

Wildlife, Habitat, Environment Protection and Community Integration Action

From matters arising at a meeting held in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe on 5th December 2003.

The Concern

The immediate curtailment of mismanagement, decimation and degradation of Zimbabwe's valuable wildlife, natural habitats, sensitive environments, dependent sociological structures and extensive economic needs, through the introduction of effective management systems across biologically and geographically sensitive locations in Zimbabwe.

The latter biomes are perilously threatened by injudicious poaching of high and low value fauna, avifauna and flora, rapid enhancement of desertification in pristine woodland areas, abolition of critical water resources through extensive pollution and causeway destruction by uncontrolled small mining operations, pervasive soil erosion, silting of essential dams, toxic mercury and cyanide emissions into river systems and general environment and natural habitat obliteration.

The Address

A group of environmentalists, conservationists, educationalists, biodiversity management professionals, game ranchers and concerned members of the public attended a meeting in Bulawayo on 5th December 2003, to discuss pertinent issues towards constructing a strategy to present Heads of Argument to the government, specific ministerial departments, the Office of the President of Zimbabwe and role playing organisations and individuals, for appropriate approval and support for the re-introduction of competent management in wildlife, natural habitats, environmentally sensitive areas in synergy with dependent community integration and development initiatives.

It was agreed that the concerns at hand focused on economic and sociological concerns as they would impact on wildlife, natural habitats, environmental matters and dependent community development, and not political implications.

The results of the meeting, as inadequate as they are at this conceptual stage, are being shared with interested local, regional and international institutes, societies, organisations, individuals and other valuable input/feedback resources that have been identified as directly and indirectly significant to the group's objectives.

Introductory Notes

Findings and decisions that came out of the World Parks Congress in September 2003 in Durban, held under the auspices of the IUCN, to which Zimbabwe is a signatory, are significantly important to the groups discussions in the context of Zimbabwe, as much as they are on a global scale. Inter alia, the following IUCN issues were presented to the meeting by Dr J Fulton :

“The World Parks Congress stated that too many natural areas exist as habitat remnants within a matrix of agricultural lands and degraded areas. Some protected and natural areas contain severely degraded zones within their boundaries. This means that the integrity of the

ecosystems within these protected areas and the ecological processes that sustain them, are severely threatened and that communities living in areas around these environments are no longer able to depend on the resources they previously had. (*Currently and increasingly, this is the case in Zimbabwe*).

Participants in the workshop on *Building Support for Protected (and natural) Areas through Site-Based Planning*, restated their fundamental objection to the destructive practices currently taking place. The participants therefore sought the strengthening of legislation and enforcement of environmental impact assessment procedures to resolve the causes.

The health of wildlife, domestic animals and people especially, are inextricably linked. Small improvements in the health of domestic and wild animals and thus their productivity, can lead to dramatic improvements in human livelihoods and indeed, the reduction of poverty.

The role of disease across the board in natural areas and the land-use matrix within which they are embedded, must be recognised, addressed and urgently dealt with in the context of protected or natural areas at planning and management levels.

Participants are concerned that the Congress does not adequately recognize the importance of appropriate forms of wildlife utilisation to generate revenues for conservation. Instead, over-emphasis is placed on non-sustainable external funding.

Sustainable hunting and fishing and other wildlife uses, contribute extensively to biodiversity conservation. They provide finance for management of protected and non-protected natural areas;

1. Generate income and benefits for local communities and landowners;
2. Create strong incentives to manage and conserve wildlife and its habitats;
3. Offer indigenous people economic opportunities, whilst retaining rights, knowledge systems and traditions.

Preliminary evidence suggests that private parks number in the thousands and protect many millions of hectares of biologically important habitat. They serve as increasingly important components of national conservation strategies. In a time when many governments are slowing the rate at which they establish new protected areas, the private conservation sector continues its rapid growth (*but not in Zimbabwe*). Conservationists need to examine this trend closely, assessing its overall scope and direction, and determining ways to maximise its strengths while minimising its weaknesses.

In Eastern and Southern Africa, privately owned lands play a particularly important role in conserving critical biodiversity. Private protected areas in southern Africa alone protect millions of ecologically important areas, especially in critical buffer zones and corridor areas.

