



For more information, contact:

Al Setka  
Director of Communications  
Great Ape Trust of Iowa  
515.243.3580  
515.720.7430 (mobile)  
[asetka@greatapetrust.org](mailto:asetka@greatapetrust.org)

## Program coordinator selected for historic conservation effort in Rwanda

### *Rwandan environmentalist to direct Gishwati Area Conservation Program*

Des Moines, Iowa, USA – May 22, 2008 – A Rwandan environmentalist and educator has been selected to direct a landmark forest restoration and ecological research effort in Africa. Great Ape Trust of Iowa, Earthpark and the Rwanda Environmental Management Agency (REMA) have selected Madeleine Nyiratuza as the program coordinator for the recently established Gishwati Area Conservation Program in western Rwanda. Among her responsibilities, Nyiratuza will establish project headquarters in the Gishwati area, conduct community participation programs for villagers and coordinate the planning of a pilot ecotourism program.

“We are so fortunate to be able to identify a program coordinator with Madeleine’s mix of training, knowledge, experience and commitment,” said Dr. Benjamin Beck, director of conservation at Great Ape Trust. “She already knows the leaders and stakeholders in the Gishwati area and has a clear understanding of what must be done to enlist them as conservation supporters. Madeleine will rise quickly in the ranks of internationally recognized leaders in biodiversity conservation.”

Nyiratuza, who began her duties May 19, was selected from a field of more than 30 applicants by officials with REMA and Great Ape Trust. Beck said Nyiratuza’s passion for conservation and the future of her country set her apart from other qualified candidates.

# NEWS RELEASE

“Her credibility is based on the right mix of on-the-ground experience, academic preparation, and commitment to local community involvement and awareness in conservation programs,” he said.

Beck was particularly impressed with Nyiratuza’s suggestions on how to convey to Gishwati residents the importance of forests for improved and secure livelihoods.

“Don’t rely on abstractions such as air and water quality – stick to things that are tangible,” Nyiratuza said. “For example, ask how many people they know who died in the catastrophic flooding and landslides at Gishwati in 2007.”

Nyiratuza received her master’s of science degree this month in Environmental Management and Development from Kampala International University in Uganda. Her thesis, titled *The Impact of Poor Livelihoods on Conservation of Gishwati Forest Reserve, Rwanda*, was based on interviews with 120 residents of three Gishwati communities. It determined villagers’ use of the forest, attitudes toward conservation and steps that could be taken to reduce their impact on forest conservation. Nyiratuza earned her bachelor’s degree in biology, geography and education in 2004 from the Kigali Institute of Education.

A primary school teacher for six years, Nyiratuza also taught biology for two years at Gisenyi College in Rwanda. She coordinated a global partnership between Gisenyi College and Hockerill Anglo-European College in the United Kingdom, and helped develop joint education and environmental projects. She founded and managed the environment club at Gisenyi College, which planted more than 500 trees on the grounds of local schools and made students more aware of conservation. More recently, Nyiratuza has designed syllabi and trained local teachers on methods for teaching science and technology. She has also participated in a study, sponsored by the Karisoke Research Center of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, on attitudes of people living near Volcanoes National Park toward conservation and ecotourism. A mother of one, Nyiratuza resides with her family in Gisenyi.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The **Gishwati Area Conservation Program** is a collaborative effort of the Rwandan government; Great Ape Trust of Iowa, a scientific research facility in Des Moines, Iowa; and Earthpark, a national environmental education center proposed for Pella, Iowa. The project in Gishwati was unveiled at the Clinton Global Initiative last fall by Rwanda President H.E. Paul Kagame and Ted Townsend, founder of Great Ape Trust and Earthpark.

# NEWS RELEASE

The Gishwati Forest, in Rwanda's Western Province, was deforested in the 1980s by agricultural development and in the 1990s during the resettlement of people following the civil war and genocide. Human encroachment, deforestation, grazing and the introduction of small-scale farming resulted in extensive soil erosion, flooding, landslides and reduced water quality – as well as the isolation of a small population of chimpanzees. The Gishwati Area Conservation Program will also reduce poverty's threat to conservation by improving water quality, controlling floods, promoting ecotourism and enhancing local employment. The project will also develop a chimpanzee field study site at Gishwati that includes planting a 30-mile (50km) tree corridor to connect the Gishwati Forest Reserve, the chimpanzees' home range, to Nyungwe National Park.

**Great Ape Trust of Iowa** is a scientific research facility in Des Moines dedicated to understanding the origins and future of culture, language, tools and intelligence. When completed, it will be the largest great ape facility in North America and one of the first worldwide to include all four types of great ape – bonobos, chimpanzees, gorillas and orangutans – for noninvasive interdisciplinary studies of their cognitive and communicative capabilities. Great Ape Trust is dedicated to providing sanctuary and an honorable life for great apes, studying the intelligence of great apes, advancing conservation of great apes and providing a unique educational experience about great apes.

**Earthpark** will be an icon of ecological literacy and learning to improve the lives of people, species and the environment around the world. This unique learning campus will demonstrate sustainable and restorative solutions to the myriad ecological threats facing humanity, using state-of-the-art educational tools and online communication with schools, communities and government worldwide. Earthpark will include four acres of tropical rainforest, a 600,000-gallon aquarium and more than 1,000 species of plants and small animals in a re-created ecosystem.

###