

Scientists work to save endangered chimps

An international effort is being organized to save some 15 endangered chimpanzees isolated in a part of Rwanda's rain forest.

Organizers of the Rwandan National Conservation Park said a 30-mile tree corridor will be planted to connect the Gishwati Forest Reserve, the chimpanzees' home range, to Nyungwe National Park.

The project is a collaborative effort of the Rwandan government; the Great Ape Trust of Iowa, and Earthpark, a national environmental education center proposed for Pella, Iowa.

"This is an ambitious plan, but the Gishwati chimpanzees are on the brink of extinction," said Benjamin Beck, conservation director at the Great Ape Trust. "Every newly planted tree increases their chance of survival by providing additional food, shelter and security from people."

The Gishwati Forest, in western Rwanda, was deforested during the 1980s by agricultural development and in the 1990s during the resettlement of people following the nation's civil war and genocide. Once the second-largest indigenous forest in Rwanda, Gishwati included about 250,000 acres during the early 1900s. By 1994 the forest covered about 1,500 acres.

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