FORESTS TO FRONTLINES: OIL EXPANSION THREATS IN THE DRC

Earth Insight

NOTRE TERRE SANS PÉTROLE

CORAP
Coalition des Organisation de la Société Civile pour le Suivi des Réformes et de l'Action Publique

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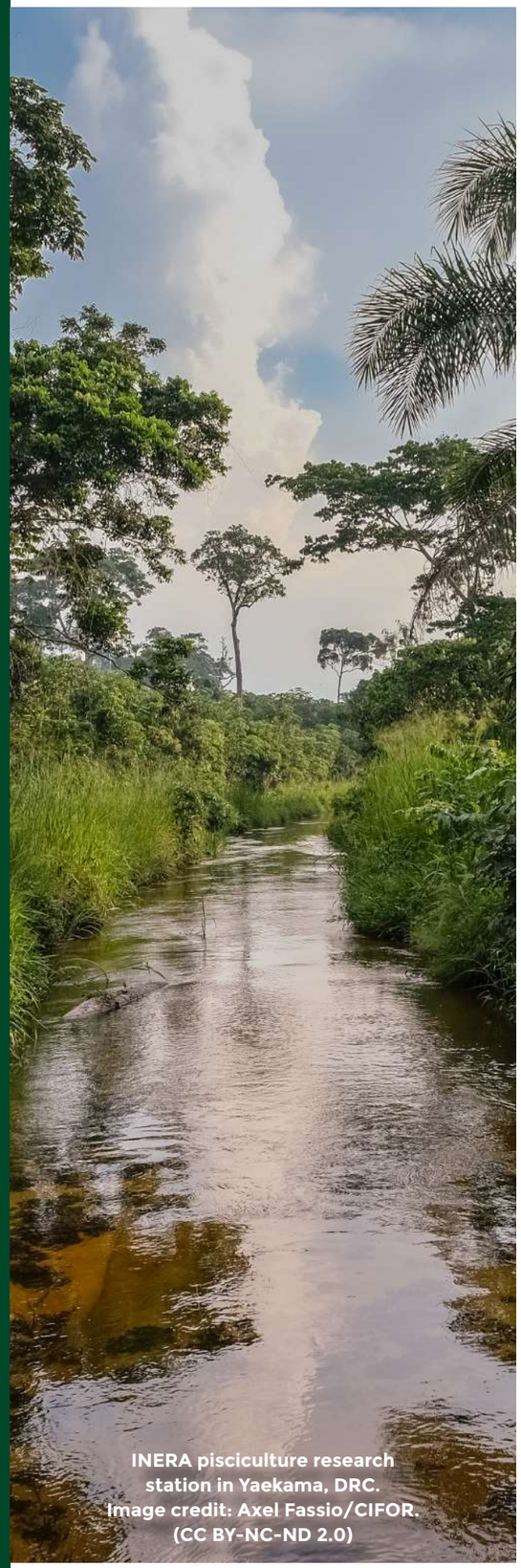
SECURING LANDS, SUSTAINING LIVES

CONTENTS



INERA pisciculture research station in Yaekama, DRC. Image credit: Axel Fassio/CIFOR. (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Executive Summary

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is poised to dramatically expand oil and gas development across more than half of the country. The government has launched a new licensing round for 52 oil blocks, in addition to three previously awarded. This latest round spans an unprecedented 124 million hectares of land and inland waters, a dramatic expansion from the controversial 2022 oil tender. This report uses geospatial analysis to map and assess the risks posed by the new blocks, revealing stark contradictions between the DRC's fossil fuel agenda and its stated commitments to biodiversity protection, climate action, and community rights. The findings are alarming:

- **Oil blocks overlap with 8.3 million hectares of protected areas (23%), 8.6 million hectares of Key Biodiversity Areas (23%), and 66.8 million hectares of intact tropical forests (64%).**
- 72% of the newly established Kivu–Kinshasa Green Corridor, a flagship conservation initiative announced in early 2025, is now overlapped by oil blocks, jeopardizing its ecological integrity and undermining its credibility as a sustainable development and climate solution.
- The Cuvette Centrale, the **world's largest tropical peatland complex** and a crucial carbon sink storing an estimated 30 gigatons of carbon, is at serious risk of degradation, with the majority of the DRC's peatland area now included in newly designated oil blocks.
- An **estimated 39 million people live within the new oil blocks, which overlap with ~37,000 or 49% of the DRC's settlements.**
- **63% of community forests are overlapped by oil blocks,** which represent critical ecosystems for the livelihoods, cultures and survival of many Idigenous peoples and local communities.

The trajectory of fossil fuel expansion in the DRC is accelerating. Yet the message from scientists, local communities, and civil society is clear: oil development in the Congo Basin is incompatible with a livable future. Scientists have warned that the Congo Basin may be approaching a dangerous ecological tipping point, beyond which its forests could begin to lose their capacity to absorb carbon and instead become a net source of greenhouse gas emissions. This shift would mark a profound reversal in the Basin's role as one of the world's most important carbon sinks, with cascading consequences for climate regulation, rainfall patterns, and biodiversity across Central Africa and beyond.

This report calls on the DRC government to cancel the 2025 oil block licensing round and invest in alternative development models that respect Indigenous and community rights, sustain local livelihoods, and safeguard biodiversity and the global climate. What happens next in the Congo Basin will have consequences far beyond its borders.

Participatory mapping in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Image credit: Courtesy of RFUK.

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Cover Image: (1) Aerial view of Salonga National Park, Democratic Republic of Congo. Image Credit: Cody Pope/USAID Democratic Republic of Congo via Flickr (CC BY-NC 4.0).

Methodological Note

This report uses geospatial analysis to examine how oil blocks available in the 2025 licensing round in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) pose a threat to landscapes critical for biodiversity, climate resilience, conservation priorities, and that support millions of people, including Indigenous Peoples and forest-based communities.

The scope of this analysis is limited to the 55 oil blocks included on the Ministry of Hydrocarbons 2025 Cuvette Centrale Oil Block Map. This map includes the 52 oil blocks that are part of the auction announced during the Council of Ministers' meeting on May 2, 2025, as well as 3 reactivated blocks already licensed. This portfolio of 55 oil blocks has replaced all previously available oil blocks in the Cuvette Centrale, including those not included in the repeal of the 2022 auction.

