THE CONGO BASIN IN FIVE NUMBERS AND FIVE MOVES

# FROM GLOBAL OUTLOOK TO REGIONAL RESPONSE

The Congo Basin is the **last of the three great tropical forest regions that still functions as a strong carbon sink**. New data for 2016–2025, computed across three independent datasets, show a region that has **contained forest loss without transforming its drivers**, just as a new wave of mining, energy and infrastructure investment moves towards final investment decisions.

| 1.67 Mha | −53% | 1.1 Gt | 77% | 29 GtC |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| tree cover lost in 2025: 6% below 2024, but 2% above the five-year average | permanent deforestation against 2010–2015 (0.87 to 0.41 Mha/yr, JRC definition) | gross $CO_2e$ emitted per year from forest loss: flat for a decade | of Basin loss and 79% of emissions occur in the DRC | in the Cuvette Centrale peatlands: the DRC's 2025 oil blocks cover almost all of its share |

## THE HEADLINE: STABILITY WITHOUT TRANSFORMATION

Forest loss eased 6% in 2025, but this is a return from an exceptional fire year, not a structural break: total loss still sits 2% above the five-year average. The improvement is also modest against a much sharper global correction. Worldwide, tropical primary-forest loss fell 36% in 2025 as the extreme 2024 fire season subsided; in the Congo Basin it fell 5 to 6%, and in the DRC non-fire loss reached a record high. Permanent deforestation has more than halved on the stricter JRC definition, yet **degradation now exceeds deforestation** (0.67 against 0.41 Mha a year, 2021–2025) and gross emissions have not fallen materially in ten years. Current policies prevent rapid deterioration; they do not yet put the Basin on a credible 2030 pathway.

## ONE REGION, THREE VERY DIFFERENT SITUATIONS

| | DRC | Cameroon | Rep. of Congo | Gabon | CAR | Eq. Guinea |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2025 vs 2024 | -7% | +15% | -38% | -25% | +22% | -35% |
| vs 2020-24 avg | -1% | +14% | -3% | -8% | +28% | -34% |

*Change in annual tree-cover loss by country. Warm = loss increased; teal = loss decreased. GFW/Hansen, 30% canopy threshold.*

**VOLUME · DRC**

The centre of gravity: 1.29 Mha lost in 2025, 77% of the regional total. Even modest gains here outweigh large ones anywhere else. Instruments exist at scale: results-based partnerships, payments for environmental services, land-use reform.

**FRONTIERS · CAMEROON & CAR**

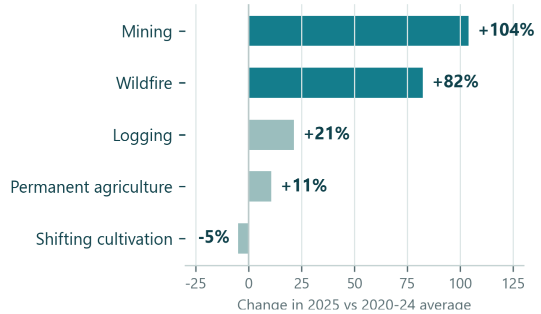
Where the trend is moving fastest. Cameroon lost 206 kha, 15% above 2024, and its primary-forest loss of 105 kha is a national record. CAR has the steepest trajectory in the Basin: loss up 22%, 28% above its five-year average, emissions up 32%. Permanent agriculture already leads in CAR (49%) and is surging in Cameroon (38%); early action can still prevent entrenchment.

**PERMANENCE · GABON · EQ. GUINEA · ROC**

Low loss, high carbon, rising exposure to oil, corridors and mining. The task is to make continued stewardship investable: standing-forest finance with a meaningful, transparent share reaching Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

## THE DRIVERS ARE SHIFTING

Three-quarters of loss still comes from smallholder farming and wood energy; the response must centre on rural transformation, land-use planning and tenure. But the fastest-growing pressures are different in kind.