Hunting, poaching and commercial trade in wildlife from many natural areas across the tropics and sub-tropics, is rapidly increasing, is unsustainable and many aspects are completely illegal. Demand for wildlife is increasing rapidly due to increases in the number

of consumers, increased buying power amongst urban consumers and increased commercialisation of the hunt. (*Poaching included*).

The ability to meet the demand is facilitated by irresponsible access to natural wildlife areas, and greatly improved hunting (*poaching*) techniques. Supply of wildlife both inside and outside of these sensitive areas, is diminishing due to unsustainable hunting and decreasing areas of habitat. This is often reflected by an increase in price. The problem is exacerbated by poor or inadequate management capacity, whether the management authorities are the local communities, governments or other agencies. An unintended consequence of some international and national development programmes and resource activities, has contributed to the magnitude of the problem, as has political instability in many countries and deteriorating economic conditions in many locations.

Hence:

1. Unsustainable hunting (*as it pertains to poaching*) for wildlife trade poses significant immediate threats to wildlife populations in many natural areas throughout the sub-tropics, especially in systems where wildlife productivity is low and being slowed;
2. A wide range of species, even those not currently identified as threatened, are at risk of localised extinction as a result of unsustainable hunting across a significant proportion of natural areas;
3. The loss of wildlife from these areas due to unsustainable hunting, has serious and immediate adverse effects on the biodiversity and ecological functioning of these areas, and hence, of their conservation role;
4. Such losses always have adverse impacts on rural people living in and around protected and natural areas, many of who depend on natural resources for their livelihoods. The people most affected are often the poorest and most marginalized sectors of society;
5. Solutions must be scientifically based, and specific to the local biological, sociological and economic conditions;
6. Unsustainable hunting can be addressed either by restricting the activity to certain species and/or zones, or by providing alternative incentives for protection, e.g., through ecotourism or hunting of certain species;
7. Commercial wildlife trade must be curtailed (?) because it is exterminating wildlife from many protected and natural areas;
8. Participation of local communities is crucial to seek solutions most likely to succeed in conserving wildlife and natural environments, and in meeting peoples' subsistence and economic needs; and
9. Capacity building of natural or wildlife area management is critical, whether they be by ex or current landowners, local communities, governments or other agencies, to develop and implement strategies to manage hunting and preventing poaching in natural wildlife areas.

The conservation community and particularly governments, need to acknowledge the problem, work to understand conservation impacts with infinitely greater urgency, and take action to mitigate negative impacts in affected areas. This includes promoting of HIV/AIDS prevention in natural wildlife area staff and dependent communities; finding solutions to relieve unsustainable harvesting; developing HIV/AIDS awareness strategies in natural area authorities; and collaborating with other sectors including health and agriculture.

The Congress represents the majority opinion of participants in "*Protected Areas Managed by Private Landowners*" with respect to the future of privately owned protected areas worldwide. Its purpose is to chart a course for the immediate future that improves and expands biodiversity conservation occurring on privately owned lands. It was adopted by unanimous vote on 13 September 2003.

Definitions : A private protected or natural area refers to a land of any size that is :

1. Predominantly managed for biodiversity conservation
2. Protected with or without formal government recognition
3. Is owned or otherwise secured by individuals, communities, corporations or partnerships.

Recognising that :

1. The greatest share of national biodiversity occurs on privately owned lands (Significant)
2. Private landholders have demonstrated a willingness and capacity to protect natural habitat and endangered species successfully, often with extensive cost
3. Conservation on private lands represents an essential and expanding complement to public conservation efforts by protecting corridors, buffer zones, areas under-represented in public park systems, and other key components of larger ecosystems that governments are not protecting for lack of financial resources, political will, or other reasons

Privately owned protected areas best serve as supplements to, not replacements for, strong public protected area systems.

