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Environment - Nature

Gabon to increase national park guarding

afrol News, 13 May - Sixty-five people are receiving training from today to become ecoguards and ecoguides for Gabon's 13 national parks. The Gabonese government recently established a large number of extensive national parks and is now enhancing their management.

The training of the ecoguards is an intensive half-year theoretical and practical course developed by WWF and local partners in order to provide manpower to help run and manage the country's newly established protected areas. The Gabonese Ministry of Defence and the French legionnaires are also contributing.

The implementation of a national park network in Gabon has resulted in new jobs being available requiring specialized skills. Thanks to funding from the US-based Moore Foundation and other partners, WWF is providing support to the national forestry school - Ecole nationale des eaux et forêts, ENEF - which is in charge of natural resource use and conservation-related education and training.

According to Olivier Pauwels, the WWF consultant in charge of the project, "the support aims at developing a training strategy for park personnel, in partnership with the National Park Council (CNPN), Conservation International (CI), the World Conservation Society (WCS), the Gabonese and French armies and gendarmeries, Shell Gabon, Peace Corps, the Smithsonian Institute, and an EU-funded project for the valorisation of protected areas (PSVAP)".

The first training session, between May and October 2004, focussing on building ecoguard and ecoguide capacities will be led and implemented mainly by trainers and teachers of the national forestry school. The course was adapted from similar courses in other African countries such as Cameroon, South Africa, and Tanzania.

- The first training session is taking place in the Gamba Complex area, says Mr Pauwels, "as this responds to a three-fold demand: a variety of ecosystems for field work that correspond to the different environments the trainees will encounter during their professional practice; the presence of synergies and partners in the area; and the capacity to host both the trainers and trainees".

By staff writer

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