

News release

Liberian conservationist honored as biodiversity 'Hotspot Hero' by Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund

Emmanuel G. Smith is being recognized for achievements in protecting the country's species and ecosystems

Arlington, Virginia, USA (22 May 2020) – On this International Day for Biological Diversity, the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) announces that Emmanuel G. Smith and nine other conservationists from around the world have been named "Hotspot Heroes" for their efforts to protect the world's biodiversity hotspots. The honorees were chosen from the hundreds of civil society organizations that have received grants from CEPF in the 10 global biodiversity hotspots where the fund is currently active.

CEPF is recognizing these heroes as part of the celebration of its 20th anniversary. The fund empowers nongovernmental organizations, indigenous groups, universities and private enterprises to protect the world's biodiversity hotspots—the world's most biologically diverse yet threatened terrestrial regions—and help communities thrive. CEPF does this through grants and technical support for conservation, organizational strengthening and sustainable development.

The Hotspot Heroes and the nongovernmental organizations they work for are making outstanding contributions to the conservation of the hotspots. They exemplify the kinds of dedicated, dynamic people who work to ensure that intact ecosystems can continue to sustain flora and fauna and provide clean air, fresh water, healthy soils, sustainable livelihoods, resilience to climate change and much more.

Mr. Smith serves as the project coordinator for the [Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia](#) (SCNL), the country's oldest conservation organization. In this role, he coordinates efforts to support 15 communities in establishing two community forests, linking Gola Forest National Park in Liberia, the proposed Foya Nature Reserve, and the Gola Rainforest National Park in Sierra Leone. Together these form the Greater Gola Landscape which represents the largest single block of remaining Upper Guinean Forests. These forests are part of the [Guinean Forests of West Africa Biodiversity Hotspot](#), which extends across the southern part of West Africa, from Guinea to western Cameroon, covering all or part of 11 countries.

The community forests serve as a crucial corridor for wildlife, including some 60 threatened species, the Critically Endangered western chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes verus*) and Endangered pygmy hippopotamus (*Choeropsis liberiensis*) among them.

SCNL's efforts involve introducing rainforest-friendly and climate-smart income-generating activities to support local communities, such as beekeeping and cocoa cultivation. Seventy-two percent of households have benefited from at least one of the project's livelihood programs.

"Mr. Smith's role requires outstanding relationships with the communities he's working with as well as the many technical partners. He has dealt with a range of issues—from commercial bushmeat and beekeeping to loan schemes and literacy," said Peggy Poncelet, CEPF grant director for the Guinean Forests of West Africa Biodiversity Hotspot. "He is deeply committed to conservation in his home country, Liberia."

The communities SCNL is working with recently demonstrated their commitment to conserving their natural resources when they turned down an offer from a logging company.

"The Hotspot Heroes represent the many tenacious, committed conservationists who are taking action every day to ensure the future of the biodiversity hotspots and the people who depend on these vital ecosystems," said CEPF Executive Director Olivier Langrand. "They endure a multitude of challenges—long hours, grueling travel, difficult working conditions, political hurdles and even threats to their lives—in pursuit of a healthy, sustainable world."

"Mr. Smith and SCNL are serving as trusted partners to the communities around the Gola forests and the governments as well, helping to forge a sustainable future for the region," said Langrand.

Read more about [Emmanuel G. Smith](#) and the other [Hotspot Heroes](#).

CEPF is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the European Union, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan and the World Bank.

Since 2001, CEPF has catalyzed enduring, locally led biodiversity conservation through US\$250 million in grants to more than 2,400 organizations in 98 developing and transitional countries. Results include more than 15 million hectares of formal protected areas established, at least 890 globally threatened species supported, and more than 3,500 communities benefiting. Learn more at www.cepf.net, [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

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Download a photo of Emmanuel G. Smith [here](#). (*Note: you will need to read through Conservation International's terms of use document before downloading.)