

Workshop on Controlling the Impact of Ebola on African Apes



Concept Paper
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Why?

Over the last decade the Ebola virus has swept across western equatorial Africa, emerging repeatedly into human populations and causing massive dieoffs of western gorillas and common chimpanzees. About one third of the world's gorillas have died. The world's two largest great ape populations, at Minkebe in northern Gabon and Odzala in northwest Congo, have been devastated. At the current rate of spread, most of the remaining handful of large gorilla populations will be hit within three to four years. Saving these large populations is a top ape conservation priority. If they too are devastated by Ebola, we will be left with a sparse patchwork of apes, many of them living outside of formal protected areas. These remnant patches will be too widely scattered to efficiently protect from the ravages of commercial hunting and too small to have good long term viability.

What?

We propose to hold a workshop on controlling the impact of Ebola on apes. The workshop will evaluate potential control measures, including vaccination, habitat modification (e.g. enhancement of natural barriers to Ebola spread or removal of focal points of reservoir contact), reservoir population control, and translocation. Control measures will be ranked according to their feasibility and potential for success. Information gaps hindering accurate prioritization or effective implementation will also be identified. For each promising control strategy, the group will develop a detailed timetable of which actions need to be taken, who might take these actions, and how they might be funded.

Products of the workshop will include:

- A report evaluating options for controlling the impact of Ebola on apes.
- A research plan for filling knowledge gaps that limit the ability to respond effectively.
- An action plan for implementing the most promising control strategies.
- Briefing materials for policy makers.

Who?

The workshop participants will include top experts from pertinent fields including virology, vaccinology, wildlife disease ecology, primatology, veterinary science, and wildlife management as well as a governmental representative from the most likely country of implementation, Republic of Congo. The primary funder for the workshop is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with matching funds from the Max Planck Institute and the participants' home institutions.

When & Where?

The workshop will last for two days and take place in early March at U.S. Fish and Wildlife headquarters in Arlington, Virginia.