*Change in basin-wide loss by driver, 2025 vs 2020–24 average. WRI/Google DeepMind driver attribution v1.3.*

Wildfire has produced its two worst years on record, 100 kha in 2024 and 67 kha in 2025 against a 2020–2023 average of 21 kha, as the Basin measurably dries: an emerging climate-fire feedback. Mining-driven loss roughly doubled in 2025, to its highest recorded share of Basin loss at 2.4%, and the footprint that matters is the indirect one. Across sub-Saharan Africa, each hectare cleared directly for mining is estimated to trigger about 34 hectares of further forest loss within five years, through the roads, settlement and farming that follow.

## INVESTMENT DECISIONS ARE BEING LOCKED IN

### Oil and gas

The DRC's 2025 licensing round: **52 blocks over 1.24 million km²**. Independent mapping (Earth Insight 2025) puts them over almost the entire DRC part of the Cuvette Centrale peatlands and 72% of the Kivu–Kinshasa Green Corridor, the DRC's own initiative.

### Mining

Nearly **100,000 km² of mining titles overlap forest** in the DRC, and mining-driven loss there has risen nearly sevenfold since 2016, from 3.4 kha to 22.7 kha.

### Corridors

Some **60,000 km of new roads across the Basin by 2030** under business as usual, implying about 0.6 Mha of additional forest loss on the Outlook's own conservative assumption.

Sources: Hansen et al. 2013 / Global Forest Watch 2026 (tree-cover and primary-forest loss, 30% threshold); JRC Tropical Moist Forest (Vancutsem et al. 2021); CAFI–FAO sample-based estimates 2015–2023; WRI/Google DeepMind driver attribution v1.3 (Sims et al. 2025); Harris et al. 2021 (emissions); WRI 2026 (2025 global loss update); Morton et al. 2026 (indirect mining footprint); Earth Insight 2025 (oil-block overlays); Kuepper et al. 2025 (Tropical Deforestation Outlook); Crezee et al. 2022 (peat); RFN 2024 (finance reaching communities). All figures as computed for the companion paper, September 2026.

## THE FINANCE WINDOW

The architecture is shifting. The **Belém Call** and the **Tropical Forest Forever Facility** could, for the first time, pay for standing forest rather than for reduced loss, alongside results-based partnerships that pay for verified reductions. Access is not automatic: it depends on eligibility, credible national measurement, robust and nationally endorsed delivery systems, and evidence that finance reaches landscapes, communities and households. Today less than a fifth of the finance intended for Indigenous Peoples and local communities reaches them. Safeguards negotiated after financing is signed are weaker and costlier; **the window to embed them is now**.

## FIVE PRIORITIES TO 2030

1. **Secure the Basin's centre of gravity.** Donors and results-based partners concentrate on the DRC: partnerships anchored in verified results, payments for environmental services at scale, land-use reform, and interventions that change the economics of charcoal and agricultural expansion.
2. **Prevent the next frontiers from consolidating.** Donors and supply-chain actors concentrate early-warning and agricultural support on Cameroon and CAR, before conversion becomes permanent and commodity-driven.
3. **Make permanence investable.** Finance providers position Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and the Republic of the Congo to access standing-forest finance, with a meaningful and transparent share reaching Indigenous Peoples and local communities through a robust benefit-sharing instrument such as the CAFI PES management tool.
4. **Set the red lines before investment decisions are locked in.** Financiers make corridor-level assessment a condition of mining, oil and infrastructure lending. Governments may wish to consider restricted-area status for peatlands and intact forests, and free, prior and informed consent as a standing requirement.
5. **Move from monitoring change to managing risk.** Governments and partners treat degradation and fire as first-order metrics, connect alerts to funded response chains, and use verified outcomes to steer finance where avoided loss delivers most.

### An invitation to contribute

RFN and CAFI invite governments, donors, companies and civil society to share **how these findings could inform your institution's action**, and the actions you envisage to protect the Congo Basin, building in particular on Section 7 of the report, "From evidence to action". Write to the CAFI Secretariat at **secretariatcafi@gmail.com**.

## READ THE FULL COMPANION PAPER

From Global Outlook to Regional Response: Advancing the Congo Basin Forest Agenda, a joint evidence paper by Rainforest Foundation Norway and the Central African Forest Initiative, extending the Tropical Deforestation Outlook to the Congo Basin.