I. Project Context

Country Context

1. Gabon is a resource-rich country, well endowed with arable land, forest, and mineral resources. It has extraordinary biodiversity as well as rich deposits of magnesium and iron ore. It is the fifth-largest oil producer in Sub-Saharan Africa and the second-largest exporter of manganese. With a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita estimated at US$8,643 in 2010, it is one of Africa’s few middle-income countries.

2. Low demographic pressure on natural resources. Gabon is one of Africa’s most urbanized countries with more than 85 percent of its population living in urban areas, predominantly in Libreville (the capital), Port-Gentil (the economic capital), and Franceville (the mining region). The Gabonese population is young, with 50 percent under 19 years of age. The rural population is widely dispersed over the hinterland where access is difficult. With a per capita forest area of 15 hectares, the pressure of population on forest resources is significantly lower in Gabon than in most African countries.

3. Despite its wealth, Gabon is unlikely to meet a number of the Millennium Development
Goals by 2015. The third national MDG progress report, published in 2010, concluded that MDG targets relating to poverty reduction, infant and maternal mortality, and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS are unlikely to be achieved. With respect to education, Gabon has succeeded in making primary education available to all (net enrollment has increased from 88 percent in 1990 to 91 percent in 2005), but the quality and the need for qualified teachers and classrooms remain a concern. The rates for infant mortality dropped from 155 per 1,000 in 1990 to 52.7 per 1,000 in 2010, but it will be difficult to reach the target of 31.5 per 1,000 by 2015. Although maternal mortality fell from 600 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 420 deaths in 2010, it is also unlikely that the target of 150 deaths per 100,000 births will be achieved by 2015.

4. In 2009, the new government presented a new economic vision: Emerging Gabon. The strategic roadmap for an Emerging Gabon (Plan Stratégique Gabon Emergent – PSGE) aims at modernizing the country and turning it into an emerging economy by 2025. This strategy is based on accelerating growth and reducing poverty but now looks to capitalize on Gabon’s comparative advantages in the regional and global landscapes. The strategy is built on three pillars:

(a) Industrial Gabon “Gabon Industriel” aims to develop Gabon into a metallurgic and industrial pole of reference (optimizing oil and mining and support to industries through construction, building materials, and agro-industrial transformation).

(b) Green Gabon “Gabon Vert” has three major goals:
(i) instituting sustainable forest management and transforming Gabon into a global leader in certified tropical timber production;
(ii) developing agriculture and livestock farming to improve food security; and,
(iii) creating sustainable and responsible fisheries.

(c) Gabon of Services “Gabon des Services” has the objective of making Gabon a center of excellence in business, ecotourism, and value-added services, such as higher education and research, health, media, and information technologies.

5. Gabon has embarked on a green growth trajectory. Gabon’s unique combination of exceptionally abundant and diverse natural resources with a low population presents a favorable context for implementing a sustainable development strategy, which will reconcile economic development with environmental preservation and benefit both the local and global community.

Sectoral and institutional Context

6. Gabon is endowed with exceptional biodiversity. Gabon belongs to the Congo Basin rain forest ecosystem, the world’s second-largest area of contiguous rain forest and features rich faunal and floral wildlife and a variety of landscapes, including an 800-kilometer coastline. Gabon contains three Terrestrial Ecoregions as defined by WWF as the world’s most outstanding examples of each major habitat types: the Congolian Coastal Forest, the Northwestern Congolian Lowland Forests and the Western Congolian Forest-Savanna Mosaic. In addition, there are significant stands of central African mangroves along the coast and patches of Congolian-Zairean swamp forests in the northeast. Furthermore several priority freshwater systems occur within the country as well as the coastline and marine ecosystems.

7. Gabon ranks first in Africa on the Environmental Sustainability Index (ESI). The 2012
Environmental Performance Index, published by Yale University (USA) on July 2012, has named Gabon as the best environmentally sustainable nation in Africa (Gabon has been ranked at position 40 in the world in the said environmental performance index). This high score was achieved inter alia because Gabon’s biodiversity is largely intact, and a large proportion of its national territory has been placed under environmental protection. Consequently, it has the lowest risk of any African nation of experiencing major environmental deterioration in the short and medium term.

8. Since 2002, Gabon has significantly expanded its areas under protection. In August of 2002 President Bongo and his government created a network of 13 national parks covering 28,371 km², i.e., 10.6 percent of the country’s surface area. An inter-ministerial government committee, the Conseil National des Parcs Nationaux (CNPN), was established to oversee the process leading to effective management of the park network. The Law 003/2007 on National Parks was then adopted on September 11, 2007.

9. Management effectiveness of the National Parks has significantly improved. The Agence Nationale des Parcs Nationaux (ANPN) was created by the Law 003/2007 on National Parks and became responsible for managing all 13 national parks. A US$10 million GEF grant (PARCS project), implemented by the World Bank, was declared effective a few months later (December 27, 2007). One of the objectives of the GEF project was to build capacities of the newly created agency. After five years of implementation (and despite difficulties at the beginning) the PARCS project helped define roles and operational modalities of the ANPN as well as contribute to the set up of key systems in the functioning of the agency (Fiduciary management, HR management, Monitoring and Evaluation system). Many features developed under the project for three targeted National Parks are now applied to the entire park network (comprising 13 National Parks). The partnership with international NGOs has been significantly adjusted over the past few years to account for leadership of the ANPN on all issues related to National Parks in Gabon. New partnerships have been deployed with local NGOs. The project has also contributed to make the Management Unit in ANPN much more efficient and autonomous, with greater impacts in terms of monitoring and control.

