence farming, mostly due to population increase upon refugees return over the last 5 years 3. Legal and illegal logging with consequent habitat degradation 4. Commercial hunting and illegal pet trading 5. Uncontrolled fires in savannah ecosystems	1. Rolling topography which makes the area unsuitable for farming 2. Legislation and policies for sustainable forestry and conservation have been enacted 3. Unique biodiversity, both in terms of species and habitats 4. Possible funding from GEF, IUCN, BirdLife, USAID, KfW, CEPF, FDA, Great Apes, etc. 5. Research opportunities 6. Ecotourism potential, given important species, culture, and scenery 7. Adjacent to the Guinea Forest (500,000 ha); possibilities for transboundary peace-park establishment 8. Wonegizi strategically located as a conservation corridor to other protected areas in Guinea 9. Habitat of flagship species such as western chimpanzees and other primates, forest elephant, pygmy hippopotamus, etc. 10. Important Bird Area (IBA) with one of few records of the White-necked rock-fowl 11. Distribution of farming communities offers opportunity for integrating community land use practices in protected area management in buffer zone

² FDA. 2008. Liberia Protected Areas Network - Strategic Plan 2008-2013. Monrovia, Liberia: Forestry Development Administration (FDA)

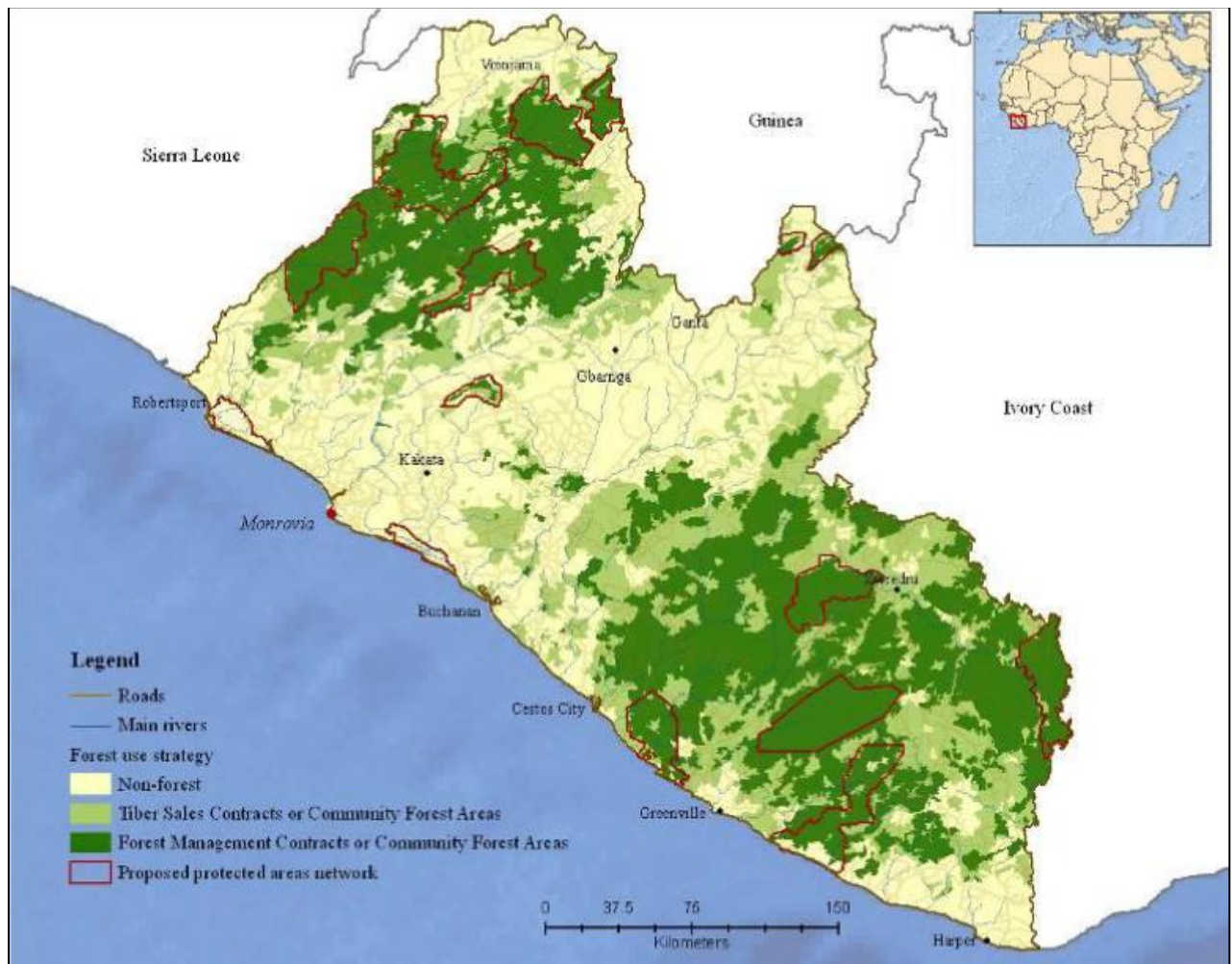


Figure 3: Map of proposed PA Network (outlined in red)³

³ FDA. 2008. *Liberia Protected Areas Network - Strategic Plan 2008-2013*. Monrovia, Liberia: Forestry Development Administration (FDA)

CHAPTER 2: INSTRUMENTS GUIDING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PROTECTED & CONSERVED AREAS IN LIBERIA

2.1 CONTEXT

The Act Adopting the National Wildlife Conservation and Protected Area Management Law sets out the legal means for how Protected Areas (PA's) are established and managed effectively. PAs are geographic spaces on land or at sea that are designated by law for protection and management for specific purposes and are categorized in accordance with international standards set by IUCN. Reflecting on the background of the growth and development of conservation activities in Liberia, there are two types of legal instruments: International and National. International instruments are often in the form of conventions or treaties to which the Liberian government affixes its signature and subjects them to ratification by the national legislature. The key instruments that guide and facilitate the establishment, development, and management of protected areas in Liberia are listed below.

2.2 INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS

International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

This body defines a protected area as “a clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values” (IUCN Definition 2008). The IUCN sets standards and criteria for establishing and managing different types of protected areas. Categories depend on the ecological and cultural characteristics of the area. The IUCN categories of protected areas are: Strict Nature Reserve and Wilderness Area (Category I a & b), National Park (Category II), National Monument or Feature (Category III), Habitat/Species Management Area (Category IV), Protected Landscape/Seascape (Category V), and Protected Area with Sustainable Use of Natural Resources (Category VI). Liberia ascended to this Union in 1981, facilitating and guiding the establishment and management of protected areas such as Wonegizi.

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Launched at the 1992 Earth Summit, it now includes 196 governments. Its primary aim is to protect plant and animal species, promote sustainable use of natural resources, and ensure equitable sharing of their benefits. The CBD's Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) was adopted during the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in December 2022 to halt and reverse nature loss. Target 3 of the GBF calls for conserving “30% of Land, Waters and Seas” by 2030. Liberia officially joined the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) on November 8, 2000.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES)

CITES is a global agreement aimed at ensuring that international trade in wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. CITES regulates international trade in certain species by imposing specific controls. All imports, exports, re-exports, and introductions of the covered species, listed in three Appendices, according to the degree of protection they need, must be approved through a licensing system. Each country must designate management authorities to manage the licensing process and scientific authorities to assess the impacts of trade on the species' status. In Liberia, the FDA serves as the management authority, and the

University of Liberia acts as the scientific advisor. Liberia ascended to CITES on March 11, 1981

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

Including Liberia, 194 countries and one regional organization have signed and ratified this instrument. Liberia signed it on June 12, 1992, and ratified it on November 5, 2002. The objective of the treaty is to "stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system". It provides the essential legal basis for global climate talks, including key agreements such as the Paris Agreement. This instrument provides an opportunity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Wonegizi, where a pilot REDD+ project has been under development since 2013.

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

This treaty was signed by member countries in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, committing them not to treat wetlands within their borders as wasteland, but to maintain the ecological character of all 'Wetlands of International Importance' and to ensure the sustainable use of wetlands. Liberia ratified this treaty, meeting the requirements for all wetlands in the Wonegizi area. Liberia officially joined the convention on November 2, 2003.

United Nations Convention on Combating Desertification (UNCCD)

Established in 1994, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is the only legally binding treaty that links environment and development to sustainable land management. The Convention specifically addresses the arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid areas, known as the drylands, where some of the most vulnerable ecosystems and peoples can be found. Up to 197 countries have signed the treaty, with Liberia joining the treaty in 1998.

The Abidjan Convention

The Convention for Cooperation in the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Atlantic Coast of the West, Central and Southern Africa Region (also called the Abidjan Convention) was adopted in Abidjan on 5 August 1984. Liberia officially ratified the agreement in 2005.

Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)

The CMS is an international treaty under the aegis of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) that brings countries together to safeguard migratory species across their ranges. Liberia became a full Party to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) on December 28, 2004, after joining on September 1, 2004.

African Convention for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources

Is a continent-wide treaty aimed at promoting the sustainable use and protection of soil, water, flora, and fauna across Africa. First adopted in 1968, it mandates that nations integrate environmental conservation into their development strategies. Liberia ascended to the treaty on November 22, 1978.

The ECOWAS Forest Convergence Plan (FCP)

The FCP is a regional initiative involving 15 West African countries aimed at protecting and sustainably managing transboundary forests. Originally established in 2013, it has been

revised into a new framework covering 2026–2035 to address deforestation, climate change, and biodiversity conservation.

2.3 NATIONAL INSTRUMENTS

Constitution of the Republic of Liberia (1986)

The Constitution mandates citizens' involvement in decisions regarding natural resource management, including forests, as outlined in Article 7, which states: "The Republic shall, consistent with the principles of individual freedom and social justice enshrined in this Constitution, manage the national economy and the natural resources of Liberia in such manner as shall ensure the maximum feasible participation of Liberian citizens under conditions of equality as to advance the general welfare of the Liberian people and the economic development of Liberia."

Environmental Protection and Management Law of Liberia (2002)

The EPML of 2002 established Liberia's legal framework for sustainable development. It provides the framework through which the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) collaborates with various line ministries and agencies, including the FDA, to conserve the country's natural resources. The law requires businesses to obtain environmental permits, prevents pollution, and protects forests. The core principles underpinning the law are: sustainable development, the precautionary principle, the polluter-pays principle, and public participation.

The Act Establishing Protected Forest Areas Network (2003)

Enacted on October 10, 2003, this law elevated Protected Areas to a central component of Liberia's approach to forest management by mandating the establishment of a Protected Forest Areas Network. It stipulates that at least 30% of Liberia's total forest must be permanently conserved. The law protects vital habitats by prohibiting damaging activities such as mining and commercial farming within these ecological zones.

The National Forestry Reform Policy and Implementation Strategy (2005)

After the civil war, in 2003, the Accra Peace Conference on Liberia established an interim government with a mandate to implement reforms to restore law and order and build a new government of peace and stability. This policy was formulated in 2005 to reform the forestry sector. The policy reform is based on three pillars: Commercial, Conservation, and Community ("3C's"). This refocused 30% or 1.5 million hectares of Liberia's forest areas for biodiversity conservation.

The Act Adopting the National Forestry Reform Law (2006)

This instrument followed the adoption of the National Forestry Reform Policy and Implementation Strategy and comprehensively codified the sustainable management and protection of Liberia's forest resources into law. A large portion of this law governs commercial forestry. However, chapters 8 and 9 exclusively address environmental protection, the Protected Forest Areas Network, and wildlife conservation. Specifically, Chapter 9.2 – 5 details the process for establishing forest protected areas by proposing them in a gazettelement package for presidential and legislative approval. It then became law and was integrated by the Protected Forest Areas Network Act of 2003.

An Act to Establish the Community Rights Law with Respect to Forest Lands (2009)

This instrument was established to ensure the participation of all citizens in the sustainable management of their natural resources, especially land, as provided for in the Liberian constitution and international conventions and treaties. It specifically defines the rights of communities with respect to land that contains forest resources.

An Act Adopting the National Wildlife Conservation and Protected Area Management Law (2016)

This instrument was created by an Act of the Legislature to promote national wildlife conservation and Protected Area management. Its objectives include establishing conservation areas and managing and protecting wildlife. This instrument re-emphasizes, elaborates on, and expands the scope of the 2006 NFRL regarding wildlife conservation and Protected Area management, including the process for establishing protected areas. It recommits the government to set aside at least 30% of its forests as protected areas.

Land Rights Act (2018)

The Land Rights Act aims to delineate the different categories of land ownership and rights recognized in Liberia, to prescribe the means by which each of the categories of land may be acquired, used, transferred and otherwise managed and to confirm, declare, and ensure equal access and equal protection with respect to land ownership, use and management, including ensuring that Customary Land and Private Land are given equal legal protection.

Under the 2018 Land Rights Act, therefore, land ownership in areas targeted for conservation intervention rests on whether the area is already a legally gazetted protected area (e.g., East Nimba Nature Reserve) or merely a proposed protected area on customary/community land (as is the case in Wonegizi). If it was gazetted by the Forestry Development Authority before the Act, it remains a protected area within government land. But land that had only been proposed, and not yet gazetted by the Act's effective date, must be negotiated between the FDA and the community, as has been done across Wonegizi.

Gbehzohn Declaration 2023

This landmark resolution affirmed the centrality of community rights in conservation and committed stakeholders to a rights-based approach that aligns with the Land Rights Act. The declaration resolves to undertake customary land formalization (CLF) and respect the right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) of affected communities before the commencement of any new protected areas. The declaration also recognized the potential for innovative conservation models, including co-management and community-led governance, to help Liberia meet its national and international biodiversity targets.

National Forest Forum Resolution 2025

The 2025 National Forest Forum resolved to strengthen forest governance and sustainable land-use management in Liberia through improved institutional coordination, stronger enforcement, and clearer demarcation of forest and agricultural boundaries. Participants called on the Forestry Development Authority to address discrepancies in national forest-cover data, strengthen monitoring systems, and improve interagency collaboration to tackle illegal activities, including unauthorized mining, illegal logging, and unsustainable land conversion. The forum further emphasized the need to enhance community participation and governance in forest management, particularly in the context of the Land Rights Act and increasing community ownership of forest resources.

The forum also resolved to accelerate Liberia's climate and conservation agenda by operationalizing the Carbon Market Authority (CMA), advancing REDD+ implementation, and strengthening the country's readiness to access carbon finance. Stakeholders endorsed actions to finalize national carbon policies, establish a carbon registry, clarify carbon rights and land-tenure arrangements, improve monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) systems, and identify priority carbon project sites. Participants further called for urgent progress on the Wonegizi REDD+ Project and recognized the importance of leveraging emerging opportunities in carbon markets, biodiversity conservation, and ecosystem service payments to support sustainable forest management and climate resilience.

To enhance the economic contribution of forests while safeguarding environmental values, the forum resolved to improve commercial forestry regulation and compliance, expand domestic value addition, diversify revenue streams through climate finance and ecotourism, and mobilize sustainable financing for conservation. Strategic priorities adopted by the forum include building institutional capacity, strengthening community forestry governance, scaling up restoration initiatives, developing blended-finance mechanisms, and improving transparency in forest resource management. To ensure implementation of these commitments, the Forum Declaration endorsed the establishment of a Technical team tasked with developing an Action Plan and monitoring framework, including clear indicators to track progress on the forum's recommendations and Liberia's broader sustainable forestry objectives.

