

Mount Mulanje Malawi

Mid-Year Update 2023



Project status

Year **5**
out of **11**

820 ha
under restoration to date

374 844
seedlings planted



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The year began with WeForest Malawi set up as its own legal entity and with a strong new team on board. A major focus in the last six months has been the onboarding of new team members, relocating to our own new office, establishing an active board of directors and setting up operational procedures.

With this solid foundation in place, we're ready for the start of an exciting new phase for the project: the protection of 7500 hectares of community-managed forest (over 8 million native trees), alongside agroforestry and cookstoves programmes for over 13 000 families living in and around this incredible Biosphere Reserve.

The reality of working in nature means that surprises are always around the corner, and in March Tropical Cyclone Freddy ripped through Malawi, Mozambique and Madagascar. Restoration helps to boost the resilience of the landscape and communities against such events.

Read on to find out more about what's been happening in the Mount Mulanje project.

In the southern region of Malawi, Freddy induced torrential rains in 14 districts. The death toll by the end of March was at least 676 people, and more than half a million people were displaced. Mulanje was among the worst affected districts, particularly on the eastern side of the mountain. This photo (below) clearly shows the paths carved through the afro-montane forest by the cyclone.



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In the days after the cyclone, WeForest worked in collaboration with Mulanje District Council, the Red Cross and the Department of Disaster Management Affairs to provide relief to affected households. This joint relief effort after the disaster distributed food items to 1957 families, including many from our Kazembe and Tchete forest blocks. While Tropical Cyclone Freddy was devastating, it highlighted the importance of forest and landscape restoration (FLR) in improving the resilience of landscapes and reducing disaster risks. District, government and traditional leadership are showing more understanding and commitment than ever in support of FLR, and the WeForest Malawi team is incorporating disaster risk reduction in its narrative about the project when presenting it to new communities.



The last of the cedar planting saw 36 068 Mulanje cedar seedlings and 8897 companion species planted on the mountainside early this year. Weeding is carried out across all the sites that have been planted since 2020, and permanent monitoring plots are being established to assess the impact of weeding on the survival and growth of the seedlings.

In this photo (right), the community patrol teams are receiving their uniforms. A 35-strong team of guards continue to ensure the remaining forest is protected. Village heads and local communities here are very supportive of law enforcement: in fact, they appealed to the forestry department and WeForest to ask for support against the charcoal groups with equipment and training. Charcoal burning groups here are very well organized and are sometimes armed, so standing up against them can be dangerous.





In our projects in neighbouring Zambia, farmers can carry out Assisted Natural Regeneration on their farms, as there are healthy areas of miombo still remaining on private lands. This isn't the case here in the heavily populated south of Malawi. If farmers have trees at all, they have few mangoes or eucalyptus trees. This means that they can only collect fuelwood from the forest reserve. To combat this, our agroforestry scheme will support families to grow and harvest sustainable fuelwood on their farms, reducing pressure on the forest. The agroforestry pilot was unfortunately affected by the cyclone, with only a third of the seedlings surviving, but the plan in any case was to establish and scale up the agroforestry programme on the western side of the mountain, near our co-management areas. This will start later in the year as scheduled.

As we phase into restoring and protecting the native miombo forests surrounding Mount Mulanje, the project's livelihoods programmes are aiming to support around 13 000 families to transition away from using forest resources unsustainably for their incomes. The beekeeping programme is currently being assessed by the WeForest team to determine monitoring and evaluation indicators.



On World Environment Day the team joined countless others in the global effort to #BeatPlasticPollution. They took part in a march in Blantyre to deliver a petition to the Chief Justice of Malawi, highlighting the importance of regulating plastic pollution and to push for a ban on thin plastics.



How do we know our restored forests are growing and making an impact?

Every hectare under restoration is mapped with GPS points to generate polygons (areas on a map) that are assigned to sponsors. Permanent monitoring plots are established in our sites and our forestry and science teams conduct surveys to monitor progress of biomass growth, tree density, survival rate and species diversity, among other indicators. Where social impacts are also critical, we measure socio-economic indicators such as the number of individuals or families directly benefiting, people trained, and income generated from forest-friendly livelihood activities.

Please visit our [What We Do](#) webpage for more information.



You'll receive an annual update in March. Meanwhile, stay up-to-date with our interactive [Mount Mulanje](#) map, and check out the [photos](#) on Flickr.

You can find an overview of all communications assets and guidance on how to communicate about your partnership with WeForest [here](#).