

RioTinto



CONSERVATION
INTERNATIONAL

The Conservation International

Rio Tinto Partnership

“Rio Tinto has shown genuine leadership and foresight in this landmark sustainability jewellery initiative,” said Justin Ward, vice president of Business Practices at Conservation International. “We believe that these impressive efforts – on the part of Rio Tinto, Wal-Mart and its other partners – are a positive step for creating a new industry standard.”

Justin Ward, vice president of Business Practices, Conservation International

Conservation International (CI) is a charitable organisation whose mission is to conserve the Earth's living natural heritage, our global biodiversity, and to demonstrate that human societies are able to live harmoniously with nature. CI is a world leader in biodiversity conservation, based on a strategy of blending science, partnerships and human welfare.

Rio Tinto has worked with CI since 1999 at a number of locations around the world, including Guinea, Brazil and Madagascar.

In 2007, Rio Tinto and CI signed a relationship agreement on integrating biodiversity considerations into Rio Tinto's environmental management systems among other key objectives, including:

- Advising on policy and the implementation of our biodiversity strategy.
- Co-ordinating efforts to minimise and mitigate biodiversity risks.
- Conserving and enhancing biodiversity.
- Raising awareness of conservation perspectives within the mining sector at the international and national levels, as well as specifically within Rio Tinto.


Achieving a “net positive impact” on biodiversity

In 2004, at the IUCN congress in Bangkok, Rio Tinto launched its biodiversity strategy and committed itself to the goal of achieving a “net positive impact” on biodiversity. This means minimising the impacts of its business and contributing to biodiversity conservation to ensure a region ultimately benefits as a result of Rio Tinto’s presence. Collaborating with biodiversity partners on biodiversity management and policy development is a critical factor in achieving a net positive impact, and the CI – Rio Tinto partnership is critical to achieving outcomes that neither could achieve working alone.

Major iron ore deposits found in global biodiversity hotspot

At Rio Tinto’s Simandou Mining Concession in Guinea, West Africa, the major iron ore deposit is located in one of 34 global biodiversity hotspots. The Upper Guinea Forest was once estimated at 420,000 square kilometres. Today nearly 70 per cent of the original forest cover has been destroyed by centuries of human activity. And the remaining forest is restricted to a number of isolated patches that are refuges for the region’s unique species, including the chimpanzee and pygmy hippopotamus. One of these isolated patches is the Pic de Fon classified forest, which overlaps with part of the mining concession.

When Rio Tinto started prospecting for iron ore in the Pic de Fon area in 2002, the Group asked CI to assess the region’s biodiversity, as well as to identify existing and potential socio-economic conservation threats and opportunities.



CI completed a terrestrial biological survey – through their Rapid Assessment Programme (RAP), West Africa programme, and Center for Environmental Leadership in Business (CELB) – recording nearly 800 species. A number of species were new to science and 11 were classified as threatened, including the West African chimpanzee and a bird species, the Sierra Leone Prinia. On the socio-economic side, bushmeat hunting and unsustainable agricultural practices were among the key threats identified. The findings gave the Simandou project an early sense of potential biodiversity risks and conservation opportunities, and fed into the project’s baseline studies.

Sound scientific data for effective conservation

The Guinea collaboration was the first time CI pioneered a methodology known as the “Initial Biodiversity Assessment and Planning” approach, or IBAP. The IBAP tool was developed to assist companies to incorporate biodiversity into their risk analysis and planning processes for new projects. IBAP has since been applied at more than ten projects around the globe, both by Rio Tinto and other companies, and is now one of the key tools Rio Tinto provides to its businesses to implement the biodiversity strategy.

Wal-Mart chooses Rio Tinto for jewellery

Wal-Mart, the world’s largest retailer, chose Kennecott Utah Copper, a member of the Rio Tinto Group, to provide gold and silver for its fully traceable, responsibly produced jewellery. It was part of a pilot partnership between CI and companies in the jewellery value chain, created from Wal-Mart’s desire to do business with world leaders who anchor their corporate principles around sustainable practices.

The company was approached because it had already demonstrated environmental and social leadership in its sector.

Wal-Mart, the world's largest jewellery retailer, has a long term goal to achieve 100 per cent traceability for all the gold, silver and diamond jewellery sold at its stores. The Love, Earth jewellery collection launched in July 2008 was produced with 100 per cent traceable gold and silver, using metal from Rio Tinto's Kennecott Utah Copper mine.

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The Love, Earth project proves that companies can collaborate successfully with solution-focused NGOs, such as CI, to produce affordable, quality jewellery and manage operations to leading industry, environmental and social standards while providing consumers with fully traceable products from mine to market. Customers can trace their jewellery all the way back to the mine it came from through an online website.

The future

The partnership is broadening its engagement programme, looking further into supply chain management and related product stewardship concepts, as well as at strategic investment in regional efforts to achieve clear and measurable conservation outcomes.

Learn more at
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