Draft Liberia Forest Sector policy and Strategy (2026 - 2036) - in progress

The Draft Liberia Forest Sector Policy and Strategy 2026–2036 provides a renewed framework for sustainable forest governance and management, replacing the 2006 National Forestry Policy and Implementation Strategy. The revised policy addresses emerging challenges and opportunities, particularly climate change, land tenure reform, biodiversity conservation, and community rights. It aligns the forestry sector with Liberia's ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development and the country's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement. A major innovation of the 2026 policy is the introduction of measurable sector targets, including reducing deforestation, maintaining a permanent forest estate, increasing industrial roundwood production, expanding domestic processing, and creating formal employment in the forest sector.

A key policy revision is the transition from the traditional "4Cs" framework (Commercial, Community, Conservation, and Carbon) to four strategic implementation pillars: sector governance; production forests and forest-based industries; management of protected forests; and buffer zone management. The policy places stronger emphasis on institutional strengthening of the Forestry Development Authority, improved interagency coordination, digital monitoring systems such as LiberTrace, forest carbon governance, and sustainable financing mechanisms. It also incorporates recent legal and policy developments, including the Community Rights Law (2009), the Land Rights Act (2018), REDD+ initiatives, and emerging carbon market opportunities, thereby providing greater recognition of community tenure rights and climate-related forest management objectives.

The updated strategy further prioritizes economic transformation and conservation outcomes by revitalizing forest concessions, strengthening community forest management, promoting forest plantations, expanding protected areas, and developing value-added forest industries. New policy directions include support for forest certification, ecotourism, payment for ecosystem services, carbon financing, restoration of degraded forests, urban forestry, and landscape-level land-use planning to reduce pressures from agriculture, mining, and other

drivers of deforestation. Collectively, these updates seek to balance economic growth, community livelihoods, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilience, positioning Liberia's forests as a strategic asset for sustainable national development over the next decade.

National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) - 2026-2030

Validated in June 2026, the NBSAP aims to provide a strategic framework for the sustainable management and conservation of Liberia's rich biodiversity over the final five years of this decade. Structured around strategic goals, it serves as Liberia's primary mechanism for implementing its commitments to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), biodiversity-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

National Conservation Strategy (NCS) - 2026-2030

The National Conservation Strategy 2026-2030 was validated alongside the NBSAP 2026-2030. It aims to ensure the effective, equitable, and sustainable implementation of the NBSAP through broad stakeholder collaboration, specifically targeting GBF 30 by 30 framework. Through a participatory and rights-based approach, it places local communities at the center of implementation. It is distinguished by its holistic integration of the "four Cs" framework (conservation, community, commercial, and carbon forestry) and the inclusion of diverse disciplines to balance biodiversity conservation with sustainable economic growth.

National Revised REDD+ Strategy

Liberia's revised National REDD+ Strategy (July 2025) provides a framework for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation while supporting sustainable economic development and community livelihoods. Building on the country's REDD+ readiness work and the lessons learned from implementation of the Liberia Forest Sector Project and other initiatives, the strategy recognizes that deforestation is driven primarily by shifting agriculture, charcoal production, chainsaw logging (pit sawing), commercial logging, mining, and agricultural expansion. Updated data from Liberia's National Forest Inventory and Forest Reference Emission Level highlight the importance of focusing interventions in the Northwest and Southeast Forest landscapes, where the majority of emissions from deforestation and forest degradation occur.

The strategy is organized around five strategic priorities: (1) reducing forest loss from shifting agriculture, charcoal production, chainsaw logging, and artisanal mining; (2) minimizing the impacts of commercial logging through sustainable forest management and stronger standards; (3) completing and effectively managing Liberia's Protected Areas Network; (4) preventing or offsetting the loss of high-carbon-stock and high-conservation-value forests in agricultural and mining concessions; and (5) ensuring fair and sustainable benefit sharing from REDD+ activities. Key interventions include promoting sustainable agriculture, alternative energy sources, community-led forest management, improved land-use planning, protection of wildlife corridors, conservation of forests within concessions, biodiversity offsets for mining, and the development of clear carbon rights, benefit-sharing arrangements, and a robust monitoring, reporting, and verification system.

Implementation of the strategy follows a phased, "nested" approach that begins with project- and landscape-level interventions and scales up toward a national REDD+ program capable of attracting results-based payments. The strategy emphasizes strong community participation, gender inclusion, institutional capacity building, and alignment with priorities such as those outlined in the ARREST (Agriculture/Agribusiness, Roads, Rule of Law,

Education, Sanitation & Health, and Tourism) Agenda for Inclusive Development, climate-change commitments, biodiversity conservation goals, and the Land Rights Act. While the estimated implementation cost is substantial, the strategy views REDD+ finance as a catalyst for long-term green growth rather than a sole funding source, seeking to combine carbon finance with investments in sustainable forestry, agriculture, conservation, and rural development to generate lasting environmental, social, and economic benefits for Liberia.

CHAPTER 3: DESCRIPTION & JUSTIFICATION FOR THE DESIGNATION OF WONEGIZI AS A PROTECTED OR CONSERVED AREA

3.1 OVERVIEW OF WONEGIZI

The Upper Guinean Forest Priority-Setting Workshop in 1999 identified the North Lorma National Forest in northwestern Liberia as a ‘very high’ conservation priority area (Bakarr et al. 2001). The area was designated a National Forest in the 1970s, and a portion of the National Forest was later scheduled to become the Wonegizi Proposed Protected Area (PPA) under the National Forestry Reform Laws of 2006, as part of the Government of Liberia (GoL) plan to establish a protected area (PA) network. Under the Protected Areas Network Strategic Plan (2008-2013), Wonegizi was identified as a priority area for legal protection, ranking highest for species diversity, threat level, species vulnerability, connectivity potential, and irreplaceability. The Wonegizi PPA is situated in Lofa County in northwestern Liberia, spanning three administrative districts - Zorzor, Voinjama, and Quardu-Gboni. The Wonegizi Mountains is contiguous with the Ziaman Man and Biosphere Reserve (Massif du Ziaman) in Guinea, and along with Wologizi, form an important transboundary forest landscape, the Ziaman-Wonegizi-Wologizi (ZWW) landscape. The landscape links forest blocks across Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone, providing connectivity that supports the movement of wildlife such as forest elephants and strengthens cross-border conservation cooperation among the three Mano River Union member states. The Wonegizi and Wologizi mountain ranges include Liberia’s highest peaks (Mt. Wuteve, 1,447 m, and Mt. Wonegizi, 1,110 m), excluding Mt. Nimba.

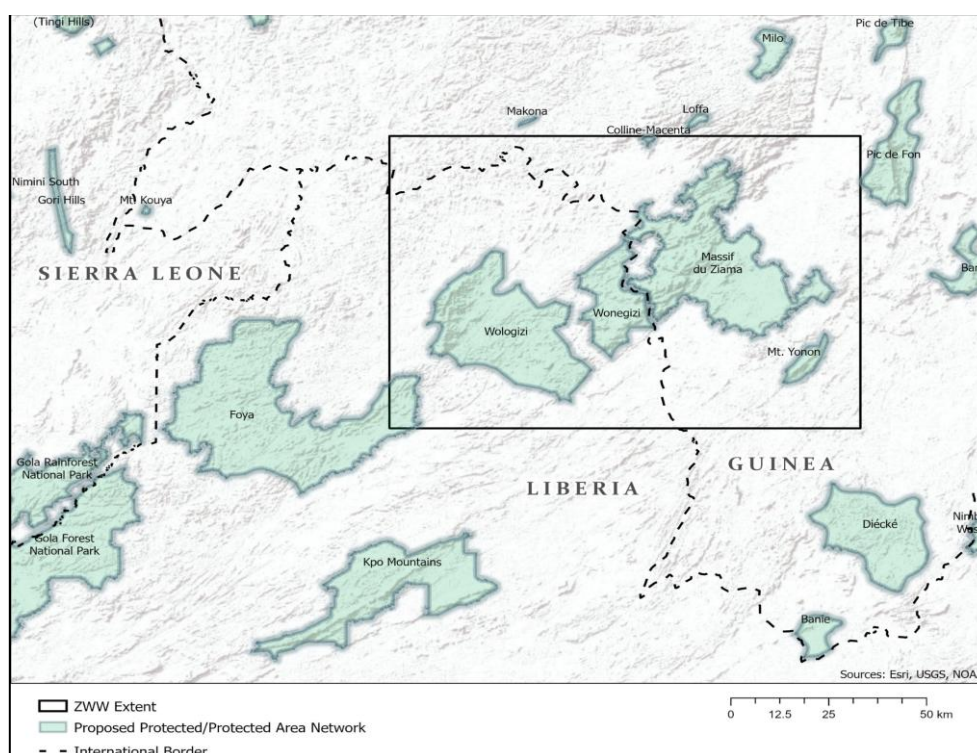


Figure 4: Wonegizi in the wider ZWW Transboundary Landscape⁴

⁴ Fauna & Flora International (FFI). 2020. *A Landscape Level Assessment of Viable Wildlife Corridors within the Ziaman-Wonegizi-Wologizi Transboundary Landscape*. FFI: Cambridge U.K.

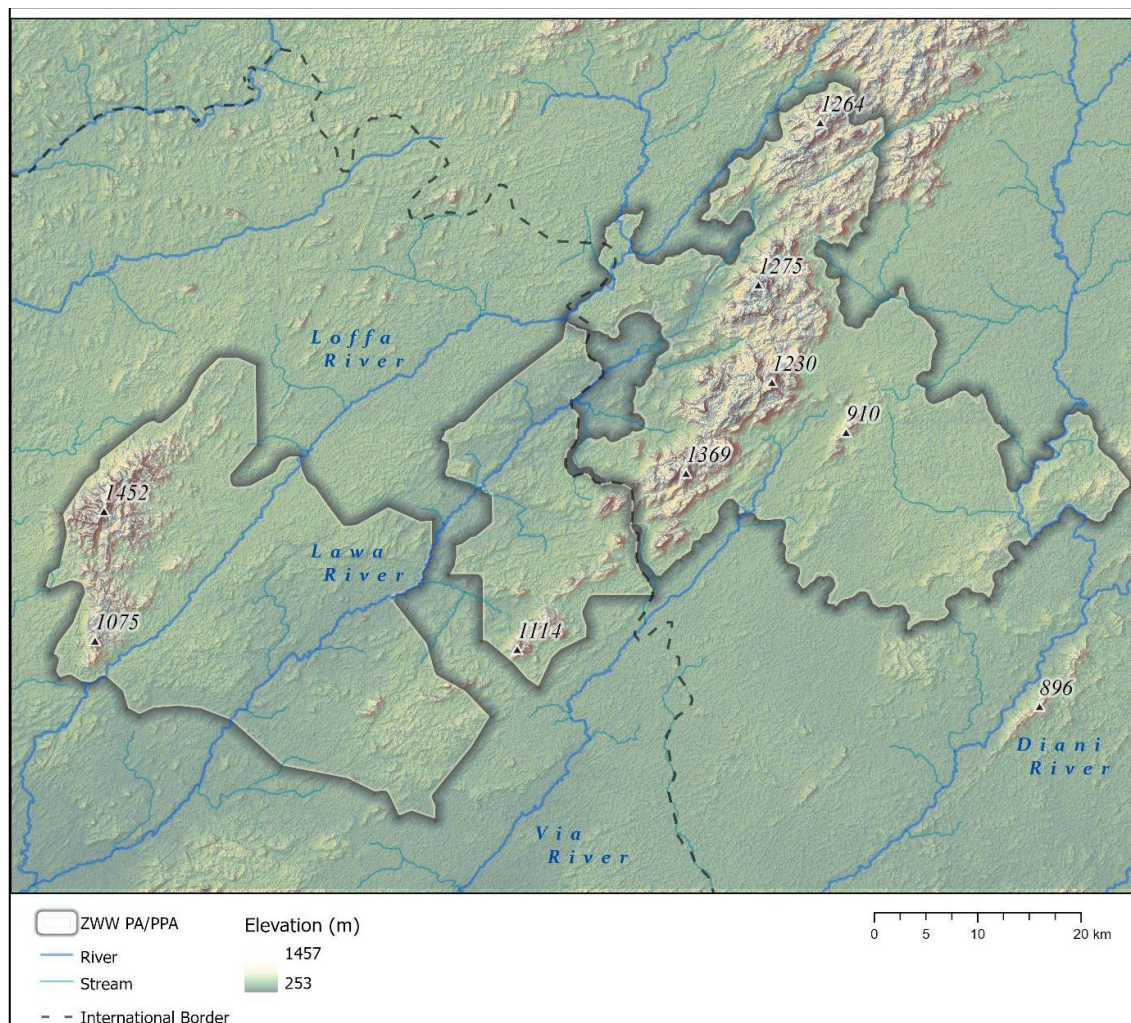


Figure 5: Topography and Hydrology of the wider ZWW Landscape⁵

3.2 BIODIVERSITY

Wonegizi PPA is situated in the Western Guinean Lowland Forests Global 200 Ecoregion (which lists the World's 200 most important areas for conservation) and the Guinean Forests of West Africa biodiversity hotspot, as listed by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Facility (CEPF). Wonegizi is also an Important Bird Area (IBA), forming part of the Upper Guinea Forest Endemic Bird Area (EBA) and a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA). A nationwide ecological survey by IUCN and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in 1979 recognized the biodiversity values of the country's forest (which includes the PPA) as part of a transboundary forest complex with the Guinean Ziama Biosphere Reserve.

3.2.1 Faunal Diversity

The Wonegizi PPA is an important component of the Upper Guinea Forest Ecosystem, a global biodiversity hotspot characterized by high species richness and endemism. Extensive scientific research since 2010 has documented the area's biological value, confirming its role as a refuge for numerous rare, threatened, and endangered (RTE) species.

Medium and large mammals have been the focus of intensive research, including the 2018 HCV assessment, which was complemented by a Large Mammal Rapid Biodiversity

⁵ Fauna & Flora International (FFI). 2020. *A Landscape Level Assessment of Viable Wildlife Corridors within the Ziama-Wonegizi-Wologizi Transboundary Landscape*. FFI: Cambridge U.K.

Assessment (ELRECO, 2019), the 2019 camera-trap survey, and ongoing SMART patrols supervised by F&F since 2019. To date, 29 medium- to large-sized mammal species have been detected, confirming that the PPA serves as a critical refuge for Critically Endangered species such as the western Chimpanzee and the African Forest Elephant. Other high-priority species include the Endangered Pygmy Hippopotamus, Diana Monkey, Upper Guinea Red Colobus, Giant Ground Pangolin, and White-bellied Pangolin, as well as carnivores such as the Vulnerable Leopard and African Golden Cat.

Small mammals were primarily documented in the PPA during the 2019 rapid landscape assessment and in eDNA surveys conducted in 2020 and 2022. The landscape-level survey recorded 15 rodent species, 8 shrew species, and 27 bat species, while the 2022 eDNA mammal assay detected 49 unique taxa. Key conservation species include the Endangered Baer's wood mouse and the Vulnerable Nimba otter shrew, both confirmed via eDNA. Threatened bats identified in the region include the Endangered Zيام horseshoe bat, the Guinea horseshoe bat, and Rosevear's serotine, as well as the Vulnerable Aellen's roundleaf bat.

The PPA has been recognized as an Important Bird Area (IBA) since 2001, and bird surveys were conducted during assessments in 2013 and 2018. To date, 126 bird species have been recorded in the PPA. The forest is an important site for the Vulnerable White-necked Picathartes, with several active breeding colonies identified. Other conservation-priority species include the Endangered Timneh Parrot and the Vulnerable White-breasted Guineafowl, Yellow-casqued hornbill, and Yellow-bearded greenbul.