The private sector shows it is efficient, accountable and innovative in conserving natural resources and biodiversity, while integrating economic uses in a sustainable way. Examples include activities such as ecotourism, game ranching, or even harvesting non-timber forest products, which provide revenues that make private conservation appealing and financially feasible :

1. Secure property rights to land and natural resources form an essential foundation for any long-term conservation strategy, particularly one involving private sector participation and investment
2. Private landholders represent a critical stakeholder group that can and do contribute meaningfully to local, national and international conservation planning efforts
3. Many private protected or natural areas are subject to legally binding conditions and restrictions regarding land use practises, that can ensure their durability and long-term conservation, including continuity, and
4. The increasing tendency for multiple private landholders to form collaborative reserves and conservancies that jointly manage large conservation units.

The international workshop on privately owned parks, makes the following recommendations to governments and civil society :

1. Conduct an assessment of the current legal frameworks for private natural land conservation, identifying key gaps in the design, implementation, and evaluation of relevant legislation
2. Work to fill existing legal gaps by developing laws, regulations, policies, and programs that support creation of appropriate wildlife area planning, formally and informally declared private protected areas, conservancies, conservation environments and similar instruments, conservation concessions, and other protection mechanisms
3. Strengthen the legal security for conservation lands, including the recognition of rightful owners, reform of land tenure laws and improved law enforcement
4. Secure user rights over land and wildlife is an essential ingredient in any strategy to conserve and develop long-term investment in wildlife habitats
5. Ensure that the IUCN protected area category system explicitly addresses privately owned protected areas
6. Develop economic incentives for private landowners to adopt private land conservation practices. (They are already in place) In providing incentives, priority should be given to lands that are within publicly protected areas, or have been granted official recognition as private conservation lands

If not already established, governments (?) should establish environmental trust funds with donor support, and authorize the use of such funds to support key private land conservation actors.

1. Lobby governments to authorize and monitor formal private conservation protection efforts, and better integrate private land conservation actions into their overall conservation strategies. This includes ensuring that even those government agencies whose primary responsibility is not conservation work, to support private land conservation actions

2. Improve the capacity of local governments to ensure that local registrars properly record private land conservation instruments
3. Increase capacity of government judicial systems to enforce private land conservation mechanisms effectively and consistently
4. Expand efforts by conservation NGOs and government agencies
5. Design, develop, deliver, and evaluate a comprehensive portfolio of education and training opportunities for key sectors involved in private lands conservation. Target audiences should include government, parks agencies, conservation NGOs, commercial entities, registrars and private and community landowners. Topics range from general capacity-building to the application of detailed technical issues and procedures. Delivery formats will include short courses, field-work, various forms of workshops, internships and fellowships, and formal academic education programs
6. Increase and deepen the transfer of technology, knowledge and experience between private landowners and other stakeholders
7. Improve and promote cooperation between private landowners and other stakeholders, particularly regarding complementary land uses
8. Establish networks of conservation owners and other stakeholders for the purpose of sharing information, knowledge, mapping out key strategies and expertise on a regional, national and even international basis
9. Conduct an inventory of privately conserved lands that characterises their overall contribution to protecting natural habitat, endangered species and cultural resources
10. Conduct a national analysis on the economics of private land conservation, including financial sustainability, contribution to national economies, job creation, and other economic and social costs and benefits
11. Identify, then work to remove perverse economic inputs at the regional and national level that distort the market and promote unsustainable land use practices
12. Investigate the myriad social issues surrounding privately owned protected or natural wildlife areas, including levels of social acceptance/non-acceptance and costs and benefits to local communities.”

Introductory Note Summary

Wildlife, natural and protected areas are inadequately protected, with extensive evidence of negligence by land-users, landowners, open society, local authorities and governments. Appropriate strengths are not being identified nor effectively employed and weaknesses are becoming dominant in determining management practices. Conditions specific to sensitive areas need early investigation, followed by appropriate entrenchment of strategically planned needs linked to sustainable protective action through capacity building and wide-reaching participation by key components. Known expertise in wildlife, natural habitat and

environmental management techniques, such as experienced past and current landowners/users, should be engaged to facilitate appropriate controls and accountability. Communities need to be integrated into biodiversity programmes and share responsibility and benefits. Funding avenues to support strategic plans need urgent approach.

