

FORESTS MONITOR

Cameroon Fieldwork Report CMR/02/01 July 2002

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report documents recent field evidence of illegal logging activities in the Djoum region of the South Province of Cameroon. During fieldwork in May and July 2002 evidence indicating a large-scale illegal logging operation was observed, and GPS coordinates were taken of log ponds containing abandoned logs within the unallocated UFA 09-007, with skidding tracks continuing to near the boundaries of the internationally important Dja Reserve. The access road to this operation is hidden within the compound of the SFID/SID sawmill near Djoum, and it is therefore possible that illegally harvested logs have been laundered through this legitimate business. Forests Monitor calls upon MINEF and the Independent Observer to urgently conduct a full investigation following these revelations, and take sanctions against those found to be responsible for defrauding the Government of Cameroon and local communities of important revenues.

INTRODUCTION

Forests Monitor recently conducted fieldwork in Cameroon to investigate reports of logging operations that are defrauding the Government and people of Cameroon of important revenues and causing social conflict between the logging industry and local communities. In this report we present findings from a field visit to the Djoum region of South Province, during which evidence indicating a large-scale illegal logging operation was recorded in an unallocated forest management unit.

REPORT ON FIELDWORK

The small town of Djoum is within a forested region of the South Province of Cameroon. It is an important area for a number of reasons: there are a large number of Baka 'pygmy' communities in the region; it is an area of high biodiversity, containing large numbers of forest elephants (*Loxodonta cyclotis*), western lowland gorillas (*Gorilla gorilla gorilla*) and other primates; and is within the region proposed as a transfrontier conservation area between the reserves of Dja in Cameroon, Minkébé in Gabon and Odzala in Congo (Brazzaville). However, it is also a prime target for the logging industry.

Investigating unsubstantiated reports of logging operations in the unallocated UFA 09-007 (43,991 hectares), we followed the public road to locate possible evacuation tracks from logging operations within this forest management unit. However, no general access routes were observed leading to the

concession directly from the public road, with the exception of a track near the village of Amvam at the south of the concession. This track was blocked by treefall, and we followed on foot until the GPS coordinates indicated that this track was clearly within the UFA (see map below). Although this track had been clearly used for log extraction in the past, vegetation regrowth indicated that this track was not in current use, and was probably at least one year old. Consequently we did not pursue this track to its conclusion.

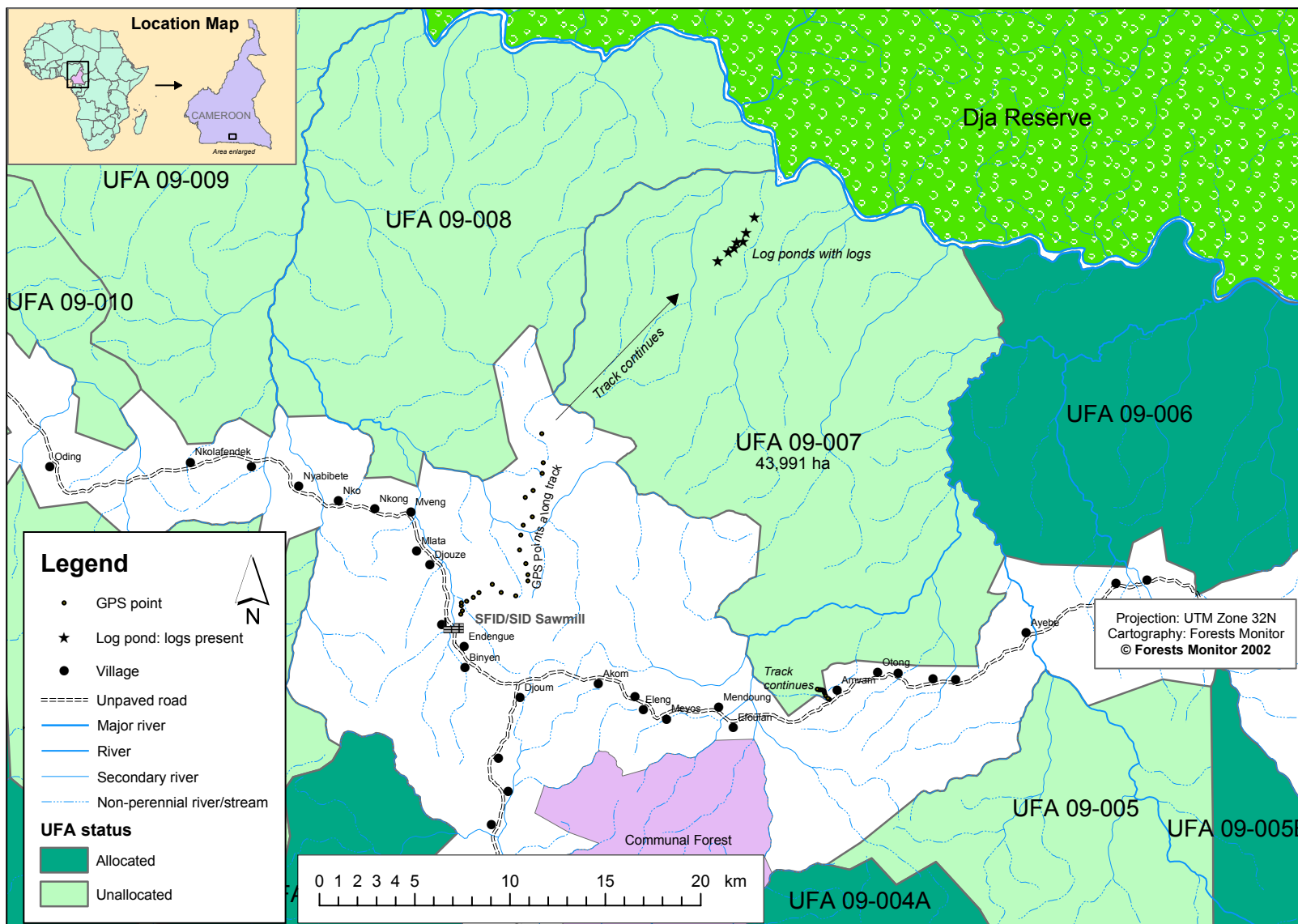
Further investigations revealed that a logging track to and from UFA 09-007 is within the compound of the SFID/SID sawmill near Djoum (see map below), where it is well guarded against discovery by watchmen at the gate. Moreover, even within the compound the track is hidden against casual observation, suggesting that it could be part of a clandestine operation to bring logs into the sawmill. This track was followed from the sawmill for 15 km, passing a number of empty log ponds and skidding tracks, indicating that considerable amounts of timber have been extracted from this area of forest. The track subsequently became more difficult to negotiate and was followed without recording GPS coordinates. The main track continued for a further 17 km into the unallocated UFA where a series of log ponds containing cut logs were discovered. GPS coordinates indicated that these log ponds were 13 km inside the boundaries of UFA 09-007, and only two kilometres from the boundary of the Dja Reserve, a 5,260km² internationally important wildlife reserve and Biosphere Reserve, managed by ECOFAC. Many skidding tracks were seen leading from these log ponds further towards the interior of the UFA and the boundary of the Dja Reserve, suggesting that a large-scale illegal logging operation could have been taking place.