The 2018 HCV field assessment also focused on amphibians, reptiles, and fish, with eDNA studies conducted in 2020 and 2022. The field assessment identified 18 frog and toad species within the PPA, while the eDNA survey detected 23 amphibian taxa. Reptiles were documented through landscape-level assessments in 2019 and through incidental observations during the 2018 HCV study, identifying species such as the Critically Endangered Slender-snouted Crocodile, Home's hinge-backed tortoise, and the Vulnerable African dwarf crocodile. The eDNA surveys detected up to 53 unique fish taxa in the landscape, including the Vulnerable *Madeiran Sardinella*.

Based on the results of these biodiversity studies, it is obvious that with adequate protection and legislation against unsustainable agriculture, hunting, and logging, Wonegizi has the potential to remain a vital habitat for a range of globally significant species and a significant carbon sink for the region.

1. There were confirmed sightings of biome-restricted species, e.g., White-necked Picathartes, Liberian Mongoose (*Liberiictis kuhni*), and a suspected West African Linsang (*Poiana leightoni*) (most likely the first record for western Liberia), as well as Endangered species (EN) such as the pygmy hippopotamus and the Critically Endangered Western Chimpanzee (with what appears to be a viable population) – **HCV 1.**
2. Wonegizi connectivity with the adjacent Zيام forest block forms one of the largest remaining forest complexes in the Upper Guinea region (127,000 ha), supporting viable populations of naturally occurring species, which is why it is classified as Globally Outstanding by WWF. The area is recognised for its rare and threatened ecosystems, including transition zones between lowland and wetlands, rocky outcrops and montane forests. The latter is scarce in the Upper Guinea region but is crucial, serving as a refuge for species with specialised habitat requirements. The presence of

indicator species such as the leaf litter frog further indicated intact and high-quality forest habitat. – **HCV 2 & 3.**

3. The forest serves as a key watershed for rivers that supply the communities in and around the forest with essential water for domestic use. It forms part of the critical forested upland watershed of the Lofa River, which flows to Monrovia, the capital, and feeds into the country's largest estuarine and mangrove system, located just outside the latter – **HCV 4.**



Figure 6: Example photos from biodiversity surveys in Wonegizi - Clockwise from top-left: Western chimpanzee; pygmy hippo, white-necked picathartes (rock fowl), and forest elephant

Biodiversity values, both intrinsic and in terms of the provisioning of ecosystem services, highlight the local, national, and international significance of Wonegizi. These values reinforce the need to protect the remaining forest - in addition to the REDD+ project's primary design aim of avoiding greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions from the forest through the cessation of deforestation and degradation.

Species of global conservation significance include those listed as Vulnerable, Endangered, and Critically Endangered under the IUCN threat categories. As species do not move in accordance with human-designated boundaries, maintaining connectivity among forest blocks to allow movement across the landscape (especially for wide-ranging species such as elephants and chimpanzees) is critical. The corridors between Wonegizi, Wologizi, and the Ziam MAB Reserve in Guinea are essential for maintaining the connectivity of this landscape.

3.2.2 Floral diversity

Botanical surveys initiated in 2010 and updated following an expedition in 2013 confirm an abundance of flora biodiversity of global conservation concern. One study reports that the vegetation of the Western Guinean Lowland Forest comprises many different plant associations, several of which are unique to the area. A total of 374 plant species have been documented in the area so far, of which 18% are Upper Guinea endemics. A 2015 study further identified 101 plant species utilized by local communities for ethnobotanical use. Since 2024, FFI has localized more than 200 tree stands from 7 globally threatened species in the PPA, including the Critically Endangered shrub *Tarenna hutchinsonii*, the *Endangered* *Cassia fikifiki* and *Rinorea djalonensis*, as well as several Vulnerable high-value timber species, such as the African Pine (*Tetraberlinia tubmaniana*), *Entandrophragma Candolei*, *Heritiera utilis*, and *Lophira alata*.

Rainfall in most of Lofa County is lower, and seasonality is stronger than in forests further to the south and south-east of Liberia. Therefore, while this area tends to be drier than most other forests in Liberia, it is still wet enough to support tree fern species known from Upper Guinea (like *Cyathea* spp.). As a result, Lofa County is home to a unique floral community. Some species unique to the area include *Anubias gracilis*, *Dicranolepis laciniata*, *Diospyros heudelotii*, *Millettia warneckei*, *Paramacrolobium coeruleum*, *Pseudoprosopis sericea*, *Samanea dinklagei*, and *Allanblackia parviflora*.

3.2.3 Biomonitoring

A total of 39 Community auxiliaries (CAs) have been recruited from surrounding communities and trained to support law enforcement and biodiversity monitoring across the PPA. They receive stipends for regular forest patrols across the PPA. This also forms part of the sustainable livelihoods strategy for the PPA, as ex-hunters are among those now employed as CAs.

Extensive monitoring began in December 2018, following a series of training sessions delivered by the FDA with support from FFI. Since then, FDA Rangers and the CAs have received ongoing training in data collection methodologies, first aid, and the Wildlife Conservation and Protected Area Management Law of Liberia. In 2019, a biodiversity monitoring (biomonitoring) protocol specific to the PPA, with selected bio-indicators, was designed, along with a community-based monitoring plan. The biomonitoring methodology allows survey teams to use hunter tracks, existing roads, and camps within the PPA during data collection and to avoid cutting vegetation whenever possible. All direct and indirect signs of animals observed are recorded. Biomonitoring patrols are conducted by 15 CAs, divided into 3 teams (one team per zone), each led by an FDA Ranger.

Surveillance patrols are conducted by five teams comprising FDA rangers and 24 CAs. The patrol strategy is based on a protocol from the East Nimba Nature Reserve (ENNR) and adapted to the Wonegizi PPA. All teams patrol for approximately 10 days each month across the PPA's three administrative zones. Patrol teams record direct and indirect observations of human activities in the PPA. Patrols also collect opportunistic data on the presence of keystone species like chimpanzees, elephants, and pygmy hippos.

3.2.4 Ecosystem Profile

The two largest rivers in Lofa are the Lofa River and the St. Paul River; the latter flows to the capital Monrovia, located at the mouth of the St. Paul River with its extensive mangrove, which is the largest in Liberia. Wonegizi represents a major part of the Lofa River's watershed, on which many downstream water users depend, with the highlands being the source of these rivers.

The land cover of the Wonegizi PPA is predominantly forest, though it is increasingly a mosaic of agricultural fields, fallow, and varying forest densities. In 2020, a Landscape Level Assessment of Viable Wildlife Corridors within the Ziama-Wonegizi-Wologizi Transboundary Landscape found that the landscape consists of seasonal moist evergreen and semi-deciduous forests. The analysis found that dense-canopy forest makes up approximately 71.14% of the PPA. Secondary forest (regrowth on previously cleared land) accounts for an additional 12.41%. Human activities have significantly altered portions of the landscape. Shrubland and fallow agriculture (locally known as "Farmbush") cover 8.10%, while active agriculture accounts for 7.04%. This agricultural land use is most notable in the northern section along the Lawa River and around settlements such as Barwen, Kargbota, and I-Mah. Other land types include water bodies (rivers and streams at 0.47%), exposed substrate (rocky outcrops and cliffs at 0.55%), roads and tracks (0.16%), grassland (0.10%), and settlements (0.02%).

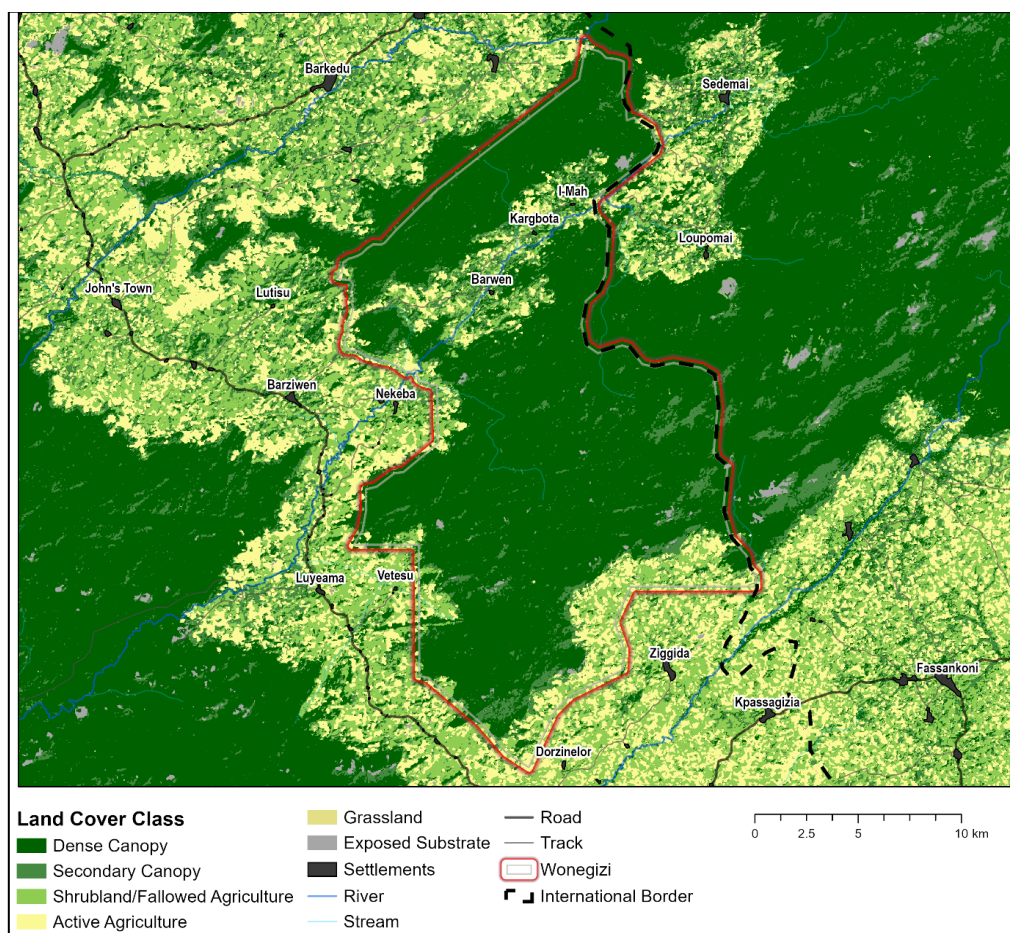


Figure 7: Land cover patterns for the Wonegizi Landscape in 2019⁶

⁶ Fauna & Flora International (FFI). 2020. *A Landscape Level Assessment of Viable Wildlife Corridors within the Ziama-Wonegizi-Wologizi Transboundary Landscape*. FFI: Cambridge U.K.

In conclusion, studies and activities confirm the abundance of floral and faunal diversity (species diversity and richness) in Wonegizi, including a significant number of flagship species of conservation concern. Maintaining the corridor, an important means of species connectivity between the Ziaman and Biosphere Reserve (MAB), the Wonegizi PPA, and the Wologizi PPA, reducing the negative impacts of hunting, logging, agriculture, and mining requires the establishment and management of a new protected area in Liberia. The proposed management model of this site recognizes that communities depend on the forest for livelihoods and socio-cultural identity. The success of this approach will depend on the alignment of conservation priorities with community priorities. The proposed regulated access to forest resources should therefore be designed so that the community can still meet their livelihood, health, cultural, and spiritual needs

3.3 SOCIAL CONTEXT

Lofa County is the second-largest in Liberia and among the most severely affected by 14 years of war. The county suffered extensive damage to infrastructure and basic social services, mass displacement, and loss of life. The capital of Lofa County is Voinjama, an important trading city with a population of 61,308, according to the 2022 Liberia Population and Housing Census. Lofa has six districts, including Zorzor, Voinjama, and Quardu-Gboni, that overlaps with the boundary of the proposed PA. The most prominent tribes in this area include the Lorma and Mandingo ethnic groups, who are members of the Zeayeama, Bondi, and Wanglodu Clans. The residents of the Zeayeama Clan are predominantly Lorma, while the Wanglodu Clan is dominated by Mandingo, and Bondi is a mixture of both Lorma and Mandingo. Lofa County was considered the ‘breadbasket’ of Liberia prior to the war, producing large quantities of food, especially rice, the national staple; today, it remains a key county for agricultural production. Communities in the landscape produce and trade agricultural products such as rice, cocoa, cassava, pineapples, palm oil, palm kernels, and bush meat.

3.3.1 Assessment of forest dependency, livelihoods, and projected land use changes

The forest in Wonegizi was largely undisturbed during Liberia’s fourteen-year civil war, when most rural residents fled the fighting and sought refuge abroad. However, since the conflict ended, forest cover has decreased due to the impact of farming, hunting, and other subsistence-driven yet commercially oriented activities. Subsistence farming is the dominant livelihood activity in the area. Although many people hunt, very few are exclusively hunters. Large-scale commercial logging has not reached this region. Historically, farmers allowed land to remain under fallow for about seven years to restore soil fertility, but increasing population pressure and demand for farmland have reduced fallow periods to approximately four to five years. Forest blocks are cleared and burned, and in the first year, rice, is planted. During the second and sometimes third year, planting focuses on legumes, after which the soil is impoverished. Significantly low yields and a growing population compel farmers to open, or “brush,” new fields annually by converting forest land, while allowing fallows to recover gradually. The demand for produce from existing farmland often exceeds supply, primarily due to very low soil fertility. This fertility quickly deteriorates without enhanced soil management, prompting the ongoing conversion of more areas into farmland. Today, forest areas are the primary source of this new farmland, which is brought into production through traditional swidden techniques. As a result, conversion is pushed deeper into areas of high canopy cover.

One of the cultivated crops of high economic value is hot pepper (*Capsicum annum*). It is scattered-sown with rice in upland farms, and after harvesting the rice, the pepper is

maintained for about a year or two, after which yields begin to decline, and farmers move to a new site. This method is one of the main causes of deforestation, as people open new farms in primary or secondary mature forests to achieve higher yields of hot pepper, because pepper is believed to grow well on farms established in primary forests due to the high nutrient buildup over the years.

Bush pepper is one of the main non-timber forest products (NTFPs) with high economic potential. It is harvested from the wild, sold in local markets, and sometimes traded in neighboring countries such as Guinea or Sierra Leone to generate income. It is used in traditional cooking and for medicinal purposes in most parts of Liberia. The price of bush pepper is highly stable due to consistent demand, making it one of the NTFPs of choice for communities, as it provides a secure source of income. The major tree crops in the communities are coffee, cocoa, and a few scattered rubber farms, with kola trees sometimes planted among them. The harvested product is normally sold to local intermediaries or to traders from across the border in Guinea. Other major crops include plantain, banana, eddoes, corn, bitter ball, eggplant, and cassava.

The majority of people in the community live in houses daubed with mud and thatched roofs, while a minority have houses made of bricks with tin roofs. Community members able to afford to build brick houses with tin roofs were usually helped financially (by adult children living in town) or planted only peanuts and beans (no rice) to earn a higher income and afford rice from the market.

Basic primary education is available in most villages, with the most educated or knowledgeable person serving as the teacher. These teachers are not always part of a government program and are often not paid on time or at all. School attendance is low, and most children in these villages may grow up illiterate. There are no health centers or doctors in any of these villages. Access to basic health care and education requires long-distance travel, often on roads that are nearly impassable. Children are most often supported to live with relatives in communities with a school, which adds to the financial burden on families.

Most residents in the project area belong to the Lorma ethnic group, with the Mandingoes as a smaller minority. In this context, 'minority' refers to the smaller number of tribe members, but the communities are closely interconnected through intermarriages and shared traditional customs. Although there have been past tensions between the two communities linked to the civil conflict, both groups work together in the landscape on conservation projects to foster unity and collaborate toward shared community benefits. Historically, the communities used the project area for shifting agriculture, sacred sites, planting tree crops, hunting, and gathering NTFPs.

