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CHIMPANZEE CONSERVATION

RAISING BIODIVERSITY AWARENESS THROUGH COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

When B2Gold acquired the Fekola Project in 2015, the environmental team quickly realized the need for additional studies to identify potential occurrences of important fauna species in the area. In 2015 and 2016, targeted surveys were conducted in key habitats, and four threatened and priority species were identified, becoming the focus of biodiversity conservation measures around the Fekola Mine. The four identified species are the West African chimpanzee, the hooded vulture, the African lion, and the hippopotamus.

The West African chimpanzee, as well as being critically endangered, is an iconic species for global conservation efforts. We recognize the importance of conserving these species and view the presence of threatened and priority species on or close to our properties as an opportunity to create significant positive impacts on the biodiversity in the area.

The Fekola Mine's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy is organized into three key aspects:

Research:

- » Understanding complex chimpanzee distribution, territory, behaviour and ecology;

Awareness, Education and Capacity Building:

- » Community awareness and education, and supporting community roles in managing local biodiversity components;
- » Institutional capacity building such as vocational and human resources training, or efforts aimed at natural resources management and/or enforcement/compliance of regulations; and

Sustainability:

- » Sustainable use of natural resources by local and regional stakeholders.

At the end of 2018, the Fekola Mine still required additional information to support effective planning and implementation of advanced conservation measures regarding chimpanzees. This presented an opportunity to combine two key aspects of its strategy – research and community awareness/capacity building. In March 2019, four individuals from the nearby Menankoto and Tintikabani villages were recruited to form part of the Fekola Mine Chimpanzee Research Team. The Team initiated a comprehensive 12-month study of the chimpanzee population and community numbers, their territorial range, and their seasonal movements in the area. The Study was conducted using three methods: 1) reconnaissance walks to identify chimpanzee presence, 2) camera trapping to photo-identify individuals, and 3) non-invasive genetic survey (i.e. collection of feces) to understand chimpanzee community and size.

The four community members on the Research Team, as well as B2Gold's environmental employee members, received training from an international chimpanzee expert in field survey techniques, data collection, analysis, and reporting. As of the end of 2019, the Research Team had covered over 1,300 km in reconnaissance walks, adding additional survey data from an area greater than 90 km². Nearly a thousand individual signs of chimpanzee presence were recorded and over 90 samples were collected for genetic testing.

The Team's 12-month Study will be concluded in March 2020, and results will form part of the updated Chimpanzee Conservation Action Plan and the Biodiversity Management Plan for the Fekola Mine. One of the most significant outcomes of the Study has been the participation of the four community Research Team members. They have gained analytical skills through training and carried out complex fieldwork that they can continue to apply, at B2Gold or at other future employment. They have gained extensive knowledge of chimpanzee behaviour and ecology, and the mitigation measures employed to protect these species that will serve their communities now and into the future. Conservation awareness and skills are in their hands.