Bugoma forest boundary marking starts

HOIMA

By Peter Abaanabasazi

Marking of boundaries for Bugoma Central Forest Reserve started yesterday with a call from conservationists and hoteliers in Bunyoro sub-region to the Government to take immediate action against encroachers.

Tourism stakeholders, conservationists and hoteliers said there is a need to protect Bugoma forest from encroachers in Kikuube and Hoima districts.

Earlier on Thursday, a group of hoteliers and tourism stakeholders held a meeting at Bugoma Jungle Lodge located in Bugoma forest in Kabwoya sub-county, and afterwards went into Bugoma forest to witness and document the extent at which the forest has been depleted.

On Thursday, the Minister of Lands, Housing and Urban Development, Judith Nabakooba, launched the erection of boundary pillars to demarcate the forest reserve's boundary in a move aimed at ending conflicts over Bugoma forest. The exercise started in Nyaigugu, Nyangabi and Nsozi villages in Kyangwali sub-county, Kikuube district, and is expected to last a week.

While inside the forest in Nsozi village. Kyangwali sub-county, conservationists were shocked that the forest which used to be thick and impenetrable, had been cleared to bare ground. The encroachers are carrying out different activities such as cultivation of maize, sorghum, marijuana, beans, timber harvesting and charcoal burning.



Nabakooba (centre), Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom prime minister Andrew Byakutaga (second-left) and other officials witness state minister for public service Grace Mary Mugasa's planting of a pillar to mark the boundaries of Bugoma Central Forest Reserve yesterday

BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

Costantino Tessarin, the director of Destination Jungle, said Bugoma forest is home to such biodiversity as chimpanzees, birds, black and white colobus monkeys, Mangabey monkeys, baboons, butterflies among others. Bugoma is also a home to medicinal trees such as Prunus Africana (African Cherry) a medicinal tree used to treat prostate cancer and other diseases; Warburgia Ugandensis (Ugandan Greenheart, Omukuzannume in Luganda) at tree which was used to produce Covidex and Tamarind (Omukooge) tree among others. Tessarin noted that the continued destruction of the forest has resulted in the extinction of such biodiversity, something he said affects both local and national tourism.

CRIME AGAINST TOURISM

In the statement issued after visiting the forest, the group led by Costantino Tessarin, the director of Destination Jungle, a tour company, said whoever was behind the destruction of Bugoma forest is an enemy to the tourism sector and climate.

He said statistics obtained from the National Forest Authority, indicated that 7,808 hectares of Bugoma forest had been cut down by 2025. Tessarin, further said that due to depletion of the forest, chimpanzees have been killed and displaced, adding that in 2005 Bugoma was home to 590 chimpanzees, but today they are 250.

Tessarin said destruction of Bugoma forest is worsening climate change, adding that Uganda is losing one of its largest natural carbon sinks, which is critical for climate stability and human survival.

He further added that in 2024, NFA in partnership with the Bugoma primate conservation project, launched the tracking of chimpanzees and mangabeys, as well as nature walks in Bugoma forest. These tourism activities were expected to bring in income, but the destruction of the forest will make it impossible.

LOCAL LEADERS SPEAK OUT

"According to Article 237 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda and the Land Act — Section 44, the Government or local governments shall hold in trust on behalf of the people and protect natural lakes, rivers, forest reserves, wetlands, streams and national parks and others for ecological and tourism purposes for the good of citizens," Tessarin said.

Richard Businge, another tour operator, noted that despite recent directives by the lands minister (Nabakooba) stopping the clearing of the forest, people were still cutting down trees for timber and charcoal burning. John Mugabo, a member of Kabwoya Environment Conservation Association, said Bugoma forest is the major source of rain in Bunyoro sub-region, arguing that its continued destruction is causing a negative climate impact.

Godwine Agalia Kasiwa, the Kikuube resident district commissioner, said they were working with different stakeholder including NFA, the Judiciary National Environment Management Authority and Uganda People's Defence Forces to prote the forest.