However, while the Wonegizi forest faces pressure from shifting cultivation and other livelihood activities from the settlements at its edges, its core largely remains well-preserved. However, without sustained intervention, current land use trends could lead to more forest loss, as seen in much of the land surrounding Wonegizi. There is, therefore, an urgent need to promote the sustainable use of this landscape, considering its socio-ecological importance at the local and national levels.

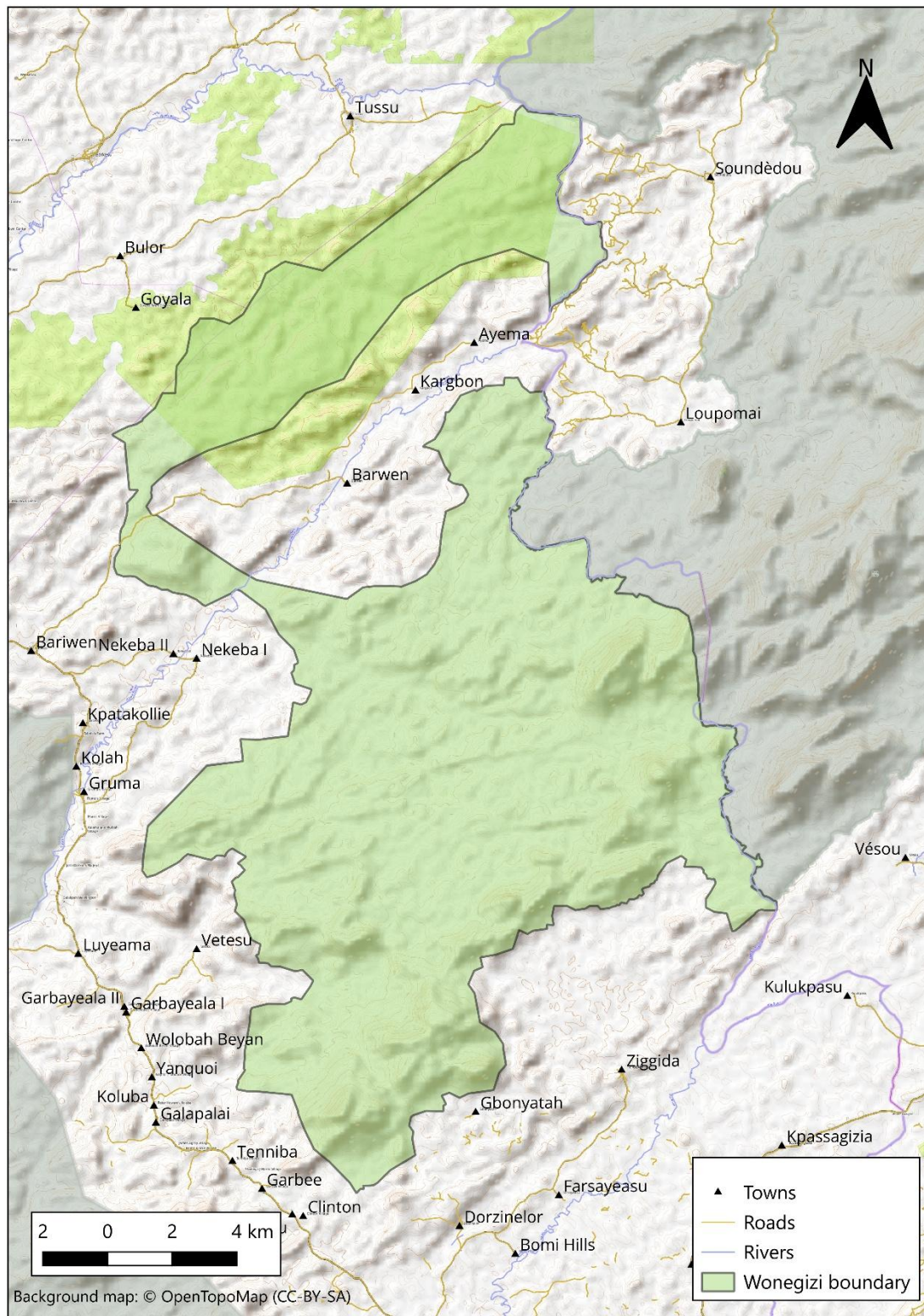


Figure 8: PPA boundary and location of key settlements (Source: FDA/FFI 2026)

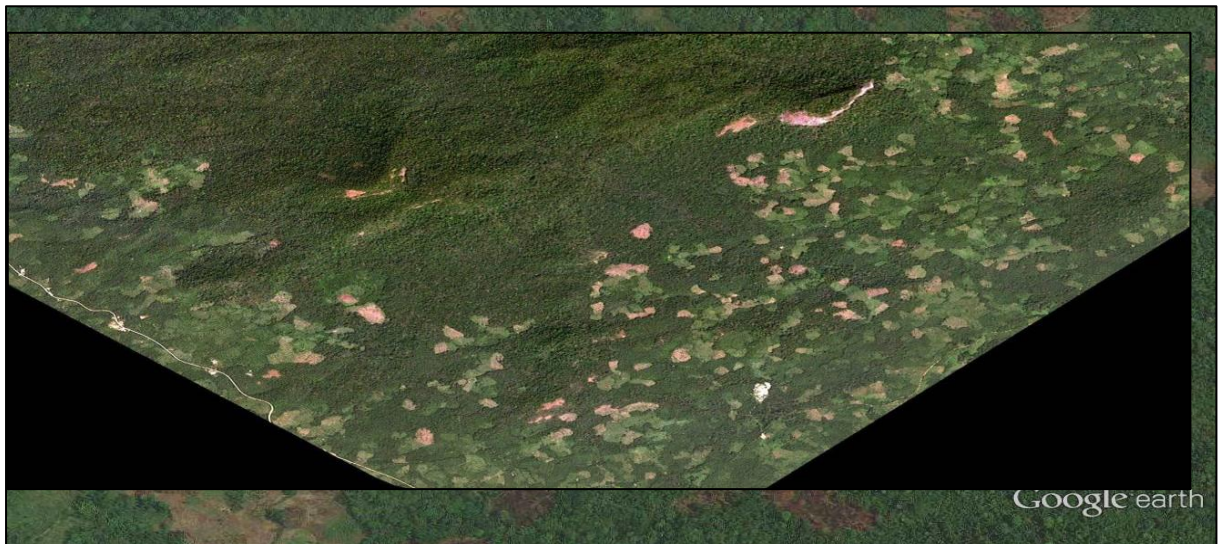


Figure 9: Example of Shifting cultivation in the southern portion of Wonegizi PPA, showing the main road to Voinjama (far left) and extensive clearing/mosaic deforestation around Ziggida



Figure 10: Evidence of shifting agriculture at the edges and within Wonegizi Proposed Protected Area: (a) 2015, and (b) 2022 © 2025 Airbus and Image © 2025 Maxar Technologies)

HCV 5 and 6 assessments were conducted in the Wonegizi PPA in 2019 to characterize the level of community dependence on resources in the PPA which are fundamental for satisfying basic necessities. Additionally, the results were to inform management recommendations for how to mitigate any negative impacts of the gazettement on local people. Five Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held in Barziwen, Nekerbozu, Bulor, Ziggida and Barwen that generated a list of basic necessities and cultural values (HCV 5 & 6) that were then incorporated into a household survey.

Table 2: List of HCVs 5 & 6 in Wonegizi PPA (Source: FDA/FFI 2019)

HCV category	HCV	Qualifying Attribute	Focal Area
NTFPs	Xylopia	Xylopia has a diverse use, primarily in construction and traditional medicine. The wood is termite-resistant, making it suitable for use in building materials such as doors and partitions. The fruit and seeds are used as a spice and flavouring agent. Medicinally, it is used to treat various ailments, including coughs, dysentery, stomach problems, etc	Xylopia is found in the high/primary forest. It is widespread inside the WPPA
	Bitter Kola	The seeds have various traditional uses, but are most often chewed for their stimulant effects and are used in cultural ceremonies. Beyond these social uses, bitter kola is believed to have several health benefits, including potential antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, and antioxidant properties. It is used for treating throat infections, colds, etc	It can be found in the high/primary forest. It is concentrated along rivers, streams, and creeks in the WPPA
	Cisco Tree Bark	Has various uses, including being a flavoring agent like cinnamon and a potential source of medical compounds. It can also be used for building materials. It can also be used to make ropes, baskets, chairs, canoes etc	It can be found in the high / primary forest. It is widespread inside the WPPA

	Bush Pepper	Has various uses, primarily as a spice and as a traditional medicine. The dried fruits are used as spice adding a pungent, peppery flavor to dishes. The leaves can be consumed as a vegetable and also have microbial properties. Bush pepper is used for treating digestive issues and other ailments and can also be used for food preservative	This is mostly distributed in the high/primary forest and sometimes in the secondary forest. It is widespread inside the WPPA
	Rattan	Housing materials, baskets	
	Fish	vital food source with significant benefits for community health. It contributes to improved brain function and overall wellbeing. Some of the communities rely on fishing to generate extra income	The major rivers for fishing lie within the WPPA. Every year, women and men go to these rivers for fishing and spend sometimes 2 weeks or more.
	Hunted Meat	It is used for both subsistence and commercial purposes. It can also serve as a source of protein	Hunting for bushmeat is mostly done in the high/primary forest and at a low rate in the secondary forest
	Edible snails	Are nutritious food providing protein and essential minerals and the shell are used to produce traditional attires	They can be found in primary, secondary and in and outside of the WPPA
Timber products	Poles	Building poles for construction	
	Firewood	Has different uses like for heating, cooking, use as materials for Furniture and fencing of farms	It can be gathered inside and outside of the WPPA
Land & Small Tree Crops	Land for farming	Communities need land to farm either for subsistence or commercial purposes. Most of the communities rely on farming for their livelihoods	Some of the communities have their farmlands outside, towards and inside the WPPA
	Cocoa Farm	This serves as another source of income generation for some community members	Some of the people have their cocoa farms inside and outside of the WPPA
	Coffee Farm	This serves as another source of income generation for some community members	Some of the people have their cocoa farms inside and outside of the WPPA

Cultural values	Sacred Sites / Places for Ceremonies and Rituals	These are sites or locations considered special or holy within a particular community holding deep cultural significance. Includes places for ceremonies and rituals, a production site for oil palm, and the Sande & Poro Society. Tianla tree bark for protection from witchcraft.	Some of these sites are found deep inside the WPPA, while other sites are found outside of the WPPA and around or within the communities

The HCV 6 assessment, which focused more closely on the cultural values and areas of cultural significance to the Wonegizi community, examined what connects people to nature within and around the Wonegizi PPA, what people like about living around the Wonegizi PPA, and what people like about the natural environment around Wonegizi. The assessment results established that people loved living in these communities because of biological connections (being born there, or the place is the home of their parents); social connections (sharing together, having ceremonial activities); economic reasons (being able to afford to manage and maintain a standard of living); psychological reasons (feeling a sense of belonging); and the nature/natural environment (hills, mountains, sacred sites, rivers for fish, fresh air from the forest, and so forth). All of these give them a unique set of cultural values, which they hold in high esteem. It is clear that communities in the Wonegizi PPA have a strong attachment to the forest and regard it as vital to their identities and heritage.

The PPA comprises sites and resources essential to meeting the basic needs of local communities. As identified through engagement with them, local communities around Wonegizi, including Barwen, Kargbota, I-Mah, and Madena, rely on the forest and its resources for their livelihoods, health, nutrition, and water. Wonegizi is also critical for the cultural identity of communities (Wonegizi Mountain in the local Lorma language/belief system means 'Crying rock' – which is of great cultural significance to the Lorma tribe). There are also several sacred forests preserved for various cultural reasons, including serving as resting places for spirits, grave sites, and locations of certain ceremonies associated with the "Poro" and "Sande" traditional societies.

The identification of multiple HCVs highlights the need to maintain communities' access rights for the collection of certain products and for hunting and fishing of non-threatened species that are not protected under Liberian law. It is also clear that there must be no restrictions on access to areas of cultural importance, including sacred forest sites.

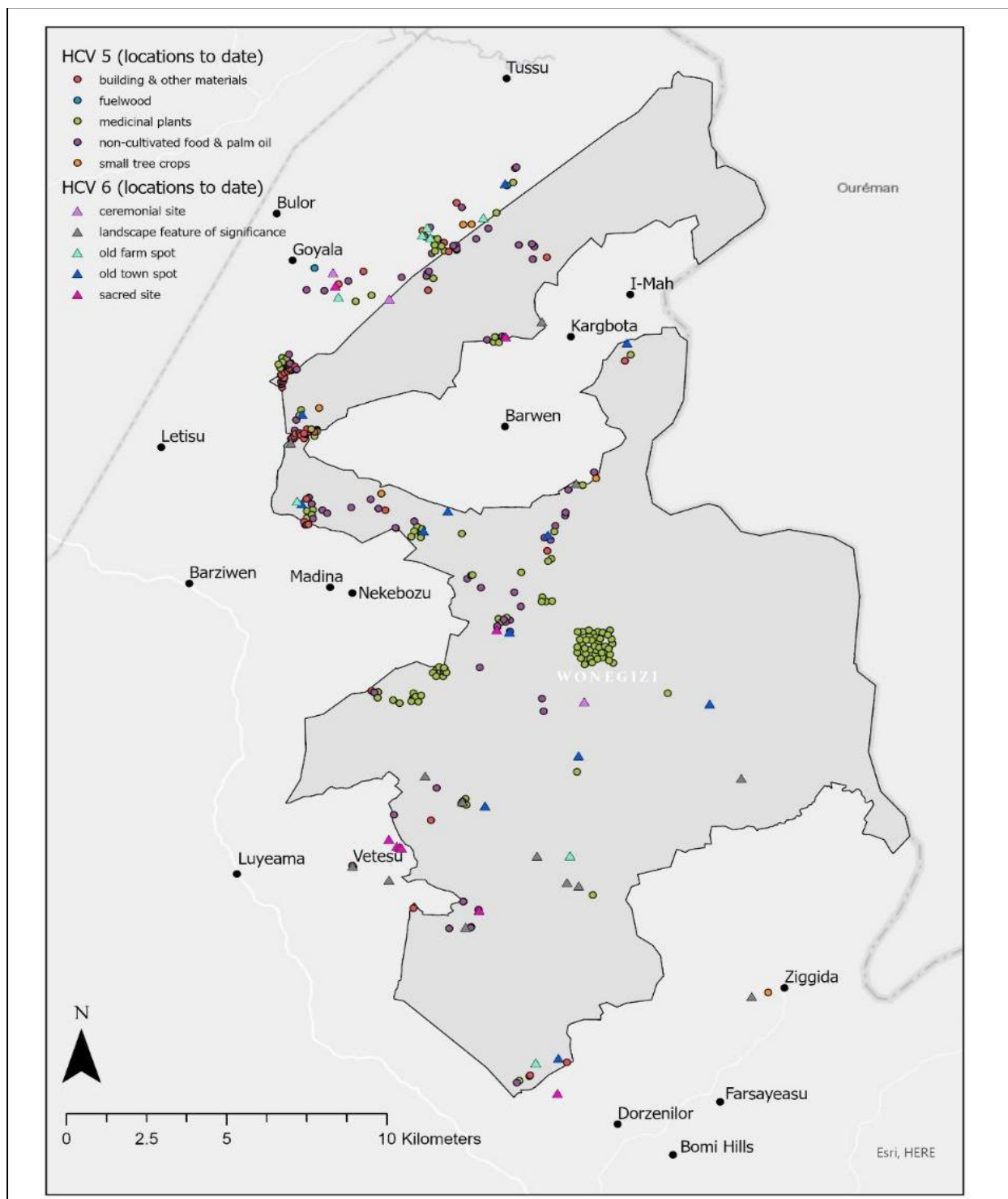


Figure 11: Sample of locations of High Conservation Value 5 and 6 showing areas of basic necessities and cultural significance (Source: FDA/FFI 2019)⁷

3.3.2 Implications on Management Planning

The HCV survey results are important for planning the co-management of future use and access. It is not feasible to predetermine zones within the proposed MSUR, and any future zoning should rely on additional HCV research. While current work provides a general understanding of HCVs' quantity and locations, they have been identified up to 10 km from

⁷ Note that the map is not exhaustive and that HCVs - such as NTFPs are widely distributed.

settlements. Basic necessities and culturally significant sites are spread throughout the WPPA, and access to these areas should remain unrestricted because of their intrinsic value to local communities.

