



Uma and Me'ha Wildlife Management Areas

Niksek River, East Sepik Province
Papua New Guinea



PNG's Largest Rainforest Protected Area

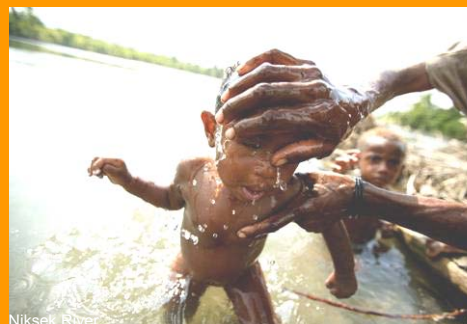
Location: The lower catchment of the Niksek (April) River, a tributary of the Sepik River.

Languages: Beiinemo, Berinomo, Belinomo **Villages:** Bitara, Kagiru

Purpose : Uma and Me'ha WMAs add on to the adjoining Hunstein Range WMA to create PNG's largest lowland rainforest protected area. This takes in a rich mosaic of ecosystems including tall lowland forest, cloud forests, small waterways and lakes, swamp forests and grassland. A haven for a number of unique and rare species, this area also harbours the world's largest stand of the endemic New Guinea kauri pine (*Agathis labillardieri*) which has become the target of a major logging proposal. The WMAs together protect much of the catchment of the Niksek River and supply wetlands that are breeding habitat for PNG's largest crocodile populations.

Communities in this remote area suffer constant problems accessing education, health and other services. In the 1980's infant mortality was among the worst in the world and the situation has only slightly improved today. By establishing the WMA's, communities are hoping to protect their forests from logging and to sustainably exploit resources like the perfumed timber, eaglewood. Rules of the WMA protect core areas of forest from logging and gardening and place restrictions on which species may be hunted and the methods used. The rules also ask community members and outsiders to respect forest spirit or *masalai* areas.

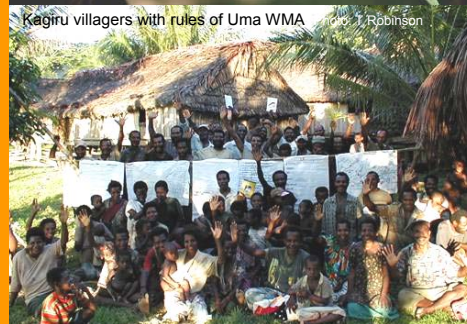
Management and Support : The WMAs are managed by community elected committees who oversee the application of the rules. Support to establish the WMAs has come from WWF, DEC and Sepik NGOs, BauaBau Theatre Company, HELP Resources and Ambunti District Council of Women.



Niksek River



Blythe's hornbill



Kagiru villagers with rules of Uma WMA

T. Robinson



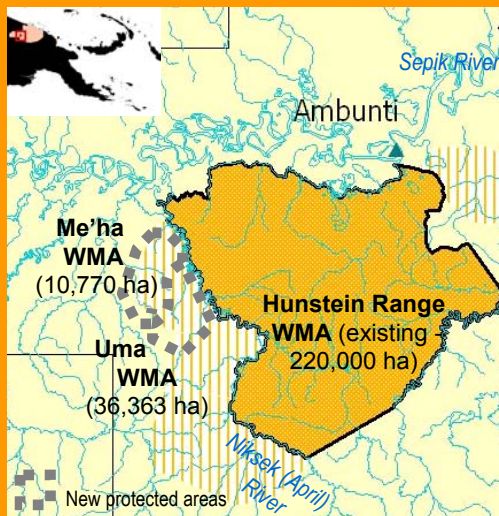
Niksek river and plains rainforest



Sepik orchid



Goodfellow's tree kangaroo



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The Mighty Sepik – Running Free and Unpolluted

Over 900km long, the Sepik River forms the largest unpolluted freshwater system in New Guinea and is one of the largest and most intact freshwater basins in the Asia Pacific. The diverse habitats and extensive lake systems of the basin support important waterbird and crocodile populations.

The Sepik River is one of the least developed areas in PNG and home to approximately 500,000 people who depend almost entirely on products from the rivers and forests for their livelihoods. The major threats to the integrity of the catchment are unsustainable industrial logging, invasive species and proposed mining developments. These can only be addressed through coordination across the larger catchment.

WWF is working with local and provincial governments and NGOs partners to establish a river basin management programme that will provide a common vision and action plan for sustainable development and conservation. Assisting communities to establish and manage protected areas on the most important sub-catchments of the Sepik is one aspect of this strategy. WWF is also supporting village income through the sustainable harvest of the valuable eaglewood and tourism promotion.



Planning the WMA. Photo: P Chatterjee

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