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## Zambia Formulates Black Rhino Recovery Plan

By Singy Hanyona

LUSAKA, Zambia, July 29, 2003 (ENS) - One month before the World Parks Congress to be held in Durban, South Africa, Zambia has formulated a national policy on rhinoceros management and rehabilitation.

Though Zambia's rhino population declined from an estimated 12,000 to 8,000 in the pre-1970 era, and rhinos were totally eradicated in the country during the 1980s, Zambia still has no management strategy for administering rhino horns. The animals' horns are valued in traditional Asian medicine and as decorative dagger handles in the Middle East.

The Zambia Wildlife Authority (ZAWA), the country's sole wildlife management entity, says that in terms of recordkeeping the country does not currently comply with the UN Convention on the Protection of Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES). Zambia is a Party to the CITES Convention, which it ratified in 1981.

Conservation experts and wildlife managers from the 14 member countries of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) gathered in Zambia's capital Lusaka this week to fine tune the draft rhino policy document. The process, supported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, would see a reverse in destructive trends and impart positive attitudes for the conservation of rhinos in Zambia.



Black rhino in the Luangwa Valley Reserve in eastern

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1972 (Photo by M. Boulton courtesy FAO)

ZAWA Director for Research, Planning and Information George Kampamba says the development of this policy would see the reintroduction of the black rhino, poached to extinction in Zambia.

The policy will also provide guidelines and strength to the rhino conservation fraternity. It will provide a framework that will guide the reintroduction of rhinos in Zambia's established private state owned wildlife sanctuaries.

Kampamba cites the civil and liberation wars as factors in the decimation of rhino population in Africa. "The wars led to influx of refugees from many neighboring countries. The refugees came with illegal firearms, which were used in killing wildlife," said Kampamba.

He noted that since the 1970s, Zambia has had inadequate trained manpower and rhino management plans to guide the design and implementation of conservation strategies. "This is why we're talking about the rhino policy now," he said.

The ZAWA Working Paper on the National Rhino Policy and Management Strategy indicates that political will has been lacking in rhino management, citing political patronage of those involved in the rhino horn trade and corruption within the law enforcement agencies.

But Tourism, Environment and Natural Resources Minister Patrick Kalifungwa says the new policy is aimed at reversing the negative trend and helping to conserve rhinos as Zambia's rich wildlife and cultural heritage.

The environment minister said that already the government has introduced the white rhino in the former fugitive range in Mosi-Oa-Tunya National Park near Victoria Falls, one of the largest wildlife estates in Zambia.

"It is for this reason that we need to formulate a policy that will standardize rhino management and monitoring strategies with other countries in the sub-region. We need to network with other countries in the region on law enforcement

surveillance," said Kalifungwa.

The development of the national policy is also seen as one way of justifying Zambia's membership in the regional rhino protocol and conservation group.

At the apex of regional wildlife management, there is the SADC Protocol on Wildlife Conservation and Law Enforcement, signed by heads of member states in August 1999. The protocol recognizes that the viability of wildlife resources in the region requires collective cooperative action by all the 14 member countries.

Recent encounter with a white rhino in Zambia (Photo courtesy Safari Par Excellence)



Winnie Musonda, a representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), wonders at the general decline of the Zambian economy due to the falling prices of copper, and she suggested that the country's wildlife resource be an alternative source of income.

Musonda says the rhino policy must be seen in the broader context of the World Bank supported Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. "This can help in tapping some of the financial resources for poverty reduction," said Musonda.

Her sentiments are echoed by Andrew Sardanis, a private investor and businessman, who said, "Rhino management is very expensive venture. You need financing to manage animals such as a rhino."

Poaching, the illegal killing of wildlife, has been cited as the leading cause of the extermination of wildlife in Zambia and the Southern African region.

According to ZAWA, the population of black rhinos across Africa has been reduced drastically by poaching, from an estimated 65,000 rhinos in the 1970s, to less than 3,000 in 1990s.

"The reason for the decline was the sudden growth in rhino horn trade in the Middle East," says the ZAWA report. During that period, wars, breakdowns in law and order, corruption and the availability of modern weapons enabled well organized gangs of poachers to bring about the near obliteration of the species.

Russel Taylor of the World Wide Fund for Nature regional office in Harare, Zimbabwe, says rhinoceros horn is the most highly priced commodity in the world. The horn is used in traditional oriental medicines as a fever reducing drug, and is prized for dagger handles in Yemen.

The early history of the rhino can be traced from the Eocene age, about 60 million years ago. Since then, according to experts, no other land mammal in the world has been destroyed at such a rapid rate.

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