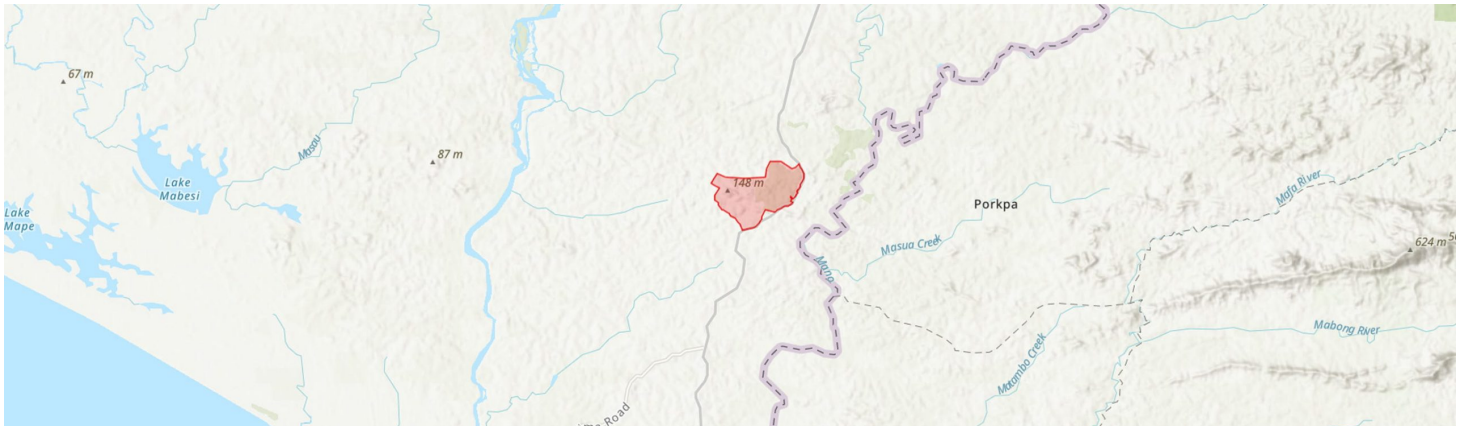


Werikenda Forest

SIETIPA16



Country: **Sierra Leone**

Administrative region: **Southern (Province)**

Central co-ordinates: **7.17000 N, -11.37000 E**

Area: **13.9km²**

Qualifying IPA criteria

A(i)

IPA assessment rationale

This site qualifies as an IPA due to the presence of 5 criterion A(i) trigger species. Without doubt there are many more undocumented threatened plant species in this forest.

Site description

The Werikenda Forest is located along the Zimmi-Bo highway in the Soro Gbema Chiefdom, in the Pujehun District of the Southern Province of Sierra Leone. This area also aligns with the Gonohun Forest Reserve (Protected Planet, 2024). Ownership and stewardship of the forest are shared among five local communities, including the villages of Gonohun, Wonde and Gbama. Of these, Gonohun manages the largest portion of the forest.

Botanical significance

The Werikenda Forest represents an important remnant of Sierra Leone's lowland evergreen forest, which is estimated to have declined by 90% nationally (NABSAP, 2017), which also corresponds to the Guinean Forests of West Africa biodiversity hotspot. Surveys conducted by a TIPAs team on 16 February 2025 documented several plant species of conservation concern, including *Aphanocalyx pteridophyllus* (VU), *Eremospatha dransfieldii* (EN), *Combretum longipilosum* (NE), *Lophira alata* (VU), *Placodiscus pseudostipularis* (EN) and *Trichoscypha longifolia* (NT). These rare species are particularly sensitive to disturbance and may disappear entirely if the site is subjected to fire and further degradation. Fruits of the large liana *Strychnos camptoneura* were seen in several places by the TIPA's team in 2025, but not yet collected. This species had not yet been recorded in Sierra Leone. *Turraea leonensis* (maybe VU) was collected in flower, it is a species not yet assessed by the IUCN. Without doubt there are many more undocumented threatened plant species in this forest.