3.4. REDD+ INITIATIVE IN THE WONEGIZI PPA

Wonegizi remained a Proposed PA and without formal management at the end of the World Bank/GEF-funded COPAN Project, which closed in 2012. In 2013, the FDA and its partner Fauna & Flora International (Fauna & Flora), working with the Skills and Agriculture Development Services (SADS), initiated activities to develop a REDD+ Project.

Since then, the FDA has worked closely with Fauna & Flora to develop the Wonegizi Forest as a REDD+ pilot project linked to the conservation of the PPA. Since 2013, the project has been supported by various funding sources and developed in accordance with Verra's Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) and Climate, Community & Biodiversity Standards (CCBS) to facilitate access to the Voluntary Carbon Market (VCM).

Recognized by Liberia's National REDD+ Strategy as a priority pilot initiative, the Wonegizi REDD+ Project aims to reduce deforestation, forest degradation, and biodiversity loss, promote sustainable landscape management, and generate carbon credits. The designation of the forest as a Protected Area will further strengthen project implementation by providing a clear institutional framework for conservation, helping safeguard forests, conserve biodiversity, and support sustainable land management across the landscape. The project is implemented through a partnership among the FDA, Fauna & Flora, and the Community Land Development and Management Committees (CLDMCs). Project implementation is guided by key activities that form the foundation for achieving these objectives and generating future carbon credits. Key objectives include strengthening community land tenure, promoting sustainable natural resource management and biomonitoring, conserving the Wonegizi landscape, and improving local livelihoods.

To date, several key activities have been undertaken, including carbon stock assessments, High Conservation Value (HCV) surveys, customary land formalization, biomonitoring, sustainable livelihood initiatives, and the establishment of long-term conservation measures. Together, these efforts have laid a strong foundation for effective REDD+ implementation and future carbon credit generation.

CHAPTER 4: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

4.1 STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

A stakeholder mapping was carried out to identify all stakeholders of the project and the Wonegizi PPA, and their specific roles, levels of influence or power, and interests in the project and the PPA. Stakeholders were considered at various levels, including donors, project implementers, beneficiaries, and groups that threaten the achievement of the project objectives.

The Zeayeama, Bondi, and Wanglodu Clans are made up of 65 communities living within a 5km radius in and around the Wonegizi forest. Seventeen (17) of these communities rely directly on the Wonegizi forest for their livelihoods, of which three (3) are also located within the PPA. The Zeayeama (Liberia) and Ziama (Guinea) Clans exist on both sides of the international border (Liberia and Guinea), and local people move freely across the border, along forest paths.

4.2 HISTORIC ENGAGEMENT 2013-2019

4.2.1 Previous Gazettement Efforts

Since 2013, several consultations and awareness-raising interventions have been held with surrounding communities, and sufficient research on the PPA has been conducted to document its biodiversity and high conservation values (HCV), as well as the socio-economic and livelihood benefits derived by adjacent communities. There is therefore sufficient evidence that justifies the need for the protection of the Wonegizi PPA. Results from the various surveys conducted and the outcome of previous consultations were presented to 17 primary communities (communities determined to be directly dependent on the PPA) during extensive consultations with individual communities in April 2019 and February 2020 (some of these are presented below).

The consultations with the 17 primary communities followed a thorough FPIC process. During the consultations, the Government of Liberia (GoL) provided information about its plan to protect 30% of Liberia's forest and to include Wonegizi in the protected area network. They were also informed of Wonegizi's high conservation value, its national and global importance, and the threats facing the PPA. Presentations were made on the boundary harmonization process and its outcome. The Land Authority presented the Land Rights Act of 2018, and communities were invited to provide feedback.

The boundary demarcation for the Wonegizi PPA will be completed after gazettelement. However, a boundary harmonization process is being followed ahead of gazettelement to ensure all stakeholders agree on the boundary lines of the proposed PA. The initial harmonization process for the Wonegizi PPA was carried out between May 2018 and April 2019 in collaboration with surrounding communities, reducing the first proposed size of 36,311 ha to 27,594 ha. The process has now been redone following completion of the CLF, leading to a readjustment of the boundary line after negotiations with the land-owning communities.⁸

The initial boundary line/path cut through the forest between 2016 and 2017 to alert the communities to the proposed boundary line of the Wonegizi PPA. It was reviewed and tagged

⁸ The finalization of the boundary is ongoing and will be updated in the final gazettelement package to allow for any adjustment during the 60-day consultation period.

(flagged) with a reflector ribbon to make the boundary easier to identify. A series of community engagement meetings were held and sustained over a long period to encourage participation by community members. This covered a total of 13 communities within the Wonegizi PPA, with full community participation. Four communities, Luyeama, Bomi Hill, Fasayesu, and Konia, were originally not considered part of the target communities. Bomi Hill and Fasayesu, which were previously satellite villages of Ziggida, became autonomous communities in 2018, while Luyeama and Konia were not considered target communities because their locations, in terms of distance to the Wonegizi PPA, are farther than those of the rest of the 13 original communities. However, based on these communities' activities in NTFP collection and some residence farming toward the Wonegizi PPA, it was recommended that they be included in the project activities. Between 2018 and 2019, a boundary harmonization process finalized the boundary line. The process involved community meetings and the selection of representatives comprising town leadership (Town and Quarter Chiefs, Youth and Female leaders, Elders and Landlords), as well as district and clan authorities, FDA, FFI, and Skills and Agriculture Development Services (SADS). A tour of the forest was conducted, and the FDA, led by selected community representatives, visited the flagged lines to assess their position. On-site discussions led to decisions on the final position of the boundary line, and the coordinates of the agreed line were recorded.

Furthermore, after consultations, sufficient time was provided for community members to review the documents presented, and a neutral third party, Integrated Development and Learning (IDL) Liberia, supported communities in providing feedback following careful review. This included clarifying the gazettement process, addressing questions about benefits, and other issues, such as access to the PPA after gazettement. These issues must be addressed before communities consent to the gazettement of the Wonegizi PPA. A series of meetings followed these initial consultations to address questions raised by communities before the final consultations, during which communities were presented with a draft consent document for internal deliberations. After deliberations that varied in duration from one community to another, the FDA was invited back by the communities to address their concerns, with conditions specific to each community inserted into the document, which was then signed by the community.

4.2.2 Assessment of additional communities for inclusion in the gazettement consultations

During the initial round of consultations, FDA-led awareness-raising sessions on the potential gazettement of the Wonegizi PPA were held in an additional 52 communities (secondary communities, presumably not directly dependent and without customary claims to the Wonegizi forest). These additional communities were grouped into 5 clusters, and meetings were held with each cluster to provide information and gather feedback on their perceptions of the PPA. Feedback from these communities prompted an assessment of all communities on the periphery of the Wonegizi PPA to determine their level of dependence on the PPA. A total of 52 communities within a 5km radius of the PPA were assessed. Of these, 4 were determined to be dependent on the PPA for their livelihoods, i.e., fishing, hunting, and the collection of non-timber forest resources (NTFP). These 4 communities were included as primary communities, along with the original 13 communities, whose consent will be sought for the gazettement of the Wonegizi PPA. Also, satellites (of relevant parent communities) that use Wonegizi are to be invited to participate in the process.

4.2.3 Gazettement Consultations at Community, District, County, and National Levels (2019 – 2020)

The first phase of community consultations for the gazettelement process was carried out. Each community received a copy of the summarized draft gazettelement proposal, copies of the Land Rights Act, the National Forestry Reform Law, the 2016 Wildlife Conservation and Protected Area Management Law, a map of Wonegizi, protected species posters, and flyers. Following these initial consultations, implemented by the FDA and partners, FFI, SADS, Liberia Land Authority (LLA), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Following these initial consultations, Sustainable Development Institute (SDI), serving as a neutral third party, conducted follow-up meetings with the communities to ensure they understood the information provided during the consultations and to provide guidance on reviewing the documents, as part of the FPIC process for gazettelement. During this process, the communities raised questions that needed further clarification. Another visit by the FDA and partners helped to clarify these issues, and an information (messaging) document was shared with communities for review and input. The messaging document described the extent of communities' access to and use of resources in the Wonegizi PPA once gazetted. A consent document, which forms the final agreement to be signed by communities once they have consented to the gazettelement of the Wonegizi PPA, was also shared with the communities for review.

Further consultations were held in March 2020 to resolve all outstanding issues raised by the Wonegizi communities regarding the gazettelement of the Wonegizi PPA. It also provided an opportunity for the Wonegizi communities to interact directly with high-level officials of Lofa County and their elected representatives.

4.2.4 Sustainable Livelihoods Initiatives

Between 2017 and 2021, the FDA, in collaboration with a range of partners, including relevant government agencies, civil society organizations, and NGOs, implemented a series of sustainable livelihood and agricultural development interventions across all seventeen communities within the Wonegizi Landscape. These interventions directly reached at least 1,225 beneficiaries and were designed to improve household incomes, strengthen food security, enhance community resilience, and reduce dependence on forest resources, thereby contributing to the long-term conservation objectives of the proposed protected area.

The livelihood support program included establishing and strengthening Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), supporting Participatory Market Systems Development, and promoting cooperative development to improve access to financial services and economic opportunities. Agricultural extension services were strengthened through the establishment of demonstration plots and the adoption of the Farmer Field School approach, enabling farmers to adopt improved agricultural practices in vegetable production, cocoa cultivation, conservation agriculture, and integrated pest management. During the implementation period, 1,095 farmers participated in field trials comparing Conservation Agriculture, Conventional Agriculture, and Traditional Agriculture systems, with 642 farmers successfully completing the program. Results demonstrated the potential of Conservation Agriculture to increase productivity, promote sustainable land management, and reduce pressure on forest resources.

To enhance agricultural productivity, communal farms were established and supplied with improved planting materials, including rice, cassava, ginger, and eddoe, supporting local seed multiplication systems. Farmers received agricultural tools, equipment, and inputs, including

cutlasses, hoes, rakes, shovels, wheelbarrows, vegetable seeds, buckets, and personal protective equipment. Additional support was provided through the distribution of agro-processing equipment, including motorized gari-processing machines, rice threshers, water pumps, and peanut butter-processing machines, which contributed to increased value addition and improved household incomes. Farmer exchange visits conducted within the Zياما–Wonegizi–Wologizi transboundary landscape further promoted the exchange of knowledge and good practices in sustainable agriculture and natural resource management.

The program also supported cocoa-based agroforestry development, conservation nutrition gardens, and nutrition and food security awareness activities in several communities across the landscape. A total of 130 beneficiaries established approximately 66,147 improved cocoa seedlings in agroforestry systems on degraded lands, contributing to both livelihood enhancement and ecological restoration. Additional support for cocoa nursery development and conservation nutrition gardens was provided in communities, including Barziwen, Guluma, Kalama, Duncan Village, Flomo Village, Ford Village, and Morris Village. However, some nursery activities were affected by high seedling mortality due to poor-quality planting materials.

Overall, these interventions strengthened livelihood opportunities, improved agricultural productivity, enhanced access to financial services, and promoted the adoption of sustainable land-use practices. By increasing household income opportunities beyond forest exploitation and supporting more productive and sustainable farming systems, the interventions contributed significantly to reducing anthropogenic pressures on forest resources and to fostering community support for the conservation and sustainable management of the Wonegizi PPA.

4.3 CUSTOMARY LAND FORMALISATION

4.3.1 Understanding Land Tenure and Use

Most land is divided along tribal/clan lines (in terms of landlords and tenants), by village, and then subdivided into individual family holdings with multiple users. Subsequently, in spite of the management of forested land at the communal level, there is a pseudo-ownership of the land that is linked to kinship, and it is possible for land to be “inherited.” Within the community, there exists a traditional system whereby the person/family who is the first to farm an area of land (first to ‘open a bush/primary forest’) is the owner of that part of the forest and can pass that ‘ownership’ down to their sons/male relatives. While the women and daughters of such a family are not afforded the right to inherit (or own) these kinds of land, their husbands and sons can farm on that land with permission from the woman’s father, grandfather, uncle, or elderly son of her father if the father is deceased, provided the husband is living with the woman in her own home. In other cases, the woman’s right to farmland is tied to her husband’s or father-in-law’s land, but her control over such land is subject to her husband’s authority.

The planting of tree crops (essentially coffee and cocoa) on land indicates long-term ownership, as the farms can be passed down through generations. In most cases, newcomers to the community (referred to as ‘strangers’) are prevented from planting tree crops and must obtain permission from the village leadership after demonstrating the ability to peacefully co-exist within the community over many years. All strangers who want to farm in the community, if not connected to the community through birth or marriage, must make a general contribution

to the community development fund and will then be hosted by their 'stranger father', who will be responsible for providing land for their farming. Typically, these farms are under a hectare, although some are larger, ranging from around 0.5 to 1.5 ha.

Article 42 (3) of the Land Rights Act provides that every protected area within Customary Land remains owned by the community and is conserved and managed by the community for the benefit of the community and all Liberians. In practice, before gazettement, the community's customary ownership and decision-making authority should be properly established and documented: the community has the right to define its customary land area, identify its members, create by-laws, establish a CLDMC, develop a land-use management plan, and participate through its collective decision-making body. Most of the land in and around Wonegizi has historically been understood as customary land, and, on this basis, communities were supported in legalizing their claims through the CLF process. The land formalization process aims to secure legal recognition of customary land rights for communities. In line with Liberia's Land Rights Act (2018), the process is participatory and community-driven, beginning with awareness-raising and capacity building, followed by community self-identification, forming of governance structures, and the development of bylaws. Communities then engage in boundary harmonization and participatory mapping to define and agree on their land areas, supported by inclusive decision-making processes that actively involve women, youth, and marginalized groups. This structured approach helps build local ownership, strengthens governance systems, and ensures that conservation and land-use decisions are grounded in community rights and priorities.

Customary land formalization (CLF) with communities in and around the Wonegizi PPA has been supported by FFI with the Liberia Land Authority and with civil society organizations, including the Community Rights Support Facility (CRSF) and the Lofa Women Network (LOWON), recognizing that secure customary land rights are a prerequisite for rights-based conservation and the successful gazettement of protected or conserved areas.

In July 2022, CRSF began the first phase of community land formalization activities. Prior to field implementation, CRSF and FFI held planning meetings with the LLA Customary Land Unit to agree on project objectives, implementation arrangements, stakeholder responsibilities, and administrative procedures. The process commenced with extensive community engagement and formal notification of county, district, clan, and community authorities. Awareness and sensitization sessions were conducted on key provisions of the Land Rights Act, particularly those relating to categories of land ownership and customary land rights. These activities were accompanied by the development of community profiles and the facilitation of a community self-identification process through which 17 forest-fringe communities reached consensus on their identity and membership. Community profiles and Community Self-Identification (CSI) reports were subsequently reviewed and validated.