The analysis in the report does not include the gas blocks in the Lake Kivu region where licenses have been awarded, or the oil block in Muanda and western DRC where there is ongoing production and exploration. Moreover, this analysis does not include the oil blocks in the eastern DRC along the Albertine Rift. These blocks were part of the July 2022 oil auction and were repealed in October 2024– however, concerns persist among civil society organizations that oil developments may still proceed in these ecologically sensitive areas due to the proximity to the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) project in neighboring Uganda.

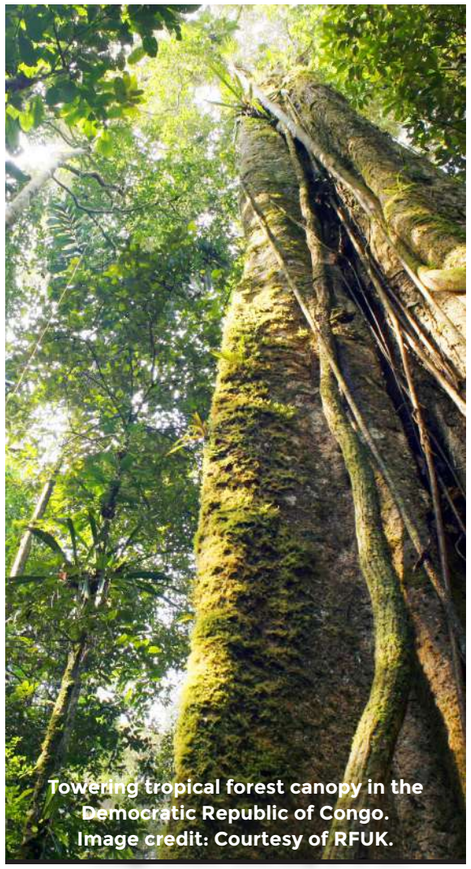
FORESTS TO FRONTLINES: OIL EXPANSION THREATS IN THE DRC

Young Grauer's Gorillas in Kahuzi-Biega National Park.
Image credit: Courtesy of Courtesy of Mike Davison/Flickr. (CC BY-ND 2.0)

Introduction & Key Context

Towering rainforest canopies, winding river systems, and vast carbon-rich peatlands make the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) one of the most ecologically significant places on Earth. Home to the second-largest tropical rainforest on the planet, the DRC harbors an astonishing wealth of biodiversity including elephants, great apes, endemic birds, and thousands of plant species that thrive in its intact ecosystems. Its Cuvette Centrale peatlands store massive amounts of carbon, critical to fighting climate change. The landscapes that form this rich mosaic of life are also a lifeline for millions of people, supporting local livelihoods, cultural identity, and climate resilience.

Allen's Swamp Monkey, Republic of the Congo. Image credit: Rennett Stowe/Flickr. (CC BY 2.0)



Towering tropical forest canopy in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Image credit: Courtesy of RFUK.

The ecological health of the DRC is deeply intertwined with the health of the planet, playing an outsized role in regulating the global climate and preserving biodiversity. Yet despite strong national and international opposition, the DRC has continued to pursue fossil fuel development across ecologically sensitive areas. In 2022, the government launched a controversial auction for 30 oil and gas blocks, many of which overlapped with protected areas, peatlands, and Indigenous and local lands. The move, which was covered in a previous report by Earth Insight and RFUK,[1] drew widespread condemnation for its potential to accelerate deforestation and disrupt globally important carbon sinks. Following strong national and international opposition, the Ministry of Hydrocarbons announced the partial cancellation of that auction in October 2024, removing several blocks.

FORESTS TO FRONTLINES: OIL EXPANSION THREATS IN THE DRC

An oil storage facility on the beach outside Muanda in the DRC, where a pipeline runs through the fragile Mangrove Marine Park Reserve, a nesting area for sea turtles. Image credit: Alexis Huguet/AFP via Getty Images.

Now, the government has launched a new licensing round for 52 oil blocks, in addition to the three previously awarded.

This latest round spans an unprecedented 124 million hectares of land and inland waters, a dramatic expansion from the controversial 2022 auction. Many of the proposed blocks encroach upon protected areas, lands inhabited by Indigenous people and forest-based communities, primary and intact forests, peatlands, and other high-integrity ecosystems that are essential to biodiversity conservation, climate stability, and local livelihoods. The move directly threatens the country's conservation goals and undermines its global commitments to climate action and the protection of biodiversity.

