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Rwanda's Forest of Hope to expand by 21 percent

New effort will add a 30-mile forest corridor to Nyungwe National Park for a group of 14 chimpanzees facing extinction.

By [Michael d'Estries](#)

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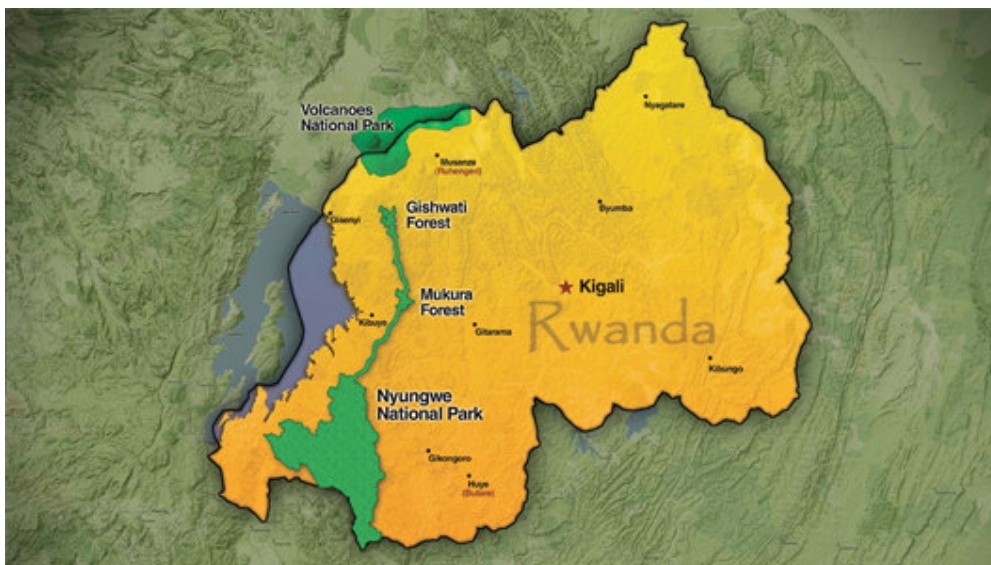


Photo: [greatapetrust.org](#)

In an effort to protect an endangered group of chimpanzees and restore balance to the ecosystem, Rwanda has announced an ambitious expansion effort for the Gishwati National Conservation Park.

Under the proposed action plan, total protected land would increase by 21 percent — from from 3,018 acres to 3,665 acres — and would mark the creation of a corridor, dubbed the "Forest of Hope", to help protect the chimpanzees. This 30-mile strip would connect to the Nyungwe National

Park. The plan also calls for the reforestation of 647 acres in the Kinyenkanda area of Rutsiro District in Rwanda's Western Province.

In addition, the Rwandan government has also started cleaning up the Sebeya River, an important water source in the region. One of the main causes of degradation has been soil erosion caused by families intensely farming steep slopes and clearing trees and vegetation. In an effort to reduce the erosion, the government recently relocated 150 families to new settlements that will not impact the watershed.

"The water quality of the Sebeya River is linked to the health of local people and the national economy," said Dr. Benjamin Beck, director of the Gishwati Area Conservation Program. "The Sebeya is not only an important source of drinking water for local residents but it also provides hydroelectric power and water for beverage production downstream."

"Now, Kinyenkanda must be reforested. This will stabilize the hillsides and reduce erosion into the Sebeya, helping to restore its clarity and economic usefulness," Beck said. "Since Kinyenkanda has been added to the Gishwati National Conservation Park, reforestation will also provide additional habitat for the 14 chimpanzees and other animals that live in the park."

The Gishwati Area Conservation Program began in late 2007 when H.E. President Paul Kagame and [Great Ape Trust](#) and [Earthpark](#) Founder Ted Townsend pledged at the [Clinton Global Initiative](#) meeting to found a "national conservation park" in Rwanda to benefit climate, biodiversity and the welfare of the Rwandan people.