Participation

The biomes encompassing fauna, avifauna, flora, natural habitats, environmental issues, water and soils as they may be defined as natural assets integral to sociological and economic development, were stated by the group to be comprehensively fundamental to a mission statement that clearly embraces conserving them in an holistic form and without compromise and should be taken to include essential maintenance processes for life support systems in a realistically sustainable manner in the best interests of Zimbabwe's sociological, economic, wildlife, natural environment and community needs.

The group was guided towards achieving its goals through cell discussions and adopting sets of principles that included :

1. Avoiding political references and confrontation
2. Sourcing necessary data to make appropriate decisions
3. Evaluating the present situation against achievable proposals
4. Constructing solutions around a specific (pilot) project for broadening later
5. Including community leaders and key stakeholders in preliminary discussion and planning process
6. Work towards developing an organisation with strategic partnerships

Cell Discussion Results

1. Construct a 'Proposal (Policy) Document' for presentation to government
 - 1.1 Non-confrontational and non-political
 - The document should form an appeal for approval by the government and or the Office of the President for the need to protect natural resources and related environments and to incorporate adjoining communities into cooperatively sustainable landowner/user management programmes
 - The document should call through appeal, for the urgent re/introduction of qualified and experienced habitat management systems to prevent poaching and wanton illegal decimation of natural habitats
 - 1.2 Draw resolute focus on socio-economic-wildlife-natural environment issues

- The proposal document should embrace the critical need for appropriate natural habitat management processes that serve the best interests of adjoining community participation in sustainable land-use, vis-a-vis agriculture, education, health, housing, tourism and hunting

1.3 Highlight benefits of tourism and hunting as foreign income earners

- The document should use past performances as a benchmark for measuring foreign income losses through a dramatic downturn in tourism and hunting; outlining increased unemployment in related industries; loss of access to educational systems; the sharp demise in health facilities; the increased homeless scale, the loss of peripheral small business enterprise; the increase in crime rates and the overall impact on sociological and economic trends
- The document should project potential local, regional and national benefits and returns through the re-introduction of balanced management techniques

2. Identify governments, national, regional and international NGO's for funding and support participation

2.1 Approach regional governments and NGO's for participation in capacity building towards support and development

2.2 Approach governments and NGO's for material and financial support

3. Ensure proposal (policy) sustainability through community participation and buy-in

3.1 To solicit participation and support of government and quasi-government in encouraging and developing community participation in wildlife, environmental and habitat management

3.2 To introduce educational, training and capacity building for the short-term arrest of deteriorating conditions and the long-term entrenchment of sustainable protection and development programmes

4. Education of communities on the ground, government departments and role players

4.1 To introduce educational, training and capacity building for the short-term arrest of deteriorating conditions and the long-term entrenchment of sustainable protection and development programmes at all levels pertaining to community, government and landowner/user participation

5. Establish wide-reaching communications systems

5.1 To coordinate activities and programmes along progressive lines to ensure full updated participation and information sharing between all groups involved

6. Health Systems

- 6.1 To present facts regarding the retardation of health facilities in wildlife, conservation and game ranching areas, complete with statistics reflecting disease levels, suffering and death results. The objective is to drive home the important benefits of competently managed environments that produce qualified health services
7. Accountability
 - 7.1 To project the need for accountability by landowners/users as critical for the assurance of conformity to recognised wildlife/environmental/habitat management processes and vice versa for government/quasi-government and departmental authorities to landowner/users to ensure lawful and professional practices are provided and sustained
8. Local government relationships
 - 8.1 To stress the need for premium working relations between National Parks, Forestry, Agriculture, Water Affairs, Health, Education and Land Management authorities
9. Regional cooperation and development
 - 9.1 To stress the importance of capturing SADC participation in the best interests of aligning any development initiative of the objectives of this group with existing central and southern African programmes. This will be seen to be conforming to initiatives that the government already approves of
10. Mining operations
 10. To portray the devastation of random and uncontrolled mining activities on and in sensitive/critical water/river systems to the extent of obliterating complete biodiversity/ecosystems; the acceleration of soil erosion; the silting up of minor/major river/dam systems; deforestation along embankments for temporary housing and extensive unhygienic practices
11. Forestry operations
 - 11.1 To raise the immediate alarm regarding injudicious logging and indiscriminate chopping down of terminalia and combretum trees and surrounding shrubbery; exposing soil and shade dependent growth to over-exposure and accelerating soil erosion
12. Rivers and dams
 - 12.1 To bring to the attention of all relevant authorities, the extreme degradation of river and dam systems, emission of toxic wastes, raising mercury and cyanide deposits in sensitive systems and the holistic destruction of aquatic life and surrounding biodiversity