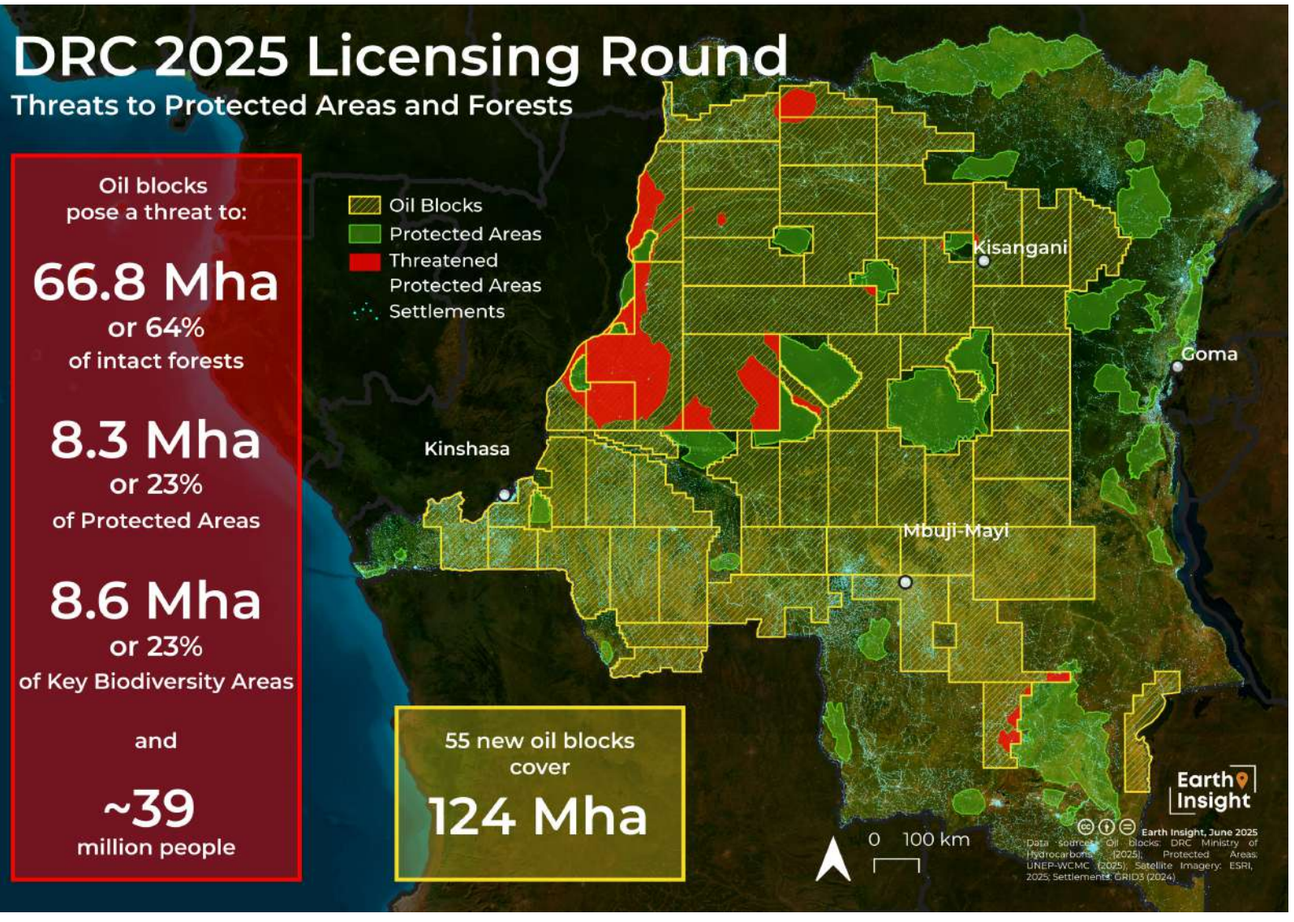
This report offers a new spatial analysis of the 2025 oil block licensing round, situating it within the broader historical context of proposed fossil fuel development in the DRC. It also elevates the growing chorus of opposition from civil society, community leaders, Indigenous Peoples, environmental defenders, and scientists to oil and gas activities in such critical ecosystems and climate strongholds.

Their message is clear: **large-scale fossil fuel expansion in ecologically important landscapes is incompatible with a livable future for people and the planet.**

The Expanding Reach of Oil Blocks in the DRC

Congo Peafowl (Afropavo congen)
Jiří Fejkl via Adobe Stock

The DRC's new oil licensing round calls into question the country's stated commitment to environmental protection and social progress. Rather than steering away from fossil fuel expansion, the government has dramatically widened the reach of oil concessions, putting at risk the ecological integrity of the Congo Basin. **More than half of the country (53%) is now covered by oil blocks,** threatening vast areas of ecological importance, disrupting local livelihoods, and threatening lands of cultural and spiritual significance, undermining the country's potential for sustainable development.



Map 1: DRC 2025 Oil Tender: Threats to Protected Areas and Forests

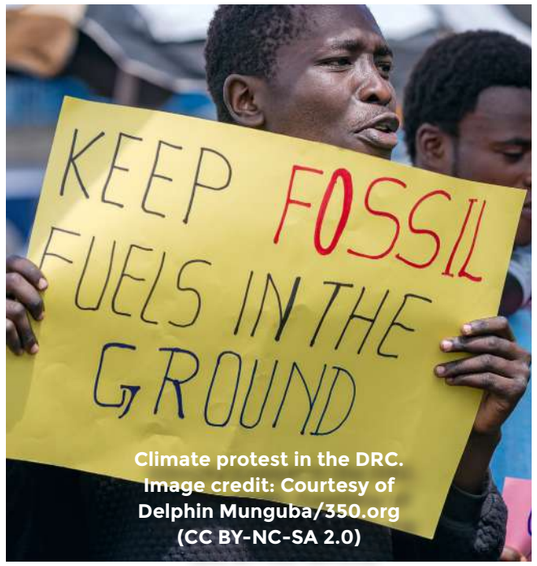
FORESTS TO FRONTLINES: OIL EXPANSION THREATS IN THE DRC

Conservation Wins Eclipsed by Expansion

The 2025 licensing round includes a few notable, although limited, conservation wins. Several high-profile protected areas appear to be removed from block boundaries following sustained pressure from civil society and international environmental defenders. Among those spared is Virunga National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that faced significant overlap with oil blocks in the controversial 2022 oil block auction.

However, this apparent victory masks a more disturbing reality. The new **oil blocks still overlap with 8.3 million hectares of protected areas (23%) and 8.6 million hectares of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) (23%):** sites identified as globally significant for species and ecosystems. These overlaps risk legal, ecological, and social conflict and threaten the integrity of places meant to be safeguarded for future generations.

At the same time, and with the exception of the 3 blocks previously awarded, many new blocks have been drawn to avoid direct overlap with protected areas while still being positioned directly adjacent to their boundaries. This pattern creates a false sense of safety. Infrastructure development associated with oil, including roads, pipelines, and settlements increases deforestation, wildlife disturbance, and land-use change that can have larger devastating effects on the ecosystems meant to be protected. The proximity of blocks to protected areas renders these areas highly vulnerable to edge effects and fragmentation, undermining the ecological connectivity and buffer zones that species and ecosystems require to thrive. The DRC already faces challenges implementing effective conservation policies, and with increasing anthropogenic pressure, the risk of overexploitation in these fragile areas is growing. Oil expansion near protected areas can also increase human presence, heightening the risk of tensions and direct conflict between operators, local communities, and conservation officers.



Climate protest in the DRC.
Image credit: Courtesy of Delphin Munguba/350.org
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Oil Development and Ecological Tipping Points

Perhaps most alarming is the threat posed to the DRC's intact tropical forest landscapes, which are some of the largest unbroken expanses of tropical forest on Earth. **The 2025 oil block auction encompasses 66.8 million hectares—or 64%—of the country's remaining intact forests.** The scale of potential disturbance is staggering, especially in a country that has contributed little to global emissions but whose ecosystems play an outsized role in stabilizing the planet's climate.

Scientists have warned that the Congo Basin may be approaching a dangerous ecological tipping point, beyond which its forests could begin to lose their capacity to absorb carbon and instead become a net source of greenhouse gas emissions.[2] This shift would mark a profound reversal in the Basin's role as one of the world's most important carbon sinks, with cascading consequences for climate regulation, rainfall patterns, and biodiversity across Central Africa and beyond. Continued fragmentation through industrial expansion risks triggering feedback loops of forest dieback, drying, and increased fire susceptibility. These impacts would not only undermine the DRC's contributions to global climate stability but could also accelerate the breakdown of one of Earth's last remaining intact rainforest systems.