Analysis of LANDSAT 7 satellite images also indicates that there are several other large tracks present within this unallocated UFA, raising the possibility that illegal logging is even more widespread than reported here, and that many of the high value trees, such as Moabi (*Baillonella toxisperma*), could have already been illegally removed. If further official investigation confirms this, then the operation will have taken place illegally without any sort of management plan, and consequently will have caused considerable ecological damage and loss of revenue for the Government of Cameroon and local communities.

The *Société Forestière et Industrielle de la Doumé* (SFID) commonly processes Moabi – a tree of considerable importance to the local indigenous communities (see *Sold Down the River* p.6) – and where the company operates in East Province this tree species has become locally extinct. The *Société Industrielle de Djoum* (SID) is a smaller company operating primarily through the sawmill at Djoum, which has an input capacity of 50,000 cubic metres per year. Recent information suggests that legal operations here have suffered a downturn, and the number of workers employed at the site has fallen from 1000 to around 400. It is possible, therefore, that the company is using illegally harvested timber to maintain its business in Djoum. Being the sole sawmill in this region, it would be well-placed to benefit when currently unallocated UFAs in the region are offered for auction in the future.

Both SFID and SID are subsidiaries of Rougier SA, a French company operating widely in the Congo Basin and one of the region's principal loggers. Rougier is listed on the Paris Stock Exchange, but the largest stakeholder in the company is the Rougier family itself. Additionally, the sawmill was a partnership between Rougier and the Italian Dassi group, although there are rumours that the Dassi group may now be the sole operator despite signs on the sawmill still indicating joint ownership and the Rougier mark on sawn timber (see photo below).

The findings of this recent investigation suggest that large-scale illegal logging has occurred in this area, causing long-term ecological damage with wide-reaching social and financial implications. However, limitations inhibiting independent investigations mean that the government must remain vigilant and responsive to the need for ongoing official missions. Despite the recent efforts by the government of Cameroon to control illegal logging, this fieldwork report highlights the need for greater transparency surrounding logging and processing operations, including clear and open procedures for independent reports of illegal activities to be followed up in a rigorous and transparent manner. Until companies operating in the forest sector conduct business in a responsible manner, the government of Cameroon will continue to be defrauded of substantial revenues, and the livelihoods of local communities and the high biodiversity value of these tropical forests will remain under serious threat.



Map of the Djoum region illustrating the track leading from the SFID/SID sawmill and the log ponds close to the boundaries of the Dja Reserve.



Photograph: Sign at entry to sawmill

RECOMMENDATIONS

Forests Monitor recommends that:

- MINEF immediately investigates this case, assesses any ecological, social and fiscal damages, and imposes financial penalties on the company/ies responsible, additionally preventing them from holding further logging concessions until they demonstrate that they are able to operate within their legal obligations;
- The Independent Observer of the logging sector in Cameroon, Global Witness, immediately investigates this case;
- MINEF and the Independent Observer establish clear and transparent procedures for independent third party findings to be investigated in a rigorous manner.

FURTHER READING

Background information on logging activities in the Congo Basin, the companies mentioned here, and many of the other logging companies operating in this region, is available in the Forests Monitor report *Sold Down the River* (available online from <http://www.forestsmonitor.org/reports>).

DEFINITIONS

GPS	Global Positioning System. GPS receivers allow users to accurately pinpoint their location on the surface on the earth to within 30 metres. A Garmin GPS12 with external antenna was used during this fieldwork.
GIS	Geographic Information System. A software system used for geographic analysis and map production. ArcView 8.2 was used in this series of reports.
FMU	Forest Management Unit (English for UFA). A defined area of forest exploitation for which a management plan is required
MINEF	Ministère de l'Environnement et des Forêts. This Ministry oversees the forests of Cameroon.
UFA	Unité Forestière d'Aménagement (French for FMU)