13. Habitat loss

- 13.1 To bring the urgent attention of the authorities to the rapid loss of natural habitats across the full spectrum of critically needed areas for the sustainability of wildlife, natural environments and consumptive use by dependent communities

14. International funding

- 14.1 To bring to the attention of the government and relevant quasi authorities that the current process is of such a destructive nature that development initiatives will immediately earn disqualification from donor support and international funding programmes if and where irresponsible/nonexistent wildlife/habitat/environmental management practices exist

General Comments

- Zimbabwe is faced with an alarming crisis related to stress and land/habitat collapse
- Large numbers of Zimbabweans live in abject poverty midst non-existent structures that hinder their progress and quality of life
- Poverty as the scourge of the country remains a major cause and consequence of environmental degradation
- Water scarcity and pollution have become a colossal problem
- The current events of gold panning along hundreds of kilometres of Zimbabwe's river systems, is destroying natural water resources and dependent biodiversities at an alarming rate
- Rapidly declining water supplies and poor sanitation have started to increase rates of water borne diseases such as dysentery and even cholera.

Across the board, the group considered the effects of injudicious exploitation/decimation of natural resources, extensive pollution, the expansion of communal agriculture into marginal areas, the deforestation of natural habitats, the indiscriminate consumptive/commercial poaching/slaughter, the irresponsible pollution and destruction of watercourses and increased toxicity counts. The latter events are all major driving forces behind wildlife, habitat and environmental degradation processes and are putting great and in some cases, irreversible pressures on Zimbabwe's natural heritage, with secondary effects that devastate biodiversity and biological resources to the extreme detriment of Zimbabwe's sociological and economic structures. In so doing, the need to approach government with an integrated management proposal as is intended for discussion and compilation in the meeting, has become imperative.

Zimbabwe's rich biological diversity is being treated as dispensable wasteland under the auspices of misguided communities. Man cannot live within wildlife and natural environments without causing extensive damage.

The call from the meeting is therefore, for the compilation of a document clearly depicting precise Heads of Argument that will appeal to the government, specific government departments and the Office of the President, to timeously consider the approval of re-introducing experienced and qualified management into key areas currently staggered by careless processes.

This approval would ideally incorporate current landowner management who possess the model working knowledge and experience in their specific areas, to immediately arrest degradation, followed by the early implementation of pre-set procedures for a logically integrated wildlife, habitat and environmental management system designed to suit the best progressive interests of Zimbabwe's rural sociological and economic development needs.

With appropriate mechanisms in place, the benefits would be colossal :

- Tourism should start to regain its rightful status in Zimbabwe
- Hunting could well begin to re-establish its once buoyant role as a conservation practice and foreign income generator
- Employment opportunities will be created
- Communities will develop and assume partnership and accountability roles through integrated capacity building
- Education systems in adjoining remote areas will regain prominence
- Essential health services unique to outlying locales will be brought back on stream
- Social structures will be strengthened
- Economic dependency on the State will diminish as communities become internally self-reliant
- Critical local, regional and international public relations will gain momentum and the international donor market will revisit its Zimbabwean funding capabilities

In all, the quality of life and security of tenure for landowners/users and communities will be installed. Moreover, the urgent water, environmental and community concerns would receive early address.

The reality is, the proposal is reasonable and practicable. It requires only the direction and energy of the discussion group, linked to value adding partnership input. After all, the question "Are we part of the problem or are we part of the solution?" could be asked, as the future of wildlife, habitat, environment and community integration is not a matter of chance, but a matter of choice. Its future security must be achieved and not waited for.

If this is true, recipients of this document are encouraged to respond with thoughts, proposals and even criticism before the next meeting on 16th January 2004.

Thank you,

Dr John K Fulton
Facilitator