The Green Corridor Project Undermined by Oil Licensing Round

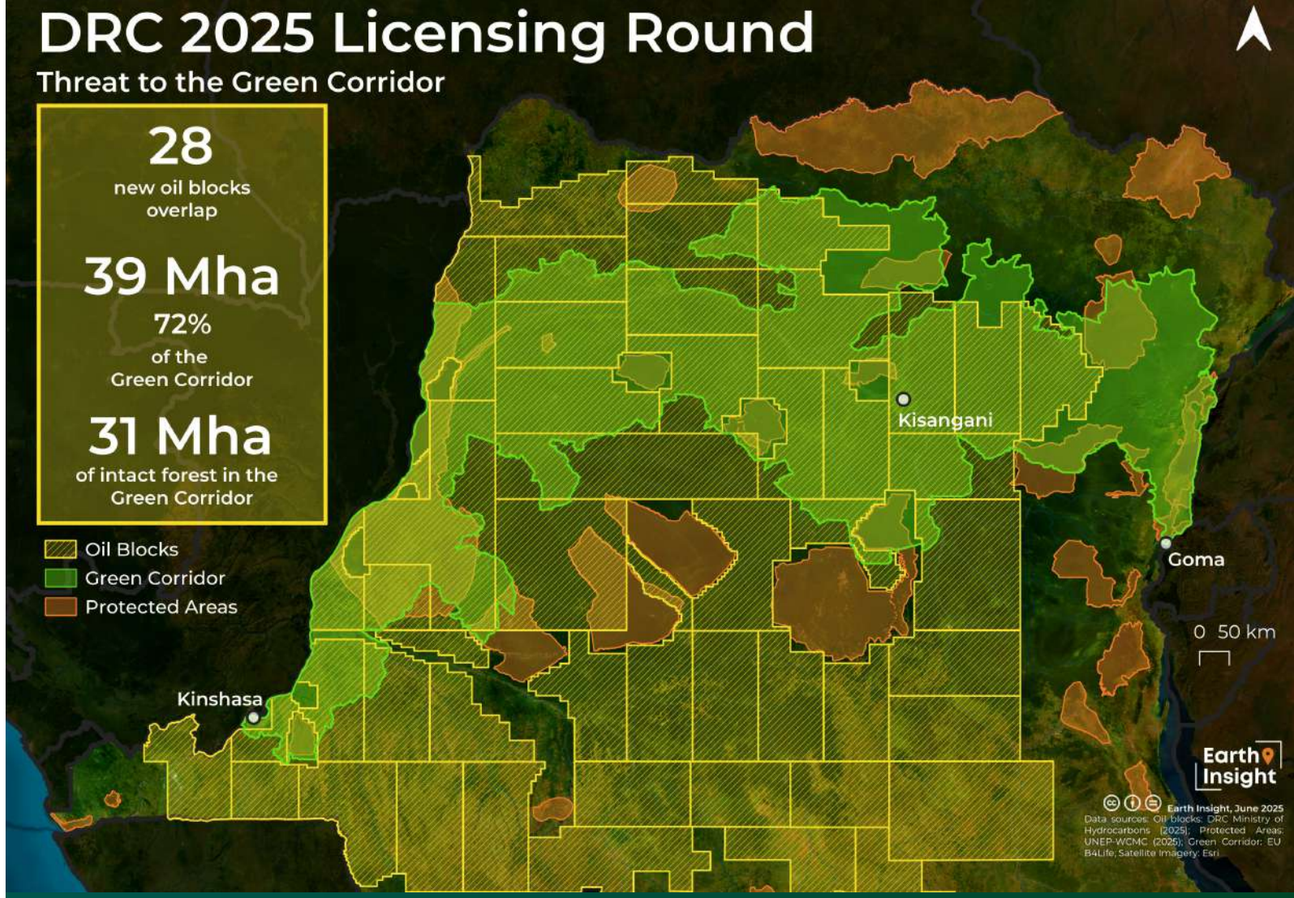
Elephants in North Kivu.
Image credit: MONUSCO / Abel Kavanagh via Flickr (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Formally established by ministerial decree in January 2025, the Kivu–Kinshasa Green Corridor aims to sustainably manage 540,000 km² of land and water in the Congo Basin.[3] This vast area the size of France forms a connective spine between the east and south-west of the country, linking biodiversity hotspots and carbon sinks in an ambitious attempt to safeguard ecosystem integrity at the landscape scale. The announcement of the Corridor drew significant praise from Congolese environmental groups, international conservation organizations, and donor institutions, many of which heralded it as a breakthrough for large-scale conservation and sustainable development in the Congo Basin.
In theory, the Green Corridor could help DRC meet its commitments under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, REDD+ agreements, and the Paris Agreement, while simultaneously positioning the country as a global leader in rainforest protection.

Just months after its formalization, however, the integrity of the Green Corridor project is being called into question by the latest licensing round the DRC. **28 oil blocks representing 39 Mha overlap with the Green Corridor, representing a striking 72% of the Corridor's area.** This overlap threatens to compromise the very ecosystems the project is intended to protect, including critical habitat for endangered species, peat swamp forests, and intact forest landscapes essential for carbon storage. If developed for oil production, this would introduce heavy infrastructure, pollution risks, and fragmentation into what was envisioned as a contiguous corridor of ecological resilience.

The overlap between these oil blocks and the Green Corridor sends a troubling signal. While the DRC government has touted the ambitious Green Corridor project as a model of environmentally friendly economic development for local communities, the contradiction weakens confidence in the project's objectives and casts doubts on the sincerity of the DRC's climate and biodiversity commitments.

While an exciting concept, the Green Corridor has also drawn criticism for procedural flaws in its development. Many local and forest-based communities whose lands fall within or near the proposed Corridor have not yet been consulted on its design and designation.[4] These communities now face dual risks: exclusion from land governance under conservation frameworks, and exposure to environmental degradation and social disruption from oil development. With neither the benefits of genuine conservation participation nor the safeguards against industrial harm, these communities have been placed in a precarious position.



