

Brazil: The Poor Have Much to Gain from Protecting Endangered Species

Contributed by Newsroom
Tuesday, 21 March 2006

Saving endangered species like pandas, gorillas and tigers helps reduce poverty and improve the lives of local communities, according to a new World Wildlife Fund report just released in Brazil.

Now as the eighth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) opens in Curitiba, Brazil, WWF urges the CBD and member governments to integrate species conservation work into efforts to alleviate poverty.

"Now's the time to recognize the strong connections between sustainable economic development, a healthy environment, and successful species conservation," said Ginette Hemley, vice president for species conservation, World Wildlife Fund.

"WWF's new report provides clear evidence that when endangered species benefit, people also benefit."

By examining six projects in Africa, Latin America and Asia, the new report shows that WWF's work to save endangered wildlife helps eradicate poverty and hunger, as well as promote sustainable and fair development in rural areas.

"Problems that threaten species like the destruction of habitats and natural resources often contribute to poverty," said Hemley.

Conservation and sustainable management of species and their habitats means better protection of forest, freshwater and marine habitats.

As a result, the rural poor who depend on these areas have more access to the goods and services they provide. Incomes increase and access to fresh water, health, education and women's rights often also improve.

According to the report, some ecotourism projects based on the observation of species in the wild - such as marine turtles, pandas and mountain gorillas - generate significant amounts of money for communities. Applying knowledge of species movements in and across habitats can help implement such sustainable land-use planning.

For example, in Tortuguero, Costa Rica, live turtles are worth more to the local economy than turtle meat and eggs ever were. The community strongly supports conservation measures to promote ecotourism, and both turtle and tourist numbers have climbed over the past 30 years.

Community forestry efforts in parts of Nepal have led to the restoration of vital habitat corridors for the survival of tiger populations living there. WWF is helping local people to manage and directly benefit from these forest resources.

According to the report, groups of community forest users can earn US\$ 4,760 annually in a nation where the per capita income is roughly US\$ 250.

In the Indian village of Farida, a WWF awareness-raising program aimed at conserving the rare Ganges river dolphin helped the community to address critical basic needs such as clean water. After five years, the number of families below the poverty line significantly declined.

The report further shows that more than 60 percent of people living around Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, which protects the habitat of the endangered mountain gorilla, feel they benefit economically and socially from the forests.

Other examples show that, in China, illegal and damaging activities in forested panda reserves declined when communities gained alternative sources of income, such as farming and animal husbandries supported by WWF.

In Namibia, the creation of conservancies, where communities are jointly managing their wildlife resources, has resulted in better wildlife management, increased wildlife populations, ecotourism development and increased profits in community-owned enterprises.

World Wildlife Fund is the largest conservation organization in the world. For 45 years, WWF has worked to save endangered species, protect endangered habitats, and address global threats such as deforestation, overfishing, and climate change.

Known worldwide by its panda logo, WWF works in 100 countries on more than 2,000 conservation programs. WWF has

1.2 million members in the United States and nearly 5 million supporters worldwide.

World Wildlife Fund - www.worldwildlife.org