During this period, government agencies and civil society organizations also recognized the need for greater alignment in their interpretation of the Land Rights Act and the practical steps required to establish protected and conserved areas. This dialogue culminated in a multi-stakeholder land governance forum held in February 2023 involving the FDA, LLA, EPA, national and international NGOs and civil society representatives. The discussions contributed to the Gbehzohn Declaration, which reinforced the importance of a rights-based approach to conservation in Liberia.

In March 2023, a second phase of support allowed CRSF to undertake a revised scope of work, following the involvement of the Land Management Association (LMA) in several Wonegizi communities. Discussions with the LLA resulted in a coordinated division of responsibilities between CRSF and LMA to ensure efficient implementation. During this phase, a series of activities was undertaken to advance community land governance structures and strengthen community readiness for formal land recognition. These included learning and awareness sessions, participatory land identification and sketch mapping, validation of sketch maps, validation of community self-identification outcomes, awareness raising on by-law development, women-only consultations to promote inclusive participation, review and consolidation of draft by-laws, adoption of community by-laws, awareness raising on the establishment of CLDMCs, and community-wide elections of CLDMC representatives.

Following field verification missions, CRSF submitted a Community Self-Identification Validation Report to the LLA in October 2023. This was followed by the boundary harmonization process, which involved awareness sessions on boundary issues, consultations with neighboring communities, participatory boundary walks, GIS-supported mapping exercises, and negotiations to harmonize and agree on customary boundaries between adjacent communities. These activities helped to reduce the potential for future disputes and created a stronger basis for legal recognition of customary land rights. As part of the self-identification process, four clusters and four CLDMCs were established: Wonegizi Section with 7 communities, Wanglodu Clan with 6 communities, Vassawulu Section with 7 communities, and Zogolemai Township with 9 communities, for a total of 29 communities and 45 satellite villages with land rights that overlap the PPA.

A key outcome of the process is the issuance of formal land deeds to the four clusters following a confirmatory survey conducted by the LLA. These deeds legally recognize communities as landowners, providing secure tenure and a clear mandate to manage their natural resources through CLDMCs. Similarly, Land Management Activity (LMA) supported the Wonegizi Section, and the land deed issued to them by the LLA. The rationale behind this exercise is to pave the way for changing the status of the Wonegizi proposed protected area from proposed protected to an official protected area or another conservation area. Tusu and Bulor are towns within the Wonegizi landscape but are self-identified with the Wanglodu Clan in the Quadugbondi District. A confirmatory survey has been completed for this clan; the land deed has been probated and printed and is awaiting formal presentation to the Wanglodu Clan as the land-owning community.

The four landowning communities also have land that overlaps with the Wologizi PPA. The following table shows the total hectares of deeded land. A map showing the overlap between the deeded land and the Wonegizi PPA will be included in an Annex.

Table 3: Deeded Land per Community around the PPA

Self-Identified Community	Total Area (Ha)
Wonegizi Section	47,386.40
Vassawulu Section	43,276.50
Zogolemai Township	28,090.60
Wanglodu Clan	14,320.30

Within the REDD+ framework, this security of tenure is essential, as it underpins sustainable forest management, reduces the risk of deforestation, and enables equitable benefit-sharing arrangements. The CLF process, therefore, not only reduces land conflicts and clarifies

boundaries but also creates the institutional and legal foundation for communities to actively participate as partners in REDD+ implementation and long-term conservation.

4.4 RECENT PROTECTED AREA ENGAGEMENT 2025-2026

4.4.1 Participatory Land Use Planning

PLUP in Liberia is anchored in the Land Rights Act (2018) and associated regulatory frameworks, which recognize customary land size and mandate inclusive, community-driven decision-making in land governance. These provisions require that land-use planning processes inform national land administration and natural resource management, including the establishment and gazettement of Protected Areas. Moreover, the Act establishes CLDMCs as the legally recognized bodies responsible for leading land governance at the community level, including coordinating and overseeing PLUP processes in collaboration with customary authorities and government institutions. The PLUP process ensures that community land rights, livelihood needs, and conservation priorities are systematically integrated into spatial planning and legally recognized land-use plans.

A multi-stakeholder PLUP process was conducted across the Wonegizi, Zoglomai, Vassawulu, and Wanglodu clusters between November 2025 and June 2026. The CLDMCs served as the primary institutional interface between local communities and implementing partners. The process combined technical capacity building, institutional engagement, and participatory planning sessions. Activities included training in PLUP methodologies and GIS mapping, awareness-raising on legal and institutional roles, and facilitated community dialogues on land-use history, challenges, and future ambitions.

Sessions were held in Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping, PLUP, and climate-smart agriculture. The LLA director delivered a simplified presentation on PLUP, outlining six key steps in the local language. This session was highly interactive with questions from the participants. The FDA followed with a presentation on its role, community involvement in conservation, and the existing law on the PPA. Subsequent sessions featured presentations on PLUP steps, High Conservation Value (HCV), and climate-smart agriculture. Translation into local languages was introduced in the sessions to ensure full participation and understanding of all participants.

As part of the broader initiative to strengthen community-led land governance and sustainable resource management, three participatory land use planning sessions were conducted across four clusters: Wonegizi, Zoglomai, Vassawulu, and Wanglodu. Each cluster engaged in a two-day intensive process designed to foster inclusive dialogue and collaborative decision-making. The sessions for the Wonegizi cluster were held in Konia, while those for Zoglomai and Vassawulu took place in Barziwen, with the latter two clusters convened separately to ensure focused engagement.

The meetings brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including representatives from CLDMC, landlords, traditional leaders, private landowners, chief hunters, paramount chiefs, district commissioners, and civil society organizations (CSOs). This broad representation was critical to ensuring that the planning process reflected the perspectives and priorities of all key actors involved in land governance.

The sessions began with an interactive dialogue between participants and facilitators to build a shared understanding of the historical and current context of land use in the communities.

Discussions explored the migration history of the communities, traditional and contemporary land use practices, and the changes and challenges associated with these practices over time. This historical perspective provided a foundation for identifying the drivers of land use change and their implications for livelihoods, biodiversity, and resource sustainability.

Following these discussions, participants were divided into smaller working groups to undertake a series of structured exercises. Each group was tasked with identifying current challenges related to land use, such as competing demands for agricultural expansion, forest conservation, hunting, and settlement development. Building on this analysis, the groups developed a shared vision for sustainable land management, articulated specific objectives, and drafted a land-use plan map reflecting their proposed spatial arrangements for different land uses.

Following the two-day individual cluster sessions, all three clusters of Wonegizi, Zoglomai and Vassawulu were brought together in Barzewein for alignment and consolidation of the PLUPs in the presence of all key county, district, and community leadership, with the participation of 99 people (70 male, 29 female). In this meeting, the outputs from the group sessions were presented in plenary, allowing for cross-group feedback and refinement. These individual plans were then consolidated into a single vision, set of objectives, and land-use plan map for each cluster, ensuring coherence and alignment among stakeholder priorities.

The process concluded with a one-day national-level reporting and technical consultation meeting, during which the results of the land use planning process were presented, reviewed, and discussed with relevant national institutions and technical experts to ensure consistency with applicable legal, policy, and conservation frameworks.

This process identified critical governance and implementation challenges, including land conflicts, weak coordination among community governance structures, gender-based barriers to participation, and tensions between customary and statutory authorities. Importantly, the participatory approach strengthened local ownership, enhanced understanding of legal rights and responsibilities, and established a foundation for continued, broader community validation and the integration of land-use plans into formal land governance processes.

This work represents the first phase of the PLUP process. During the second phase, communities will be re-engaged to review and agree on the proposed vision, objectives, and draft land use plans developed during the initial consultations. The plans will undergo community validation through participatory discussions and decision-making processes to ensure that they accurately reflect local priorities, customary rights, conservation objectives, and future development aspirations. Ground-truthing exercises will also be conducted to verify land-use classifications, boundaries, and spatial information in the field. The results of these activities will be incorporated into the final Land Use Plan, which will then be formally endorsed by the relevant stakeholders and authorities.

4.4.2 ENGAGEMENT TO REASSESS COMMUNITIES' PERCEPTION OF FLAGGED BOUNDARY (DECEMBER 2025)

Significant work was completed previously on the proposed Protected Area boundary line, which was negotiated and identified through a flagging process. The flagged boundary, informed by various landscape studies and plans for a REDD+ project, was intended as a preliminary boundary until a longer-term boundary was agreed upon. As mentioned above, this was paused to conduct CLF. In light of the CLF results, Communities, FDA, and NGO partners now need a shared, up-to-date understanding of how communities view the flagged

boundary. This includes identifying areas where the line is clear and acceptable, as well as where adjustments or clarifications are necessary to ensure legitimacy and compliance with any PCA's eventual boundary.

As part of this effort, a 12-day field mission to Wonegizi and a week-long post-field engagement with partners in Monrovia were conducted, including focus group discussions in communities and attendance at participatory land-use planning (PLUP) sessions. The engagement in Monrovia also included consultation with LLA and FFI. Central to the engagement with the communities was the recognition that the decision on which type of PCA to establish and the boundaries of its zones must be made in consultation with the affected communities, based on their aspirations (aligned with participatory land-use planning and CLF processes). The goal is for any future PCA to protect high-value forests while recognizing and respecting customary land rights and supporting local livelihoods.

During the mission, the field team, supported by an independent consultant, reassessed the previously negotiated and flagged boundary, examined whether communities were still aware of the location and accepted the line, and documented the conditions under which communities would support a future Protected Area. This engagement was informed by the fact that, through the CLF process, communities are the landowners of the PPA. Community meetings were held with Dorzenilor, Nekerbozu, Madina, I-Mah, Karbota, Barwen, Vetesu, Bulor, Tusu, and Goyala. Below are the main findings of this process that informed further engagement toward the gazettement process:

- There remains a strong basis for moving toward formal gazettement, which was unanimously supported by communities. Communities generally discussed the establishment of the Wonegizi protected or conserved area as a matter of when, rather than if. The flagged line remains broadly accepted as the reference point for the eventual protected-area boundary, and land use beyond the line is not yet widespread. Several towns reported no crossing and, in some cases, active efforts to stop farming beyond the line. Community members consistently stressed that the forest persists because they have actively contributed to its protection. For instance, Dorzenilor and Barwen mentioned specific sections designated for restricted access or community reserves, while Tusu and Goyala expressed overall satisfaction with the existing boundaries. Generally, all communities showed a readiness to create a PCA as long as the process remains fair, transparent, and connected to mutually agreed benefits.
- The Customary Land Formalization process has strengthened, rather than weakened, the case for a rights-based protected area. As the CLF has led to the recognition of customary ownership, it has been widely appreciated and is already recognized as a tangible benefit of conservation interventions in the landscape.
- Communities prefer a co-managed protected area, not an exclusively state-managed model. Across the consultations, the dominant preference was for collaboration between communities and the FDA. This preference was linked to recognition of the FDA's technical authority, but it was also contingent on fairness, accountability, consistent enforcement, and respect for community knowledge and decision-making.
- Most consulted communities favored establishment through legislation. This preference reflects a desire for a durable legal instrument that communities believe will be harder to alter without accountability. For gazettement purposes, this finding can be used to show that communities are not rejecting formal protection; rather, they are asking that the legal pathway be clear, durable, and protective of agreed arrangements. Subsequently, the most practical category is one that allows zoning and negotiated sustainable use. Community requests for seasonal fishing access, medicinal plants, non-timber forest products, construction materials, old farms, tree crops, and community-use forests indicate that a rigid no-use model would be inappropriate and could undermine legitimacy. A multiple-use and co-managed category would better align conservation objectives with livelihood realities, customary rights, and long-term conservation.

4.4.3 Further Consultation toward Consent and Re-flagging

In May and June 2026, a multi-stakeholder team led by the FDA, LLA, and EPA, with the support of FFI and IDL, conducted community consultations across the Wonegizi landscape to advance the establishment of the Protected Area. The mission focused on community awareness, FPIC, boundary harmonization, and boundary marking.

A total of 17 communities were engaged by two teams, with strong participation and consistent themes emerging around land rights, benefit-sharing, boundary adjustments, and livelihood concerns. In the Ziggida community, all team members facilitated the meeting so that teams could learn and harmonize the process before dividing into teams. A debrief and lessons learned session was held after the Ziggida meeting, with teams sharing experiences and concerns. A harmonized approach was agreed to continue the community consultations.

Team A covered 8 communities: Ziggida, Lutisu, Barziwen, Barwen, Imah, Kargbota, Goyala, and Tusu (Bulor declined participation), while Team B covered 8 communities: Vetesu, Luyeama, Madina, Konia, Dorzinelor, Nekebozu, Fassayeazu, and Bomi Hill.

The Bulor community declined to participate in the FPIC meeting on the condition that the land boundary dispute between them and Goyala in Zoglomai Township be resolved and reported to LLA and the county superintendent before participating in any Wonegizi gazettelement activities. However, they consented to the process continuing with other communities, and they (Bulor) will formally write to the FDA to inform partners of their inclusion in the gazettelement process after the land boundary dispute with Goyala is resolved.

Participating institutions included the Forestry Development Authority (FDA), Liberia Land Authority (LLA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), FFI, IDL, an FPIC Consultant, and communities. These meetings were followed by GIS teams engaging communities to negotiate, update, and confirm PPA boundaries, and by recruiting community members to participate in boundary flagging and demarcation, with community agreement.

After the community awareness and FPIC consultations, a similar multi-stakeholder team, consisting of the same partners, returned to the communities for a follow-up visit to share and discuss the draft consent document with them for review and approval of PCA establishment. During these discussions, communities provided dates for the team to return and collect signed provisional consent documents.

Each consultation meeting followed a structured agenda and was guided by a messaging document. Information was presented, and meetings were facilitated, by designated team members from relevant institutions. Themes covered included:

- PCA creation and management options;
- Explanation of FPIC principles and community rights. FPIC was explained using culturally relevant storytelling, informational flyers, and radio jingles;
- Presentation of PCA options and legal frameworks;
- Gathering community views on boundaries, the GIS team supported boundary adjustment, re-flagging, and demarcation;
- Identifying concerns, expectations, and recommendations;
- Sharing and discussing the draft with the communities and giving guidance on how they could develop the PCA consent document.

A total of 1,105 participants were recorded across all the consultations, with Team A recording 584 participants in 8 communities and Team B recording 521 participants across 8 communities.

During the fieldwork, daily debriefings were held to refine the engagement strategy. Data were captured through attendance sheets and discussion notes, and key issues, concerns, and recommendations were logged. Although the two teams visited different communities for the consultation meetings, the concerns raised were very similar, as evidenced by the information gathered during the end-of-mission debriefing session in Konia.

Below are the key concerns raised, grouped by themes:

A. Boundary Negotiation and Flagging

Most of the Wonegizi communities, with the exception of Tusu and Lutisu, want the former flagged line (from 2024) adjusted to provide additional farmland for the landscape's fast-growing population.

Communities want to be fully represented during boundary harmonization and adjustment of the flagged line; they want the GIS team to allow communities to make decisions on the final position of the boundary line, and they want this not to be dictated by the GIS team.

Boundary line adjustments should be transparent. Boundaries should not be adjusted in favor of an individual or a particular group to give them more farmland than others.

People who are knowledgeable about the forest terrain and those whose farms are in close proximity to the flagged line should be prioritized for recruitment to clear vegetation along the agreed boundary line.