Map 2: Oil threats to the Green Corridor

Concerns also persist over the lack of enforceable constraints on development projects that pose significant environmental and ecological risks—particularly oil and gas operations planned within the proposed area. Article 4 of Decree No. 25/01 of January 15, 2025, which establishes the "Kivu-Kinshasa Green Corridor" community reserve, states that the decree does not infringe upon existing community or third-party rights until the formal allocation of zones, particularly following the public inquiry. While this clause is intended to protect community rights, it creates a legal grey area that may leave the door open for developments incompatible with conservation goals. Rather than allowing ambiguity, the establishment of the Green Corridor should serve as a clear opportunity to prohibit extractive activities that undermine biodiversity protection and human rights, consistent with the Nature Conservation Act and other relevant legal frameworks.

The fate of the Green Corridor could serve as an important test case for the DRC's environmental governance. Will it become a living example of landscape-scale conservation that integrates climate, biodiversity, and community well-being, or collapse under the weight of short-term fossil fuel interests? The stakes are high, not only for the DRC but for the world.

> **"The Kivu-Kinshasa Green Corridor is a vital area for our biodiversity and the communities that depend on it. Establishing oil blocks there paves the way for the destruction of community forests, the fragmentation of natural habitats, and the pollution of our water, air, and land. This development model goes against the rights of local populations and the DRC's environmental commitments." - Emmanuel MUSUYU, Executive Director of CORAP**

Fossil Fuel Expansion in the World's Largest Tropical Peatland

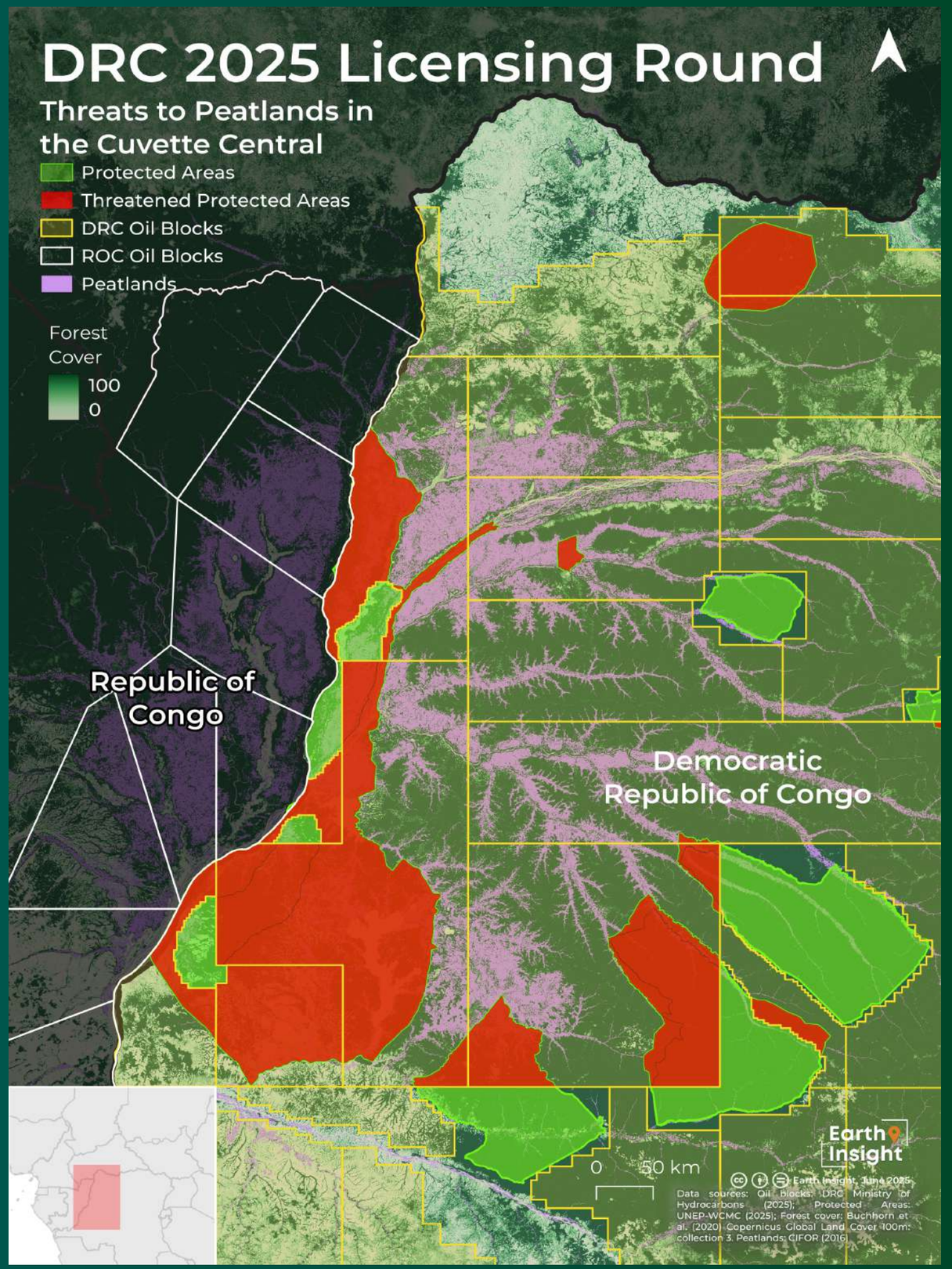
Deep within the heart of the Congo Basin lies the Cuvette Centrale– a vast, swampy expanse of ancient tropical peatlands stretching across the northern DRC and the Republic of the Congo (RoC). Covering over 145,000 square kilometers, an area larger than Nepal, this lowland region is home to the world's largest and most carbon-rich tropical peatland complex. Beneath its seemingly impenetrable wetlands lies an estimated 30 gigatons of carbon stored in layers of waterlogged organic matter, accumulated over thousands of years.[5] First scientifically confirmed as a massive carbon sink in 2017, the Cuvette Centrale has since become recognized as one of the most globally important ecosystems for climate stability.[6]

Ecologically, the peatland supports an extraordinary array of biodiversity. It forms part of the greater Congo Basin rainforest, which harbors species found nowhere else on Earth. Forest elephants, lowland gorillas, chimpanzees, and endemic birds thrive in the mosaic of swamp forests and riverine systems. Its wetlands also provide critical spawning and feeding grounds for fish species that sustain local diets and economies. Dozens of Indigenous and local communities rely directly on the ecosystem for food, clean water, fuelwood, and cultural practices. As a rich, living landscape, the Cuvette Centrale is deeply intertwined with both biodiversity and human survival.

