



Construction of Buligi Marine Ranger Post, Murchison Falls National Park (MFNP) Recovery Program

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Background:

Murchison Falls National Park (MFNP) in Uganda is home to some of the most diverse and beautiful wildlife species in Africa. Covering an area of 3,877 km² at the northern end of the Albertine Rift Valley, along the shores of Lake Albert in north-western Uganda, the park is divided by the Victoria Nile River. Appointed a national park in 1952, MFNP is the largest in Uganda and one of the most important in terms of biodiversity of plant and animal life as well as tourism.

Murchison Falls National Park is the heart of Uganda's wildlife recovery with significant gains able to be attributed to the Recovery Program which constructs strategically located ranger posts for increased coverage. IEF and partners have supported the construction of 12 ranger posts land and marine, and the Joint Operations Command Center, all of which resulted in a reduction in poaching and return of wildlife. This biodiversity encourages tourism and community employment opportunities which combine to reduce human pressures on wildlife and habitat.

Need:

The Satch Kranz Conservation Fund Grant addresses the need for additional coverage in the Buligi Sector of MFNP. Two previous ranger posts supported by IEF, the Semanya and Kabim Marine Ranger Stations, cover a portion of the region and resulted in a reduction of illegal activity, but there remained a 30 kilometer stretch along the River Nile that was unprotected where thousands of snares are being set monthly. This project built the new Buligi Marine Ranger Station servicing that unprotected area and includes a secure boathouse for boat and equipment storage for marine patrols. Securing this region will complete coverage of the Buligi Sector and protects wildlife in this hotspot active poaching region during a time when due to pandemic pressures wildlife crime and illegal activity is increasing.

Status:

The Recovery of Murchison Falls Programme has lifted the long-term protection and conservation of all wildlife in the Delta and along the Nile (which is still part of the National Park up until Lake Albert). The construction of the Buligi Marine Ranger Station is complete and is open and operational. The station ensures ranger welfare is well catered for with the basics to ensure the rangers on the frontline are respected and motivated to do their dangerous jobs.

The Buligi area has been a considerable problem and gap for Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) – with the nearest marine ranger posts being 20 kilometers away but poaching access from the communities only 200 meters away. This discrepancy in ease of access was exploited by poachers laying hundreds of snares and poaching many animals on a daily basis. The Buligi Marine Ranger Station is a long-term investment that will help block poachers entering the Delta and will dramatically reduce illegal fishing (especially in designated fish breeding areas) and therefore reduce wildlife and fish being poached and injured.

The increased coverage provided by the new marine ranger station will reduce the burden placed on the Uganda Wildlife Authority's Veterinary Response Unit. This unit finds, rescues, and if need be treats lions, elephants, giraffe from snares and traps.

The UWA / UCF Recovery Programme has focused on providing UWA the foundations of park management. This programme has included 20 ranger posts to counter threats and needs, the majority located in core wildlife landscapes and in areas selected to quickly respond to problem animal control. Other vital parts of this work include supplying communications and operations systems, ranger training and equipment, and of course transport. All are essential in expanding protection of wildlife from the small tourism zone of the Delta – across the whole 5000 km² for the first time. The aerial survey showed the positive impacts with Uganda Kob, giraffe, elephants and other animals dramatically increasing in numbers and expanding their distribution.

Building the ranger station has also been important for community development. Buligi was built by local youth, all of whom over four years have had on-going vocational college training, apprenticeships, and employment placements by UCF. Many of the youth come from families who are negatively affected by human-elephant conflict by losing crops to elephants, or they were involved in poaching – and have now agreed to change. After four years the youth in the program have achieved so much and continue to develop successful careers in construction, forestry, agriculture, and with UWA.

Video: <https://youtu.be/xW1cWStoLi0>