Farmland is a priority for the communities. The adjusted boundary now excludes farmland from the WPPA, and once gazettement is finalized, it will no longer be possible to open new farms in the protected area. This will be mitigated through conservation agriculture support, which helps improve yields and soil quality, thereby increasing production and reducing the need for long fallow periods. As the population of Wonegizi increases over time, the lack of farmland will become an issue to be mitigated through support from the FDA and other conservation actors for affected community members, enabling them to diversify into off-farm livelihood strategies.

B. Continued access to resources and sacred sites

Communities raised the need to continue having access to important sites on a regulated basis. For example, they want seasonal access to a river where they fish, or the ability to visit sacred sites and NTFP areas.

C. Benefit sharing- Livelihoods benefits

Communities want assurance at this time about the exact types of benefits they would receive and how they will be shared with them as legitimate owners of the Wonegizi Forest. There is also concern about whether the benefits to come will be shared at the individual community level, at the cluster level (for example, the Wonegizi or Vassawulu Section level), or at the general Wonegizi landscape level. Some communities in close proximity to the PPA, whose farmland will be greatly affected by the project activities, suggested that they should receive more of the benefits to come than communities whose farmland is not affected by the project.

There was demand for clarity on:

- Types of benefits
- Distribution mechanisms

- Target beneficiaries

There were requests for:

- Agriculture inputs and training
- Schools and infrastructure
- Livestock support
- Scholarships
- Jobs and income opportunities

D. PCA creation options

Almost all of the communities visited opted for legislation. As required, the community can consult with a third party during the 60-day period and provide feedback about this before reaching a final decision. As stated, the community meetings were for information sharing, not for prompting communities to make urgent decisions.

E. Human-wildlife conflict

The issue of wild animals leaving the PPA to destroy crops on the farms was raised. Communities want the FDA to take action to curtail this, as it has been reported to the FDA on many occasions, but there has been no redress.

F. Carbon project

During a previous project, significant awareness was raised about a potential carbon project and its benefits to the Wonegizi communities. Some communities want to know what carbon is, how it is being sold, and how they will benefit. Communities also want to know whether the community or the government will own the credits.

G. Governance and Management

There was unanimous support for the co-management approach (community + FDA), but concerns remained about the enforcement burden on local leaders without adequate support. It was also noted that there is a need for community inclusion in decision-making. Overall, there was a high willingness to engage, but a trust deficit remains. There is a strong dependence on the forest and its resources for livelihoods, as well as a demand for tangible, immediate benefits. There is a need for clear communication and transparency

4.4.5 FPIC process – iterative approach to seeking consent

The FPIC process is ongoing. As explained above, FPIC activities took place in 2024, and we are now in the current phase of the FPIC process. It must be acknowledged that FPIC processes take time, and different communities may move at different paces. As mentioned above, there remains a strong basis for protected area gazettement, which is unanimously supported by communities. Communities generally discussed establishing the Wonegizi protected or conserved area as a matter of when, rather than if. However, although the flagged line remains broadly accepted as the reference point for the eventual protected area boundary, most communities wanted the chance to adjust the boundaries to some degree. In addition to boundary placement, there are other considerations and decisions regarding the protected area.

To allow for an iterative approach to consent and to give communities the opportunity to craft the terms of the agreement, they were provided with a draft consent document for review and edits. The draft consent document is still general in its agreement to create a protected

area, with specific details not yet determined. These will be determined in a participatory way as part of the next iteration of the FPIC process.

Table 4: progress to date with the FPIC process – seeking final consent for the creation of a protected area in Wonegizi

Community	Key Concerns	Provisional consent granted to create a Protected area
Ziggida	•Requested equitable benefits and livelihood support •Appreciated the boundary negotiation process but emphasized the need for prior notice to ensure full stakeholder participation •Requested that all community members be informed in advance of any boundary-related activities	Yes
Lutisu	•Questioned the need for repeated boundary negotiation and cutting •Raised concerns about wildlife conflicts and crop destruction •Requested adjustments to the boundary near farmland •Generally satisfied with the current flagging line but requested continued monitoring	Yes
Barziwen	•Asked about crop areas within flagged zones •Raised concerns about the accountability of partners for past commitments •Requested farmer training and agricultural inputs •Reported failed cocoa nursery and broken processing machines from past support •Cited failed development support projects and questioned follow-through	Yes
Barwen	•Requested community representation in GIS flagging and boundary activities •Asked about tangible benefits already received from the project •Emphasized the need for transparency in boundary negotiation and flagging process •Requested that boundary decisions not be dictated by the GIS team alone	Waiting for review and approvals from their elites in Monrovia.
I-mah	•Sought adjustments to the boundary near existing farms	Waiting for review and

	•Raised concerns about access rights post-PCA creation •Highlighted cross-border farming challenges with Guinea •Requested clarity on whether sacred sites and rivers behind the flagging line would remain accessible	approvals from their elites in Monrovia.
Kargbota	•Asked about benefit-sharing mechanisms and how benefits would reach communities •Requested inclusion in boundary cutting activities •Suggested forestry education opportunities at Lofa University •Emphasized the need for community members with local knowledge to guide boundary flagging	Have requested until July 28th
Goyala	•Boundary Status: A few farms reported close to the line, but no crossings were reported. The community is happy to have the flagged boundary become the PCA boundary. •Key concerns and requests: •Requested school support and educational infrastructure •Demanded accountability mechanisms for partners •Requested flexibility in flagging adjustments •Reported severe crop destruction by elephants (particularly one elephant known as "Noko") •Raised a boundary dispute with the neighboring Bulor community	Yes
Tusu	Boundary Status: No reported crossing. Generally satisfied with the current line becoming the PCA boundary. Requested continued seasonal access to the Big Afrarn River for fishing during the dry season. Key concerns and requests: •Asked about individual land deeds under customary ownership •Questioned whether FDA leadership could unilaterally alter PCA decisions •Requested cocoa support and expansion of the VSLA program •Raised concern about the lack of compensation for crop raiding by elephants	Have requested until July 7 th because key stakeholders were away.
Vetesu	Boundary Status: Up to five crossings of the flagging line in the past; one active farm across for the current farming season; many people farming very close to the line. Reported violations by up to 10 persons from the	Yes

	neighboring community (Luyeama). The community wants a boundary adjustment. Key concerns and requests: •Damage to farms by elephants is reported with no compensation •Expectations for agroforestry/cocoa support not met •Role of CLDMC in settling land issues unclear • A proper mechanism is needed to coordinate community representatives for meetings •Project support irregular (community auxiliaries not supported to conduct patrols) •Requested boundary adjustment to provide more space for farming •Requested hand pumps and other livelihood support	
Luyeama	•Stated they were not initially part of the project and have never benefited from project activities •Asked why they have not received farmer field school support, conservation agriculture training, or cocoa seedlings •Reported that PARLEY (external actor) paid \$250 USD and restricted farming towards Wologizi, creating severe constraints as most farming land is towards Wologizi •Requested FDA intervention regarding PARLEY activities •Located between Wonegizi and Wologizi forests, raising dual pressure concerns •Raised concerns about human-elephant conflict and lack of redress •Asked about carbon credits and how they are sold •Asked whether women would be recruited for the boundary negotiation and flagging exercise	Yes
Madina	•Asked how benefits would be shared among people farming close to the PPA versus those far away •Stated that people whose farms are directly affected should receive proportionally more benefits •Expressed frustration: "We are tired of everyday empty talks. Try to find something for us." •Reported elephants raiding crops with no redress from FDA	Yes

	• Asked whether the forest would be fenced to stop wildlife from destroying crops	
Konia	• Will the community be allowed access to the core zone to collect medicinal plants when it is established as a protected area? • Is our sacred (Poro) bush in Konia important, or will you remove it? • Concern that a powerful former government minister is destroying the forest through massive farming. Asked the FDA and partners to take urgent action now before it is too late.	Yes
Dorzenilor	Boundary Status: No reported farming beyond the line. Incomplete/unclear marking perceived to create "available" areas. The community set aside the forest for timber provision. They want a boundary adjustment for a larger farming area. Key concerns and requests: • Asked what communities would survive on while protecting the forest • Asked who would make the final decision on boundary position • Asked whether the community would be allowed to farm across the demarcated line after completion • Asked about the validity period of their land deed • Asked whether FDA/Partners would pay money to the community • Raised equity concerns about benefit-sharing given different community sizes • Requested community participation in boundary negotiation process	Dorzenilor has complained of not being fully involved with the decision of the flagging line, so they will not sign until that is settled
Nekebozu	• Emphasized they were conserving the forest prior to external involvement • Asked how communities can work together to protect the forest • Raised concerns about wildlife destroying habitats and crops • Asked whether the community, FDA, or NGO partners would decide on the final boundary position • Requested that the GIS team follow the boundary line shown by community members	Have requested until July 5 th due to community bereavement

	•Requested benefits, sacred site access, fishing access, job opportunities, and scholarships •Raised concern about fairness in employment and demarcation participation	
Fassayeazu	•Asked about the benefits for the community if they conserve the forest •Questioned the need for another boundary line adjustment when the old flagged line exists •Agreed to participate in demarcation and await benefits •Raised concern about how benefits would be shared fairly •Asked about penalties for those who cross the agreed boundary •Reported presence of cash crops beyond the flagging line, requiring boundary adjustment •Requested livestock as protein source to minimise bushmeat hunting •Expressed concern about hunting restrictions and how they would survive	Yes
Bomi hill	•Raised concern about boundary decisions and demarcation proceeding without full community agreement •Asked about PARLEY: an external group that told them not to farm in certain areas, with the promise of money •Requested to know if PARLEY is in partnership with the FDA and the NGO partner •Raised concern about youth from the community who graduated from FTI but have no jobs •Asked about penalties for those who constantly destroy the forest •Asked whether there would be tangible livelihood support	Yes
Bulor	The Bulor community declined to participate in the consultation due to a dispute over customary land. This decision is documented as part of the FPIC process, recognizing that the right to decline engagement is itself an exercise of their right to FPIC.	

4.4.6 Government Consultations

Consultations with national, county, and district-level stakeholders will be scheduled after all communities have officially confirmed their consent for the establishment of the Protected Area.

CHAPTER 5: DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED WONEGIZI PROTECTED AREA

5.1 MULTIPLE SUSTAINABLE USE RESERVE

Following the classification of protected areas stipulated under the Wildlife and Protected Area Management Act of 2016, Wonegizi is being proposed as a Multiple Sustainable Use Reserve (MSUR), managed under a co-management agreement. The proposed designation is based on the current land use and tenure rights, as this category best secures the protection of the landscape's ecosystems, habitats, wildlife, cultural values, and traditional resource management systems, while acknowledging and respecting community rights.

Designating the Wonegizi Proposed Protected Area as a Multiple Sustainable Use Reserve aligns with Liberia's 2016 National Wildlife Conservation and Protected Area Management Law and is the most legally coherent, socially acceptable, and ecologically practical choice, particularly given that the customary land formalization process has revealed that the area is primarily communal land.

The MSUR allows regulated, low-impact, non-industrial use by local communities, subject to a legally binding management plan. This category is defined in Section 1.3 and expressly recognized under Section 5.3.1(a) of the National Wildlife Law of 2012 as an acceptable PA category for legislative action. The MSUR advances equitable governance through community co-management, sustainable resource use, and fair benefit-sharing.

Protected Forest Area Categories for Legislative action include: "Multiple Sustainable Use Reserve"⁹. This proposal to establish a Multiple Sustainable Use Reserve sets forth the following as required by the National Wildlife Conservation and Protected Area Management Law of Liberia, Section 5.4.1:

- a) The purpose of the proposed Wonegizi Protected Area is to ensure the protection of its unique biodiversity and ecosystem services while allowing sustainable uses of Forest Resources by local communities. Subsequently, the proposed management category for the Wonegizi PPA is Multiple Sustainable Use Reserve, which allows "subsistence uses but within parameters which do not harm the health of the ecosystem" as outlined in the National Wildlife Law of 2012.
- b) The proposed boundaries for the area are set out in Appendix I; also **see section 3.1, Chapter 3** of this document. Also, for Community awareness and agreement, **see sections 3.3 and 3.4** of this document
- c) The land is currently forested and used by local people for subsistence

⁹ Section 1.3 & Section 5.3.1(a) National Wildlife Law of 2012

- d) An assessment of wildlife and natural, cultural, and other significant resources in the area for the preservation of representative biomes of the country, **see sections 3.5 & 3.6** of this document
- e) An assessment of the existing state of human disturbance and resource utilization by rural people in the area - **see section 3.8** of this document
- f) Stakeholders affected directly and indirectly are identified - **see section 3.5** of this document
- g) A report based on the study of social and ecological consequences of the proposed conservation area - **see sections 3.5 & 3.6** of this document
- h) Based on ownership of the area by local communities, and ongoing stewardship, it is proposed that the area is co-managed with the community and, as such, the proposed category is Multiple Sustainable Use Reserve with tangible and non-tangible benefits to the community, including ecosystem services, livelihood enhancement and benefits generated from carbon credits. The co-management model will allow equal decision-making powers and shared management responsibilities between the FDA and communities, and will be detailed fully in the management plan, which is due to be completed after gazettement as detailed in [section 5.9 of the Wildlife Act] – **see section 2.4** of this document for a description of the proposed co-management arrangement.
- i) Free, Prior, and Informed Consent – As required under Liberian law, an FPIC process has been undertaken because the proposed establishment of the protected area affects customary land and associated forest resources – see sections 3.1 and 3.4 of this document.
- j) No rights, titles, interests, franchises, claims, or privileges are lost; access to all existing farms and tree crops is preserved, along with access to the protected area on a sustainable basis that involves regulations under the terms of the co-management plan to be completed after gazettement as detailed in [section 5.9 of the Wildlife Act] - **see section 2.4 and 3.1** of this document.
- k) A summary of any consultations held with Government agencies and Persons affected by the proposed establishment, and especially the views and needs of local communities, and how community considerations have been or will be addressed - **see section 3.4** of this document.
- l) Any other data gathered as a result of consultations and environmental impact assessment processes - **see sections 3.4, 3.6, 3.7 & 3.9** of this document

5.2 PROPOSED BOUNDARIES AND MANAGEMENT

The Metes and Bounds of the Wonegizi Protected Area boundary will be updated once the final coordinates and size of the PA are confirmed. The location of the boundary will then

inform the co-design of the governance model that the FDA and local communities will use to manage the reserve through the management plan.

5.4 ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

In 2019, an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) was carried out in accordance with the EPA's ESIA guidelines to assess the environmental and social impacts of the gazettement of the Wonegizi PPA on the target communities. Desk review of previous assessments and surveys, field observations, focus group discussions, and public consultations with community members and local authorities, and lab analysis (water and soil samples) was carried out to know the magnitude of impact likely to originate from the project activities and propose mitigation measures. It was also intended to identify how the livelihood and project benefits to the target communities will be addressed. The EPA issued an environmental permit approving the establishment of the PA.

Based on the review of updated biodiversity and social assessment reports provided by the FDA and FFI, a new environmental permit is anticipated to be issued by the EPA once the PA boundary is finalized.

5.5 ANTHROPOGENIC AND BIODIVERSITY THREATS

Surveys have identified a number of anthropogenic threats to biodiversity in the study areas. The species, threat indicators, and recommendations for monitoring and mitigation are presented in Table 4 below. These indicators provide a good measure of the impact of the project intervention. It is also imperative to document the nature, frequency, and scale of management interventions to fully comply with the framework for biodiversity indicators.

The FFI bio-indicator species list includes recommendations for indicator groups and types, as well as threats, species, and vegetation variables that may provide useful indications of the impact of project interventions.