The **DRC's 2025 licensing round includes new oil blocks that span nearly the entire DRC portion of the peatland,** putting vast tracts of this fragile ecosystem in direct danger of exploration and drilling. Extractive development in such waterlogged and carbon-rich soils carries catastrophic risk. Disruption of the peat layer through drainage, road-building, seismic testing, or drilling can expose the buried organic matter to oxygen, triggering decomposition and releasing enormous quantities of carbon dioxide and methane into the atmosphere. Once degraded, tropical peatlands are extremely difficult– if not impossible, to restore within human timescales.

The potential consequences of fossil fuel development in the Cuvette Centrale extend far beyond national borders. Scientists warn that even small-scale disturbance in tropical peatlands can create runaway emissions.[7] In a region already vulnerable to climate variability, the loss of the peatland's buffering function could also exacerbate local flooding, reduce water quality, and compromise regional food security. These risks raise serious questions about the compatibility of oil development with the DRC's commitments under the Paris Agreement and the Global Biodiversity Framework. The oil blocks are also inconsistent with the DRC's plans to develop carbon and biodiversity markets, which depend on the preservation of high-integrity ecosystems.

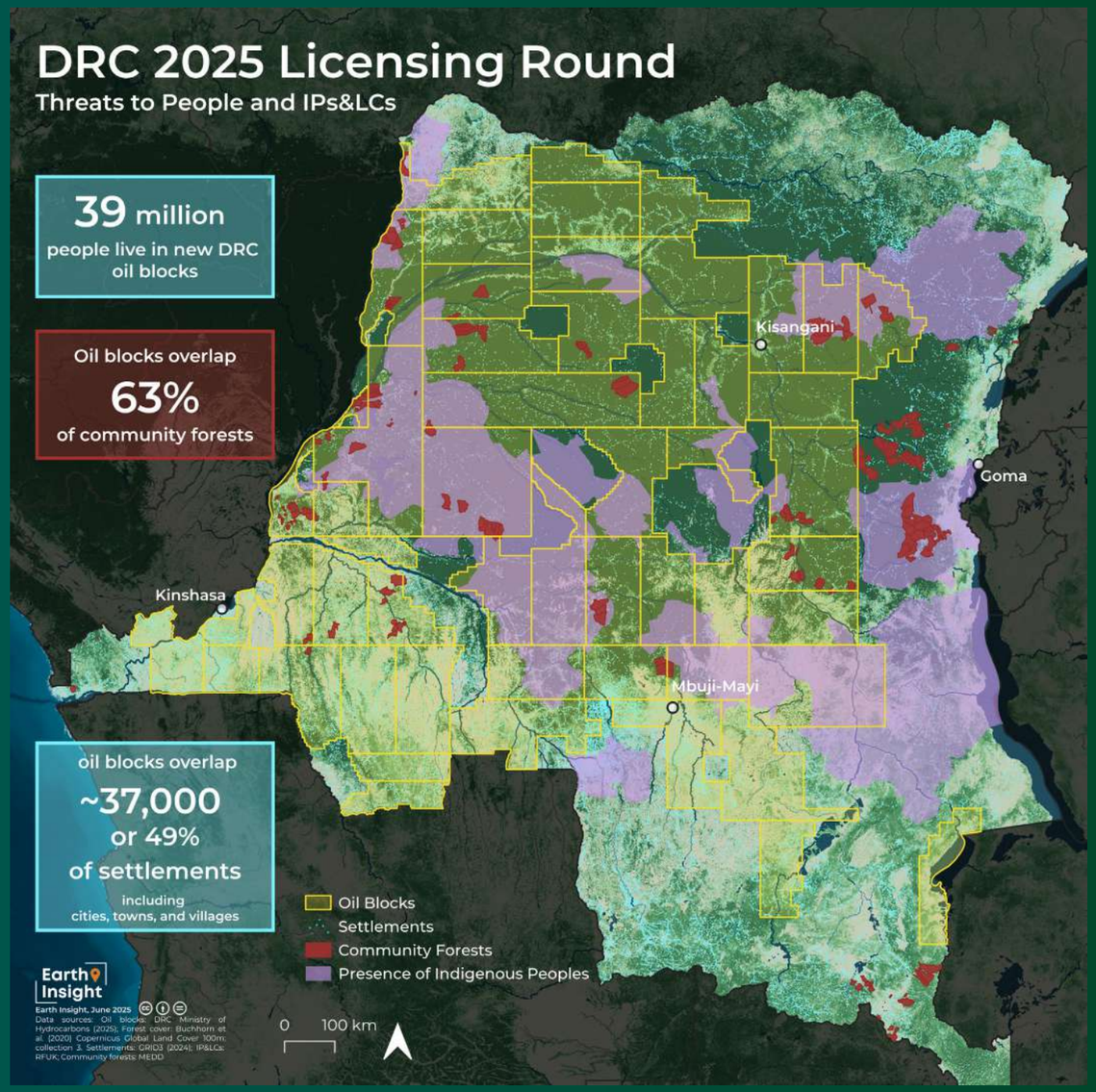
The proposed expansion of fossil fuel activity in the Cuvette Centrale illustrates a fundamental contradiction in the DRC's environmental rhetoric. While the government has voiced strong support for international climate and biodiversity agendas, the prioritization of extractive revenues over long-term ecosystem integrity could cause irreversible damage to both people and nature. Civil society continues to raise the alarm, warning that such shortsighted development threatens to undermine the very foundations of the country's natural wealth and climate resilience. As the largest tropical peatland on Earth and a critical stronghold in the global climate system, **the Cuvette Centrale should be treated as a non-negotiable conservation priority.** The costs of extraction or of poorly planned development are simply too high.



Map 3: Threats to Peatlands in the Cuvette Centrale

The Human Cost of the Latest Oil Blocks

The expansion of oil blocks in the DRC is not only a threat to biodiversity and climate stability, it is a direct threat to local people living amidst the potential extractive developments. An estimated **39 million people live within the boundaries of the newly designated oil blocks up for auction,** many of whom rely on the surrounding forests, rivers, and lands for food, clean water, livelihoods, and cultural survival. These are not abstract figures: these people are farmers, fishers, hunters, elders, children, and knowledge holders, whose daily lives and long-term well-being are placed at risk by extractive development.