Habitat and geology

The vegetation is characterized by lowland evergreen closed forest, exhibiting varying levels of disturbance. Characteristic species of west evergreen forest such as *Diospyros chevalieri*, *Heritiera utilis* and *Lophira alata* are common (pers. obs., 2025; Hawthorne &

Jongkind, 2006). Parts of the forest are dominated by *Aphanocalyx pteridophyllus*; these parts have probably not been disturbed for at least several generations of trees. Other parts of the forest are dominated by *Lophira alata*, a species known to regenerate commonly after disturbance (X. van der Burgt, pers. comms., 2025). Several drainage lines are present, retaining water during the dry season. The site lies on the Granite Greenstone terrain (Culver & Williams, 1979).

Conservation issues

The Werikenda Forest was protected by communities, with no large-scale logging activities for approx. 200 years. However, between 2006-2025, forest cover declined from 12 km² to 8.48 km²—an average annual loss of about 0.18 km², based on satellite imagery (Google Earth, 2025). Although this rate is lower than the national average annual forest loss of just under 3% (Malan et al., 2022), it highlights an accelerating threat. Logging, particularly for planks, is driven by inter-community competition over resources, and is the primary driver of degradation. Cleared areas are frequently converted to subsistence agriculture through slash-and-burn practices, while increased human activity, including hunting and noise from chainsaws, is likely disrupting key animal seed dispersers. These pressures reflect a tragedy of the commons, where shared ownership without strong governance has led to overexploitation. Although conversations with local elders and the paramount chief during 2025 fieldwork suggest openness to conservation, urgent intervention is needed to implement sustainable community forest management.

Site assessor(s)

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Date of first assessment:

16th Feb 2025

Reviewed by:

Martin Cheek, The Royal Botanic Gardens Kew

IPA criterion A species

SPECIES	QUALIFYING SUB-CRITERION	≥ 1% OF GLOBAL POPULATION	≥ 5% OF NATIONAL POPULATION	1 OF 5 BEST SITES NATIONALLY	ENTIRE GLOBAL POPULATION	SOCIO-ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT	ABUNDANCE AT SITE
<i>Eremospatha dransfieldii</i> Sunderl.	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	Occasional
<i>Aphanocalyx pteridophyllus</i> (Harms) Wieringa	A(i)	✓	—	—	—	—	Occasional
<i>Homalium smythei</i> Hutch. & Dalziel	A(i)	✓	—	—	—	—	Frequent
<i>Lophira alata</i> Banks ex Gaertn.f.	A(i)	✓	—	—	—	✓	Common
<i>Placodiscus pseudostipularis</i> Radlk.	A(i)	✓	✓	✓	—	—	Occasional

IPA criterion C qualifying habitats

HABITAT	QUALIFYING SUB-CRITERION	≥ 5% OF NATIONAL RESOURCE	≥ 10% OF NATIONAL RESOURCE	1 OF 5 BEST SITES NATIONALLY	AREAL COVERAGE AT SITE
Low-altitude evergreen forest and gallery forest	C(i)	✓	—	—	

General site habitats

GENERAL SITE HABITAT	PERCENT COVERAGE	IMPORTANCE
Forest - Subtropical/Tropical Moist Lowland Forest	—	Major

Land use types

LAND USE TYPE	PERCENT COVERAGE	IMPORTANCE
Harvesting of wild resources	—	Major
Nature conservation	—	

Threats

THREAT	SEVERITY	TIMING
Residential & commercial development - Housing & urban areas	Low	Ongoing - increasing
Agriculture & aquaculture - Annual & perennial non-timber crops - Small-holder farming	Medium	Ongoing - increasing

THREAT	SEVERITY	TIMING
Biological resource use - Logging & wood harvesting - Intentional use: large scale (species being assessed is the target) [harvest]	High	Ongoing - increasing
Natural system modifications - Fire & fire suppression - Increase in fire frequency/intensity	Medium	Ongoing - increasing

Protected areas

PROTECTED AREA NAME	PROTECTED AREA TYPE	RELATIONSHIP WITH IPA	AREAL OVERLAP
Gonohun Community Forest	Community conservation area	protected/conservation area overlaps with IPA	—

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