



Harmonising land use in Save Valley Conservancy

Save Valley Conservancy (SVC) in south-eastern Zimbabwe was created in 1992 when landholders converted from cattle ranching to wildlife operations, a model better suited to SVC's semi-arid conditions. Cattle and internal fences were removed, wildlife reintroduced, habitat restoration efforts undertaken, and an electric perimeter fence constructed.

Raoul du Toit | Director, Lowveld Rhino Trust

It is now part of an important wildlife complex including Bulye Valley Conservancy, Malilangwe Conservancy and Gonarezhou National Park, all within the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area. SVC hosts one of Africa's nine large (>100) black rhino populations (22% of Zimbabwe's black rhinos), together with all five large predators, elephants, buffalo and other species.

However, SVC faces many ongoing problems. Turmoil resulting from Zimbabwe's 'Fast Track Land Reform Policy' of 2000 has given rise to ongoing 'tragedy of the commons' problems in SVC: unplanned settlement and intra-community friction, destruction of fencing, resulting in human-wildlife/predator-livestock conflict, carcass poisoning and transmission of diseases between wildlife and livestock,

and poaching for bushmeat and high-value wildlife products e.g. rhino horn.

Zimbabwe is under specific CITES oversight for rhino. Opportunities for SVC's shareholders and local communities to generate income from sustainable use of its natural resources have therefore been reduced, households currently rely on unsustainable natural resource use along with income from relatives working elsewhere (mainly in South Africa). Holistic resource protection beyond basic law enforcement is poorly understood. The involvement of communities, especially women, in natural resource management is low.

A new model is urgently needed in SVC to safeguard its wildlife resources, to diversify livelihoods of local people, and to reduce friction over land-use.

We are therefore working with partners to develop a community project that, if funded, will tackle the identified problems through five key areas that will:

- support the development of local institutions for effective natural resource governance and enhanced livelihoods
- build awareness of environmental issues
- stabilize the deteriorating resource base through improved management of wildlife and habitats (e.g. fire-management)
- support the development of livestock management practices, food production systems (e.g. small-scale gardens) and other income-generating activities (e.g. mopane worm collecting) that complement wildlife-based land use
- and help mitigate human-wildlife/livestock-predator conflict (e.g. predator-proof bomas)



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Main: Giving out rhino-themed school inputs to children in Save Valley Conservancy as part of the local community conservation programme

Community consultations/empowerment will be carried out via workshops and training sessions. Pilot/demonstration sites will be established and exchange visits facilitated to see these at work. Community representatives, acting as 'Wildlife Guardians', will be trained and equipped to work on natural resource management issues and on outreach and communication to communities. Many of these roles and activities will be targeted at, and be culturally suitable for, women from the local community. Where relevant, models from successful techniques such as those used by the Northern Rangelands Trust and Save The Elephants in Kenya will be introduced and tested in the SVC context. The African Wildlife Conservation Fund's Lowveld Wild Dog Project, initiated in SVC in 1996, will advise on human-wildlife conflict mitigation activities.

We hope to be able to report back on the implementation of this exciting project in a year's time.

