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Sunday, 1 March 2015

Destruction of protected forests

[Biya family accused of encroaching in Dja reserve](#)

A press release issued by the conservation NGO, Greenpeace, has observed that the Dja Reserve in the South region is seriously being destroyed and that the areas mostly affected are those adjacent to the presidential residence in M'vomeka

By Essan-Ekoninyam in Yaounde

The conservation NGO of world renown, Greenpeace, has decried the massive destruction of forests and wildlife species in the Dja reserve situated in the South region of Cameroon.

Greenpeace notes that the activities of huge agro-industries situated adjacent to the reserve pose a serious threat to the survival of the rich tropical forests that serve as natural habitat for rare and protected primates, especially the Cameroonian and Nigerian species of chimpanzee and the drill.

The environmental watchdog laments in its press release of 23 February 2015 that over 3000 hectares of forests in the Dja reserve have already been destroyed due to the expanding plantation activities of the Chinese agro-industry – Hévéa sud.

It notes further that satellite information and information gathered on the ground have shown that Hevea-Sud's oil palm and rubber plantations "are found in the zone of the residence of the president of Cameroon Paul Biya." Greenpeace revealed that though Hévéa sud claims to be owned by Chinese investors, it actually belongs to a member of the Biya family. Greenpeace affirms that the Cameroonian owner is only using the Chinese as front men.

It intrigues many that Greenpeace's revelations are coming only after the Dja Reserve was recently recognized as a UNESCO Heritage site.

The Greenpeace press release notes that plantation activities within and around protected forests are not uncommon in Cameroon. It cited, for instance, the case of Herakles farms, the giant American company that is reported to have destroyed vast forests and varied animal species in a conservation hot spot in the South West region, where it has planted its oil palm plantations.

However, Greenpeace observed that the destruction in the Dja Reserve is significantly more than that of Herakles farms in the South West region.

Apart from Hevea sud and Herakles farms, Greenpeace also indicts Azur, another oil palm producer which is now eyeing the dense forests in some parts of the Littoral region for the creation of oil palm plantation.

Greenpeace notes that a large part of the forest targeted by Azur is adjacent to the Ebo forest which has already been earmarked for conversion into a national park especially given that it harbours many species of rare primates notably the Cameroon-Nigeria chimpanzee, the African Elephant and the drill.

All these wildlife species are facing extinction due to the combined effects of commercial farming, commercial hunting and climate change. The drill, for instance, is a species of monkey that has almost entirely disappeared in other parts of the world; 80% of the remaining population of the drill is found only in Cameroon. That is why Greenpeace fears that the Azur palm oil project may only help to wipe out the only remaining habitat for this endangered drill species.

It should be noted that two letters addressed to Azur by Greenpeace requesting the oil palm company to provide them with details of its project and the environmental impact assessment report, have not been replied.

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