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Media Release

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Rwanda places a high value on its mountain gorillas

The Government of Rwanda, one of the three range States for the critically endangered mountain gorilla, is making headlines for doubling the price to spend one hour with gorillas in Volcanoes National Park from 750 USD to 1,500 USD.

While this has received some mixed reactions amongst the private sector and within the region, [WWF](#) and [Fauna & Flora International](#), who collaborate on mountain gorilla conservation via the coalition [International Gorilla Conservation Programme](#) (IGCP), celebrate the move in order to manage a growing tourism sector within ecological limits.

“This decision is both brave and correct,” says Fauna & Flora International’s Chief Executive Mark Rose. *“It shows the government’s concern and commitment to the proper management of Rwanda’s most valuable natural asset.”*

Demand for this unique experience is high, while the number of mountain gorillas remains very low; fewer than 900 individuals exist in very restricted forests on the borders of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda.

“Provided tourism figures for gorilla encounters remain high, this move is likely to benefit both gorillas and people,” says Anna Behm Masozera, Director of the International Gorilla Conservation Programme. *“I hope, and in fact fully expect, international tourists will continue to travel to Rwanda and to the region to experience a moment in time with the mountain gorillas, free and wild in their native forests.”*

The price change has been coupled with a decision to increase the percentage of total park revenue earmarked and used for conservation and development projects in neighbouring communities from 5% to 10%. The Rwanda Development Board has informed stakeholders that the raise in permit price will also fund targeted investments over the long term to ensure a higher value experience for tourists, a safer environment for the gorillas, and exploration of innovative ways to expand habitat when and where it results in a clear win for both gorillas and people.

“When you consider the threats the population has endured over the years including, war, hunting, habitat destruction and disease, it is encouraging that the mountain gorilla has not gone extinct. Placing a high premium on this unique experience and investing more in community conservation is a welcome move,” says Margaret Kinnaird, WWF Wildlife Practice Leader.

WWF and Fauna & Flora International understand that, irrespective of the permit fees increment, the current regulations to minimise potential negative impacts of tourism on gorillas – ensuring a limited number of tourists spend no more than one hour with the gorillas, with only one group of tourists visiting each gorilla group per day – will be maintained¹.

“The pursuit of better practice to achieve greater protection of the mountain gorilla is something that is continuous and forms a large part of our support, whether this is in regard to how tourists are managed in proximity to gorillas and within the parks, and how the funds are put to use by communities through the revenue sharing process,” says Behm Masozera.

“There is a need to put in place and enforce additional measures which will more closely align mountain gorilla tourism across the range States with the best practice approaches recommended by the IUCN; this type of harmonisation of policies for wildlife conservation and tourism development is made possible under the framework provided for by the Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration²,” she adds.

While the future of mountain gorillas is far from secure, WWF and Fauna & Flora International are committed to continuing to work together and with the mountain gorilla range States and other actors to reinforce the best practice approaches which can make tourism a mechanism to achieve both conservation and sustainable development goals.

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Notes to editors:

1. A means of informing tourists about the regulations in place: Gorilla Friendly™ Pledge. www.gorillafriendly.org

The International Gorilla Conservation Programme has signed an MOU with Wildlife Friendly Enterprise Network for the Gorilla Friendly™ project which translates best practice into standards which can be independently audited. Stakeholder consultation has occurred and the standards for park operations, guiding, tour operators, hotels and lodges, and products are moving toward piloting in the region.

2. The Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration is a mechanism for strategic, transboundary, collaborative management of the Greater Virunga landscape. Set up by Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN), Rwanda Development Board and Uganda Wildlife Authority with their partners in the region, it started with ranger collaboration to protect mountain gorillas in Mgahinga, Bwindi, Virunga and Volcanoes National Parks in 1991 and has since expanded in scope to include tourism, community conservation and research and monitoring.

About Fauna & Flora International (FFI) (www.fauna-flora.org)

FFI protects threatened species and ecosystems worldwide, choosing solutions that are sustainable, based on sound science and take account of human needs. Operating in more than 50 countries worldwide, FFI saves species from extinction and habitats from destruction, while improving the livelihoods of local people. Founded in 1903, FFI is the world's longest established international conservation body and a registered charity.

About WWF

WWF is one of the world's largest and most respected independent conservation organizations, with over 5 million supporters and a global network active in over 100 countries. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the earth's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.