Map 4: Threats to Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities

Community forest meeting in the DRC.
Image credit: Courtesy of RFUK.

Among the most at-risk are communities that have secured, through long-fought battles, community forest titles. Community forests are a growing form of legally recognized, locally governed tenure in the DRC and are part of a nationwide effort to decentralize forest governance and to give Indigenous Peoples and local communities more authority over the territories they have lived within and managed for generations. As of August 2025, over 4 million hectares of community forests have been formally recognized, with many more under consideration.[8] These forests are critical for local self-determination, offering pathways for local economic development, forest conservation, and cultural continuity. Participatory mapping efforts indicate that nearly all forest areas in the DRC are subject to some form of customary use or claim, even if not yet formally recognized.[9] The expansion of oil and other extractive industries therefore not only threatens existing community forests but also undermines the rights of communities seeking to secure legal recognition of their customary lands, eroding opportunities for self-determined development, conservation, and governance.

The latest oil licensing round places 63% of all community forests in the DR within oil block boundaries. This overlap threatens to displace communities, erode customary governance systems, and reverse decades of progress toward rights-based conservation. It could also violate the principles of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), which are enshrined in both national legislation and international law and are meant to protect Indigenous and local communities from precisely this kind of imposed development.[10]

While oil projects are often framed as engines of economic growth for local communities, the benefits are rarely shared equitably. In most cases, profits flow out of the local community to multinational corporations, while communities are left to face the costs: contaminated water, degraded lands, conflict, and disrupted livelihoods. The fossil fuel economy has a long history of failing to deliver tangible improvements for local people where it has occurred in the DRC and elsewhere in the region.

The human cost of this licensing round cannot be measured in hectares lost or emissions released alone. In the DRC, the cost must also be understood as dispossessed lands and disrupted livelihoods. If the government is serious about climate action and social progress, it must listen to its citizens on the frontlines and choose a path that does not include oil.

Muanda: A Devastating Precedent

Located at the mouth of the Congo River in the far western reaches of the DRC, the coastal town of Muanda has long been the face of the country's oil production. Home to the DRC's only active oil extraction operations, Muanda is a case study of the broken promises that often accompany fossil fuel development. Far from delivering local prosperity, Muanda is now emblematic of the social, environmental, and economic failures of industrial expansion in the absence of accountability.

Despite decades of oil extraction in the region, **local citizens in Muanda remain among the most impoverished in the country.** Access to clean water, healthcare, and education remains limited, and youth unemployment is rampant. The wealth generated from oil has flowed overwhelmingly to international companies and a small group of Congolese elites, with little reinvestment in local infrastructure or livelihoods. Instead, the people of Muanda have been left to deal with the toxic legacy of oil including polluted mangroves, degraded farmland, contaminated fisheries, and chronic health issues linked to extractive industry.[11,12,13]

Environmentally, the Muanda region has also suffered irreversible harm. Once-thriving mangrove ecosystems and coastal wetlands have been scarred by drilling operations, pipeline leaks, and poorly managed waste. Communities that once relied on clean coastal waters and healthy fisheries for food and income now face shrinking catch sizes, declining health, and increasing food insecurity. These realities are the documented, lived consequences of fossil fuel expansion.[14,15] Civil society groups and journalists have reported that local voices have been excluded from decision-making, that environmental monitoring has been weak or non-existent, and that grievances have been ignored. [16]

> **Oil exploitation in Muanda has robbed us all. Our community solidarity has broken down, leaving us divided. Our natural sources of livelihood are vanishing, and we suffer from illnesses caused by the polluted air we breathe— illnesses we don't know how to treat, with no proper health facilities or access to care. Muanda remains the least developed oil town in the world."**
>
> **- Alphonse Khonde, Muanda, DRC**

Now, as the DRC attempts to dramatically expand fossil fuel concessions across more than half its land area, the experience of Muanda looms large. If the same model of extraction is exported to the rest of the country, the consequences could be exponentially more devastating for people, biodiversity, climate, and for the planet. International actors including investors, donors, and climate institutions have a responsibility to align their support with rights-based, low-carbon development and to avoid repeating the extractive model that has already failed coastal communities in Muanda and frontline communities across the world.

Oil well in operation near Muanda, DRC. Image credit: Courtesy of Alexis Huguet via AFP/Getty Images.

Congolese civil society has spoken out publicly and powerfully against this licensing round and the broader threat of fossil fuel expansion. During the **Week of Action from June 22-28, 2025,** widespread coordinated actions took place, ranging from peaceful demonstrations, to press conferences, to strategic meetings. From Goma to Kinshasa to London, citizens raised their voices in defense of land, water, forests, and rights.

At the heart of this movement is the **Our Land Without Oil Coalition (Notre Terre Sans Pétrole)**—a diverse alliance of Congolese civil society organizations, Indigenous networks, youth movements, and legal advocacy groups. The coalition has become a leading force in challenging the narrative that fossil fuel development is compatible with progress. The coalition has issued open letters to the government, organized grassroots consultations, produced policy briefings, and brought local voices to international forums to demand a just, post-extractive future for the DRC.

Communities are demanding meaningful participation in decisions that affect their territories, recognition of their rights to land and forest governance, and investment in local economies that do not compromise their future. As Pascal Mirindi, Campaign Coordinator at the Our Land Without Oil Coalition puts it:

> **"The Congolese government continues to betray our expectations. One day, it proclaims itself a 'solution country' in the face of the climate crisis; the next, it auctions off our forests, our land, and our lives for oil projects. This constant contradiction reveals a sad reality: Our leaders lack vision, a plan for society, and genuine love for this country.**
>
> **It is high time to adopt a truly ambitious, fair and coherent environmental policy: policy that protects our forests, our protected areas, our biodiversity and places people—local communities, young people, women and future generations—at the center of decision-making.**
>
> **We have a choice: continue digging our grave with oil, or build a livable, dignified, and sovereign future."**

Critical Choices Ahead: Navigating the Future of the Congo Basin

The DRC stands at a critical juncture. The 2025 oil licensing round has laid a dangerous path for the country's development trajectory, deepening contradictions between ambitious social and environmental goals and the aggressive expansion of fossil fuel concessions. This tension threatens to unravel years of progress and promises around social and environmental accountability, prioritizing potential short term economic gains for a few over long term prosperity for Congolese society.