10. Biodiversity management outside the National Park network remains a challenge. Over the past few years, major progress has been made in preserving biodiversity within National Parks and immediate buffer zone. However, there is an increasing awareness that biodiversity and ecological services need to be also preserved outside the National Parks. One priority that has been clearly set by the Government of Gabon (under the leadership of the ANPN and the General Directorate of Environment) is the preservation of the critical wetlands sites. See Box 1 on the importance of wetlands for sustained long term growth.

11. Wetlands provide major ecosystem services to the world, yet they are often overlooked. The worldwide value of the wetlands and their associated ecosystem services has been estimated at US$14 trillion annually. Yet many of these services, such as the recharge of groundwater, water purification, mitigation and adaption to climate change or aesthetic and cultural values, are not immediately obvious when one looks at a wetland. Planners and decision-makers at many levels are not fully aware of the connections between wetland conditions and the provision of wetland services, and the consequent benefits for people: benefits that often have substantial economic value. (see Box 1).

Box 1.
Wetlands are critical ecosystems and sustain long term growth. Wetland ecosystems are a major part of the natural wealth. At a worldwide scale they provide us with services worth trillions of US dollars every year – entirely free of charge – making a vital contribution to human health and wellbeing. Important key ecological services delivered by wetlands include:

(i) provisioning services: fresh water, fish, prawns, seaweeds, fruit, grain, wild game, timber for fuel and building materials, medicines;
(ii) regulating services: climate regulation, flood control, storm protection, water purification, waste treatment;
(iii) cultural services: beautiful places for recreation and education, and places of religious significance; and,
(iv) supporting services: nutrient cycling, sediment retention and provision of habitats.

12. In Gabon, wetlands ecosystems are critical in the provision of drinking water to major urban centers, energy, and also in sustaining fisheries production. For example, the Mbe watershed, one of the most economically important wetlands in Gabon, provides the sole source of freshwater for the population living in the capital city, Libreville. In addition, Libreville’s principal electricity source is a hydroelectric plant on the Mbe operated by Société d’Energie et d’Eau du Gabon (SEEG). The Mbe forest provides other ecosystem services, as it reduces siltation in two artificial lakes that feed this plant. The forests also regulate year-round flow and prevent flooding. Coastal mangroves are vital for the fishing industry in Gabon and beyond, as they constitute irreplaceable habitat for fish breeding.

13. Gabon has been a party to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (WII) since 1987 with the inclusion of the first three sites on the list of Gabonese WII. The country has registered a total of nine sites on the list of WII representing a wide variety of aquatic ecosystems (mangroves, savannas, waterfalls and rapids, lagoons, rivers, lakes) of more than 2.8 million hectares (see table below). Despite the political engagement through the adhesion to the Convention, only limited actions have been taken so far to operationalize the Convention pillars on the ground. However, the new priorities set by the Government in terms of biodiversity preservation are clearly targeting the WII. Accordingly, the Government has decided to use the entire Gabon allocation under the GEF-5 to foster significant progress on WII management.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Ramsar site name</th>
<th>Surface area (in ha)</th>
<th>Registration date</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wonga-Wongué</td>
<td>380 000 ha</td>
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<tr>
<td>Petit Loango</td>
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<td>Setté-Cama</td>
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<td>Akanda</td>
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<td>Pongara</td>
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<td>Birougou</td>
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<td>Bas-Ogoué</td>
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<td>Falls on the Invindo river</td>
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<td>Falls of Mboungou Badouma and Doumé</td>
<td>59 500 ha</td>
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II. Proposed Development Objectives
The Development Objective of the proposed operation is to improve management of selected critical wetlands ecosystems, through knowledge creation and capacity building of national entities.

III. Project Description

Component Name
Component 5: Project Management, Monitoring and Evaluation
Comments (optional)
This component supports the overall daily administration of the project, to ensure that regular monitoring and evaluation is carried out, and the results are fed back into decision making on pro

Component Name
Component 1: Improvement of Knowledge and Monitoring of Wetland Ecosystems in Gabon
Comments (optional)
This component will generate knowledge on wetlands in Gabon and set up a reliable monitoring system that can produce early warnings on potential alterations of wetlands ecosystems.

Component Name
Component 2: Support to Sustainable Management of Selected Critical Wetland ecosystems
Comments (optional)
Planning for sustainable management of selected sites
The component will focus on planning for sustainable management of selected sites and strengthen surveillance capacities.

Component Name
Comments (optional)
This component will contribute to the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol and Access and Benefits Sharing of Genetic Resources.

Component Name
Component 4: Strengthen Institutional Framework to support Wetlands Management
Comments (optional)
This Component will establish an institutional framework favorable to the sustainable management of the WII in Gabon at both the national and local levels.

IV. Financing (in USD Million)

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V. Implementation

VI. Safeguard Policies (including public consultation)
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<tr>
<td>Environmental Assessment OP/BP 4.01</td>
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<td>Natural Habitats OP/BP 4.04</td>
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<td>Pest Management OP 4.09</td>
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<td>Projects in Disputed Areas OP/BP 7.60</td>
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Comments (optional)

VII. Contact point

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