Table 5: Species, threats, indicators, and monitoring in Wonegizi MSUR

Species	Threats	Indicators	Recommendation for Monitoring
Anthropogenic threats			
Trees	Forest clearing (deforestation) and degradation	✓ Farming and charcoal production	✓ Documenting the rate of deforestation will help monitor the rate of change in the threats and their impact on forest-dependent species. ✓ Assessment of forest composition
Large-bodied Animals (Chimpanzee, Pygmy)	Hunting	✓ Bushmeat	✓ Number of guns ✓ Number of spent cartridges

Hippopotamus, and Zebra Duiker)			✓ Number of traps
Biodiversity threats			
Forest Birds	✓ Habitat-use - Population trends	✓ Forest generalists ✓ Forest visitors	✓ Biodiversity yearly during both wet and dry seasons over a period of 5 years
Mammals (West African chimpanzee and Pygmy hippopotamus)	✓ Hunting ✓ Habitat destruction ✓ Encroachment of settlements ✓ Human-wildlife conflict	✓ Changes in tree species structure and ✓ Composition along with the primate population	✓ A yearly bio-monitoring program targeting important large mammals
Other important mammals and birds observed (Bongo, Liberian Mongoose, Green-tailed Bristlebill, White-necked Picathartes, and West African Linsang)	✓ Habitat loss from agriculture ✓ Logging and mining ✓ Hunting with dogs, Shotguns ✓ Snares and Pesticides	✓ More frequent encounters over time	✓ Increased awareness of this species and effective management of its habitat

5.6 PARTICIPATORY MONITORING ACTIVITIES

Community-based monitoring, as well as involvement of Liberian academic and forestry institutions (students from the University of Liberia, Forestry Training Institute, Lofa County Community College, etc.), where possible, and expert biologists/ecologists will be used to obtain useful data on the status of the PA to enable proper monitoring and evaluation of the PA's status and impact on surrounding communities. This will include monitoring of threats, biodiversity, and social impact.

To evaluate the management effectiveness of the Protected Area, various approaches will be applied, including the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) currently

implemented by the FDA, the Integrated Management Effectiveness Tool (IMET) following the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Protected Areas Management Effectiveness (PAME) framework, and the Social Assessment for Protected Areas (SAPA) and Site-level Assessment of Governance and Equity (SAGE), social monitoring and governance evaluation tools developed by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) in collaboration with FFI, a tool on which FDA staff have been trained.

Furthermore, international or national action plans (where available) for some of the identified threatened species will be applied.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 CONCLUSION

There remains globally significant biodiversity in the Wonegizi landscape that can be secured by establishing the Protected Area. The area has been scientifically studied and determined to be globally significant for biodiversity conservation: a KBA, IBA, and HCV forest that provides habitat for a number of threatened species, including critically endangered species such as the western chimpanzee and endangered species such as the pygmy hippopotamus. It is recommended that the area be declared a Multiple Sustainable Use Reserve, as guided by the provisions of the 2016 National Wildlife Conservation and Protected Area Management Law, and as a category VI PA, per the IUCN's PA category. However, the socioeconomic information presented above means that socioeconomic considerations must be incorporated in PA planning and management.

Toward this end, the CLDMCs, established through the CLF process, should play a central role in coordinating clustered land-use planning, forest management, and patrol activities across villages and shared forest zones. Working closely with traditional leaders, including landlords, elders, Zoes, and local chiefs, the CLDMCs can help ensure that management decisions respect customary ownership patterns, inheritance traditions, and community resource-use practices while promoting sustainable forest conservation. Supported by Forest Monitoring Committees (FMCs), Community Auxiliaries (CA), and Grievance Redress Committees (GRC), these structures have the potential to strengthen local participation, improve conflict resolution, and facilitate collaboration between communities and the FDA. While this governance framework provides a strong foundation for community-led conservation, its effectiveness will depend on addressing existing challenges outlined in Section 4.4.1.

6.2 ONGOING ACTIONS

6.2.1. Introduction

Significant progress has been made over the years toward the gazettement of the proposed protected area, with extensive technical studies, stakeholder consultations, boundary verification exercises, and community engagement activities undertaken as detailed throughout this document. These efforts have laid a strong foundation for the gazettement

process and substantially advanced progress toward the required legal, technical, and social milestones.

Notwithstanding these accomplishments, several activities remain ongoing and are expected to continue as the gazettelement process progresses. These include final adjustments and, where necessary, validation of boundaries; follow-up consultations with communities to obtain additional information or clarification; obtaining any pending consent forms; and completing any remaining documentation, as detailed below. These actions are intended to ensure that the final gazettelement reflects accurate information, incorporates stakeholder input, and meets all applicable requirements before formal designation.

6.2.2. Physical Boundary Flagging and Demarcation

A detailed explanation of the boundary harmonization process and associated community consultations is provided in Section 4.4. This section synthesizes the key boundary-related concerns, observations, and recommendations expressed by communities during the consultation process, highlighting the principal issues relevant to the gazettelement of WPPA.

Boundary harmonization and the final positioning of the PPA boundary emerged as one of the most significant issues raised during the consultation process. The majority of communities expressed a desire for the previously flagged boundary line to be reviewed and adjusted to reflect current land-use realities, particularly the growing demand for agricultural land driven by population growth. Several communities reported that existing farms, including cash crop farms, are located near or beyond the previously flagged line, while others indicated that the current boundary alignment limits access to areas considered important for present and future farming activities. Communities generally requested that any boundary adjustments be undertaken through a participatory process that balances conservation objectives with livelihood needs.

Communities consistently emphasized the need for transparency, inclusiveness, and community ownership throughout the boundary harmonization process. Stakeholders requested that knowledgeable local residents, landowners, farmers, traditional leaders, and other community representatives be fully involved in negotiating and validating the final boundary alignment. There was a strong view that decisions about the final boundary should not be made solely by technical teams but should be informed by community knowledge and agreed upon through consultation and consensus. Several communities also requested advance notice of boundary-related activities and the inclusion of local residents in boundary-clearing and demarcation exercises, given their familiarity with the terrain and historical land-use patterns.

In addition to concerns about the boundary's location, communities sought clarity on the implications of the final boundary for access to natural and cultural resources. Concerns were raised regarding continued access to rivers used for fishing, sacred and cultural sites, medicinal plants, and other non-timber forest products that may fall within the conservation area. Some communities questioned the need for further boundary adjustments where a previously agreed flagged line already exists, while others highlighted unresolved local boundary disputes that may require additional attention. While some boundary-related concerns were addressed and resolved through the harmonization process, a number of issues remain outstanding and require further follow-up and engagement with affected communities. Nevertheless, communities generally expressed support for the completion of the boundary harmonization process, provided that it continues to be implemented in a

transparent, inclusive, and participatory manner, while adequately addressing legitimate livelihood, cultural, and land-use considerations

6.2.3. Signing and Collection of Provisional FPIC Consent Documents

The FPIC consultations identified several issues that require continued attention during the gazettement process. A recurring concern across communities was the need for greater clarity on the tangible benefits of converting the area to protected status and how those benefits would be distributed among communities across the landscape. Many participants cited prior expectations of support for conservation activities and sought assurances about future livelihood opportunities, development assistance, and equitable benefit-sharing arrangements. The communities emphasized that those in proximity to the core conservation areas had incurred opportunity costs greater than those of communities residing farther away, and that this should be reflected in the anticipated distribution of benefits. Questions were further raised regarding carbon initiatives, ownership of potential carbon revenues, and the mechanisms through which any associated benefits would accrue to community landowners.

Communities also highlighted the need to address human-wildlife conflict, particularly crop damage caused by elephants and other wildlife, which was reported across several settlements. Concerns were raised about livelihood security, including access to employment opportunities, scholarships to facilitate training in technical and vocational education, agricultural support, tree crop development (cocoa, coffee, oil palm), alternative income-generating activities, and improvements to social infrastructure, particularly schools and health centers. Traditional leaders emphasized the important role they play in forest governance, law enforcement, and conflict resolution, while noting the need for formal recognition and support for these responsibilities. Additional matters requiring follow-up include clarifying the roles and responsibilities of various community governance structures, addressing concerns regarding external actors operating within the landscape, resolving outstanding community-level concerns, and ensuring that effective grievance redress, community participation, and co-management mechanisms are established. The FDA recognizes the legitimacy of these issues and will take steps to ensure that they are systematically addressed and, where possible, resolved during the gazettement process through continued stakeholder engagement, technical assessments, and collaborative decision-making. Addressing these outstanding matters will be critical to strengthening community confidence, securing broad-based support for the proposed protected area, and ensuring that the gazettement process remains consistent with the principles of FPIC and meaningful community participation.

Moreover, the presentation, participatory editing, and validation of FPIC documents were integral parts of the community engagement process and were conducted following the community awareness meetings on boundary demarcation. FPIC consent documents were presented in 16 of the 17 communities located within and around the Wonegizi PPA. During these sessions, detailed explanations of the contents and implications of the consent documents were provided to community stakeholders, ensuring they had a clear understanding of the gazettement process, their rights and responsibilities, and the anticipated benefits and implications of establishing the protected area. It was also noted that some information is provisional and will need to be added once all communities have finished deliberations about the boundaries and any conditions. Following these consultations, each community identified an appropriate date for the formal signing and submission of its FPIC consent document.

As of date (July 3, 2026), ten (10) communities—Barziwen, Goyala, Bomi Hill, Fassayeazu, Luyeama, Vetesu, Lutisu, Konia, Ziggida, and Madina—have signed and submitted their provisional FPIC consent documents, demonstrating their support for the gazettement process. The remaining six (6) communities—Barwen, Kargbota, I-mah, Tusu, Nekebozu, and Dorzenilor—are expected to complete the signing and submission process in the coming weeks. The collection of all FPIC consent documents remains a critical requirement for advancing the gazettement process and ensuring that the establishment of the Wonegizi Protected Area is grounded in broad-based community support and participation.

6.2.4. District and County Stakeholder Consultation Meetings

District and county-level stakeholder consultation meetings represent the next major phase of the gazettement process and are expected to commence upon the completion and signing of the provisional community FPIC documentation and the collection of all outstanding consent forms. These consultations are anticipated to conclude by mid-July 2026.

The meetings will bring together key stakeholders from district and county administrations, traditional leaders, civil society organizations, relevant government institutions, and other interested parties. The objective is to provide stakeholders with comprehensive updates on the progress of the gazettement process, including the outcomes of community consultations, boundary demarcation activities, and FPIC commitments. In addition, the consultations will serve as a platform to discuss the benefits, governance arrangements, management objectives, and legal implications of establishing the Wonegizi Protected Area. Stakeholder feedback and recommendations generated during these meetings will further strengthen the transparency, inclusiveness, and legitimacy of the gazettement process.

6.2.5. National-Level Information Sharing Meeting

Following the completion of community, district, and county-level consultations, a national-level information-sharing meeting will be convened to engage a broader range of stakeholders involved in environmental management, biodiversity conservation, land-use planning, and natural resource governance in Liberia. The meeting is expected to take place in the second half of July 2026.

The national forum will provide an in-depth presentation of the Wonegizi Protected Area, highlighting its ecological significance, biodiversity values, conservation objectives, community engagement outcomes, and progress toward formal gazettement. Participants will include representatives from government ministries and agencies, development partners, conservation organizations, academia, civil society institutions, and other national stakeholders. The meeting will also provide an opportunity to share lessons learned from the gazettement process, discuss long-term management and sustainability considerations, and build national-level awareness and support for the formal establishment of the Wonegizi Protected Area as an important component of Liberia's protected area network.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

This gazettement package provides supporting information for establishing Wonegizi as a Multiple Sustainable Use Reserve (MSUR) through legislation. The designation aims to

protect the area's globally important biodiversity while respecting customary land rights, community livelihoods, cultural heritage, and local knowledge. To ensure a legitimate rights-based approach to conserving this unique landscape, the gazettement decision should be accompanied by the following implementation actions:

- a. Establish the PPA as a Multiple Sustainable Use Reserve with zones that account for social and environmental considerations: The Legislature should establish the area as an MSUR to prevent it from becoming an exclusionary Protected Area. The reserve should combine a strictly protected ecological core with agreed-upon sustainable-use, livelihood, cultural-use, restoration, and buffer zones. Permitted uses should be clearly defined and remain subject to ecological limits that protect the forest's health and integrity.
- b. Complete boundary harmonization before full enforcement: Unclear or disconnected sections of the flagged line, existing farms, overlapping claims, and community requests for adjustment should be resolved through joint field verification involving the FDA, Liberia Land Authority, civil society, affected communities, women, farmers, traditional leaders, and neighboring settlements. The final boundary should be visibly demarcated and continuous, mapped against the agreed land-use plans, and subject to a procedure for correcting errors.
- c. Protect Customary Ownership and Tenure Rights: Gazettement should not extinguish, transfer, or weaken customary ownership recognized through the 2018 Land Rights Act and the customary land formalization process. The Act, boundary description, management plan, and co-management agreement will preserve community tenure and clarify that gazettement changes the management status of agreed areas rather than converting the customary land into unencumbered state property.
- d. Create an enforceable co-management arrangement: The reserve should be governed through a formal co-management body in which communities and the government exercise equal authority. The arrangement should define decision-making powers, representation, financial accountability, and the respective roles of the FDA, customary authorities, community land institutions, grievance bodies, conservation partners, women, youth, farmers, hunters, and other forest-resource users.
- e. Provide financing, capacity, and monitoring: Gazettement should be supported by a realistic financing and capacity plan for the FDA and community institutions. Monitoring should assess forest cover, wildlife, livelihoods, access to resources, equitable participation, gender inclusion, benefit distribution, grievances, enforcement, and human–wildlife conflict. Findings will be shared with all stakeholders and used for periodic, independent review and adaptive management. It is recommended that the Liberian Government and development partners, through the FDA, develop projects to address the challenges facing communities adjacent to the reserve.
- f. The legislature should support and ensure provision for the development and implementation of a national policy and response strategy for human–wildlife conflict mitigation, which includes feasible compensation or recovery support, while strengthening intercommunity dispute resolution and Liberia–Guinea cooperation in the Wonegizi–Ziama Landscape.

In conclusion, to strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of the proposed co-management framework, institutional capacity and collaboration among community governance structures and the relevant government entities will be enhanced through training, clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and coordination mechanisms anchored in participatory

development of a collaborative management plan. Inclusive decision-making processes will be promoted to ensure the meaningful participation of women, youth, and other marginalized groups in forest governance. The co-management arrangement and governance will guarantee grievance redress, remedy, and conflict prevention: An accessible, independent, and time-bound grievance mechanism will address boundary disputes, enforcement conduct, benefit distribution, project commitments, and the actions of reserve personnel.

The development and implementation of a REDD+ Pilot Project and an institutional arrangement for REDD+ will ensure sustainable financing that will enable long term management of the Wonegizi Protected Area. This will ensure that people can benefit from income generation linked to forest protection and increase community support for conservation. Furthermore, the long-term success and conservation impact of the Wonegizi Protected Area rely on enforceable safeguards for effective co-management, community rights, livelihood security, equitable benefit sharing and adaptive monitoring.

Ongoing sustainable livelihood development in the Wonegizi landscape, including agroforestry, VSLAs, sustainable forest management have directly benefited communities while strengthening the evidence base for long-term conservation. These efforts will be scaled up and continue to demonstrate that conservation and local economic development can co-exist. As such, Wonegizi should serve as a national example of achieving biodiversity conservation while fostering local stewardship to advance long-term sustainable development not only for Lofa County but for Liberia as a whole.

APPENDIX I: DRAFT ACT