The risks of heading down this path cannot be overstated. The new blocks up for auction threaten globally significant peatlands, intact tropical forests, community forests, and protected areas– ecosystems that are vital to global climate regulation and biodiversity, and represent irreplaceable cultural landscapes for millions of Congolese people. Communities, civil society groups, and Indigenous leaders across the country have risen in unified opposition to this extractive push and continue to advance a vision rooted in rights, justice, and ecological integrity.

This is a defining moment for the DRC, one that will shape the country's environmental legacy and economic development future. As pressure mounts from civil society, it's clear that alternative pathways are not only possible, but necessary. The Our Lands without Oil Coalition has issued a clear call to protect forests, uphold human rights, and reject extractive models that have failed people and ecosystems alike. The DRC government and international actors should be standing with local citizens and frontline communities in choosing a different path and demanding a future beyond oil.

Our Land Without Oil protest in the DRC.
Image credit: Courtesy of Notre Terre Sans Pétrole.

FORESTS TO FRONTLINES: OIL EXPANSION THREATS IN THE DRC

Key Solutions and Proposed Actions

- **In line with the demands of Congolese Civil Society, cancel the 2025 oil block licensing round and stop all future hydrocarbon expansion.**
- **Treat the Cuvette Centrale peatlands as a non-negotiable conservation priority** in recognition of their irreplaceable role in global climate regulation.
- **Revoke oil blocks that fall within the Kivu–Kinshasa Green Corridor,** and uphold the corridor's original vision of landscape-scale conservation and sustainable development.
- **Respect and uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities** by ensuring Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) for all extractive and conservation activities.
- **Recognize and protect community forests and customary lands yet to be formalized from industrial expansion,** strengthening and expanding locally governed conservation and forest management models.
- **Advance key legal and policy reforms such as implementation of the Indigenous Peoples and land-use planning laws and development of a new national community forest strategy** to promote good land governance and respect for the rights of forest communities potentially impacted by extractive industries.
- **Accelerate progress towards low-carbon development** including harnessing DRC's vast potential in renewable energies, sustainable use of critical minerals and other legal and policy measures to promote green investments.
- **Align international financing and donor support with climate, biodiversity, and rights commitments,** not fossil fuel expansion.
- **Guarantee meaningful participation and transparency.** Involve communities and civil society in environmental governance, monitoring, and decision-making processes.

A view from above of the vast forests of the DRC.
Image credit: Courtesy of the U.S. Forest Service via Flickr.

Annex
Spatial Analysis Methodology

Data Disclaimer:
The geospatial analyses in this report are an attempt to capture threats from the Democratic Republic of Congo's 2025 oil auction using the most recently available, most accurate and precise data and methods available. As such, the results of these analyses may change between reports as data and/or methods are updated. The World Database of Key Biodiversity Areas (WDKBA) releases regular updates based on national assessment processes. The World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) has known data inconsistencies due to national government data reporting. We have accounted for these inconsistencies wherever possible.

Oil Blocks
The extent of oil blocks was digitized by Earth Insight based on the June 2025 Cuvette Centrale Oil Block Map released by the Ministry of Hydrocarbons. This map includes the 52 oil blocks announced as part of the auctions well as 3 recently revived blocks that are licensed to Compagnie Minière Congolaise (CoMiCo). This analysis does not include blocks with previous exploration or production licenses, or repealed blocks.

Forest Cover
The intact forest cover area under oil blocks was calculated by intersecting the JRC Tropical Moist Forest (TMF) cover product (Vancutsem et al., 2021) with the oil block layer using Zonal Histogram, and then summarizing the number of undisturbed forest pixels. The Copernicus Global Land Service, derived from the PROBA-V satellite, was used for visualization (Buchhorn et al., 2020).

Protected Areas
The protected areas data used in this analysis are from the World Database of Protected Areas (UNEP-WCMC and IUCN, 2025). Protected areas include strict nature reserves, national parks, and protected areas with sustainable use of natural resources. The area of PAs under oil blocks was calculated by intersecting the WDPA layer using the intersection tool.

Key Biodiversity Areas
The area of KBAs under oil blocks was calculated by intersecting the WDKBA layer (BirdLife International, 2024) using the intersection tool.

Green Corridor
The polygon for the Green Corridor used in this analysis is from the EU Biodiversity4Life (2025). The oil blocks were intersected with the Green Corridor polygon to calculate the area of overlap and the number of overlapping blocks. Intact forest was calculated by intersecting the TMF cover product with the extent of oil blocks within the Green Corridor using Zonal Histogram, and summarising the number of undisturbed forest pixels.

Impacts on People
The 2020 UN adjusted constrained population estimate (100m) from WorldPop was used to estimate the number of people living within the oil blocks. The population estimate was calculated by intersecting the population raster with the extent of oil blocks using Zonal Statistics, and summing the population values in each pixel.

The number of human settlements under threat was calculated using a global product maintained by the US National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (2025). Settlements in this dataset include cities, towns, and villages.

Data on community forests comes from the National Community Forest Database from the DRC's Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, Forest Management Directorate, Community Forestry Division. The threat to community forests was calculated by intersecting the community forest layer with the oil block layer.

In order to show the impact of the oil auction on Indigenous peoples and local communities, a layer showing the presence of Indigenous peoples was used. This layer was created by the NGO Dynamique des Group des Peuples Autochtones (DGPA) and RFUK's MappingForRights program, and shows administrative areas known to have the presence of Indigenous peoples. This layer should not be equated with Indigenous territories, which still need to be mapped and recognized.

Annex II Spatial Data Sources

Oil Blocks: Earth Insight (2025) Oilbase; Ministry of Hydrocarbons (2025) Carte des Blocs Petroliers de la Cuvette Central Edition 2025
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Protected Areas: UNEP-WCMC and IUCN (2025), Protected Planet: The World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) and World Database on Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (WD-OECM) [Online], March 2025, Cambridge, UK: UNEP-WCMC and IUCN. Available at: www.protectedplanet.net.
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Community Forests: Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (MEDD). (n.d.) Community Forests. Available from https://rdc.geocfcl.org/applications/
Presence of Indigenous Peoples: Rainforest Foundation UK/MappingForRights, Brainforest, CADEM, CED, DGPA, Foder, GASHE, MEFP, OCDH, RRN (2020). Indicative Indigenous Presence. Available at https://www.mappingforrights.org/
Country Boundaries: Global Database of Administrative Areas - GADM (v. 3.6) [dataset]. Available at https://gadm.org/index.html

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