

**Proposal for an  
African Elephant Habitat Conservation Programme  
*Pilot Project***

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This paper proposes a Pilot Project for designing an international African Elephant Habitat Conservation Programme that would have three inter-disciplinary thrusts: enhancing the knowledge base of elephant biology; reviewing critically the nature of elephant “trouble spots”; devising and implementing a mechanism to meet the opportunity costs of local human communities.

## **Background**

1. The African elephant, although special for many aspects of its biology, cannot be considered in isolation from the habitats that support it nor the humans that compete with or benefit from it. Although this proposal is about the elephant as a species, it is also about the elephant as an *icon* for its habitats (as well as the international conservation effort) and at the same time as a *competitor* that must come to terms with its human neighbours if it is to exist at all.
2. We conserve elephants, as most species, in fire-fighting mode. Local symptoms of biological discordance (such as illegal killing or habitat modification) inspire local research projects. Local appeals for damage compensation or asset management assistance by neighbouring human communities lead to local command and control operations ranging from culling to community conservation enterprises. Such efforts are necessary but not sufficient for formulating effective and sustainable conservation policy for elephants and their habitats throughout the species’ range.
3. There are according to the sum of current best estimates (Barnes et al. 1999) between 3- and 400,000 wild African elephants throughout their range. This is not the kind of number usually commensurate with arguments for endangered species status, and debates continue between the camps of control and *laissez-faire*, between the proponents of sustainable use and those of intrinsic value conservation.
4. Since the early 1970's (e.g. UNDP/FAO 1980) conservationists working in developing countries have been talking about “wildlife utilisation funds”, that is, schemes to divert revenues to the landowners neighbouring protected areas. These include participatory “community-based conservation” schemes as well as compensation based on *ad hoc* claims or systematic ecological monitoring. Such efforts have enjoyed a measure of success in some localities (Getz *et al.* 1999), while failing to meet expectations for a variety of reasons in other areas (Inamdar & Cobb 1999).
5. Norton-Griffiths (1998) and others have pointed out that the governments and people of wildlife-hosting countries in the developing world are in fact bearing huge opportunity costs for not supplanting wild animals that are maintained largely for the enjoyment of well-moneyed folks from other parts of the world. This is yet another burden on a rural population already suffering the pernicious poverty that results from wealth disparities, corruption and environmental degradation.
6. The obvious question would seem to be: if the World Community, and particularly that part in the developed North, wants to maintain this global patrimony, should it not share in the costs of its maintenance? Irrespective of one’s stand on the ivory trade or the morality of killing “large-brained co-habitants of planet earth”, is it not possible to conceive of a plan to meet fairly their opportunity costs and thereby to buy elephants some room?
7. Drawing from recent forest conservation experience in Costa Rica, the answer may well be, yes. In an innovative, World Bank-financed forestry environmental services programme, Costa

Rica “delinks the provision of environmental services from the financing of these services” (Chomitz, Brenes & Constantino 1998, p.6). Two major premises are a new forestry law that explicitly recognises bookable services provided by forests and a government that is an honest broker. The government acts as an intermediary in the sale of services. However, “most innovative part of the system is the provision of services by private landholders under contract.” (*loc. Cit.*)<sup>1</sup> This seems to be a practical demonstration of the growing body of theory that argues for the cost-effectiveness of direct benefit conservation incentive payments (e.g. Ferraro & Simpson 2000).

8. African elephants are superlative in most respects: large body, large brain, highly social and communicative, wide-ranging and capable of modifying whole landscapes. Their continental distribution and the worldwide debate on the international ivory trade stretches their sphere of influence to the truly global. The possibility that as with diamonds an illicit ivory trade is helping to finance internal wars that are rending the social and economic fabric of the continent increases the urgency of engaging range state citizens in rational asset management.

9. The need for a broad approach is in fact well recognised by a number of non-governmental, inter-governmental and private bodies. All of these have strong strategic advantages (and therefore are essential collaborators in the proposed enterprise), but they also experience certain impediments based on the nature of their charters.

10. For example, the African Elephant Specialist Group has a strong science base and has recently formed a Human-Elephant Conflict Task Force, undertaking a range of surveys, analyses and policy studies (Hoare 2000). The HETF has identified economic studies and interventions as a key area needing further development. The AfESG also carefully husbands and updates the African Elephant Database, which, together with the work of the HETF, would provide an excellent backdrop for a comprehensive, targeted conservation programme. But good science notwithstanding, the AfESG is dependent on the good will of its Member States and constrained by them in the use to which the data are put (Dublin, pers. comm.).

11. Similarly, international accords, such as CITES, are inherently comprehensive in scope, but they suffer from the unavoidable downside of negotiated agreements, namely, they are inevitably a compromise that often results in conservative policy and the lowest common denominator of positive action.

12. Private, not-for-profit trusts like Save The Elephants (Douglas-Hamilton) and the African Elephant Conservation Trust (Moss) work explicitly on a continental scale with global connections. They can be extremely effective in marshalling support for local conservation and research interventions, but they must work long and hard to establish credibility with inherently conservative governments and local authorities. The proposed project will draw heavily on this experience.

13. This proposal attempts to meet the need for an objective, science-based, well-coordinated and authoritative programme to tackle the conservation of African elephants within a comprehensive framework commensurate with the scale of their impact on human society and habitats.

14. The task is as large as the subject and obviously requires careful planning and networking. Therefore this preliminary proposal is for a six-month Pilot Project that will review, scope and

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<sup>1</sup> In 1997, the first year of the Costa Rica FESP, the landowners of some 95,000 ha earned \$14m. This amount is of the order of magnitude that would pay an annual minimum wage to all landowners and adult group ranch members surrounding Kenya’s six highest profile elephant populations.

define the necessary steps to launch a programme based on sound science, donor participation and a carefully laid out plan to meet and manage fair opportunity costs. .

## **Objectives**

15. *Pilot Project objective.* A rapid but balanced review of current African elephant conservation efforts; needs and gaps identified; a preliminary design of a mechanism to meet opportunity costs; operational strategies for formulating a comprehensive programme framework to address elephant conservation on three broad fronts – biological, social and economic.

16. *Long-term programme objective.* Implementation of a programme for conservation of African elephants and their habitats throughout their range and the elephants living in mutually beneficial coexistence with adjacent human populations. Benchmarks for the long-term objective:

- at least [a pre-determined proportion] of existing populations protected and their habitat set aside for non-consumptive uses;
- at least [a pre-determined proportion] of the surrounding human communities participating in and receiving benefit from the programme.

## **Outputs**

### ***Pilot Project Output***

17. The tangible Pilot Project output will be a prospective report that includes a critical review of current elephant conservation efforts, identification of the needs for and interest in a comprehensive African elephant habitat conservation programme, and a scoped and costed programme plan proposal. All or part of the report will be suitable for publishing under the funding body's imprint or in a suitable conservation and development journal.

18. Intangible outputs include a network of potential national, international and NGO collaborators for future programme development.

### ***Potential Programme Outputs***

19. Should the Pilot Project lead to a long term programme, at least three major outputs are envisaged:

- A compendium of 30-years' research on the Amboseli elephant population and the accompanying database of social, reproductive and demographic data of over 1,700 known individuals (mid-2002)<sup>2</sup>.
- A critical review within a standardised framework of the cause-effect linkages driving key "elephant problems" (mid-2002).
- An operational international mechanism (code-named "The Elephant Holding Company", see below) to meet fairly and equitably the opportunity costs of human communities surrounding key elephant populations (scoped by mid-2001, potentially operational in at least one pilot country thereafter).

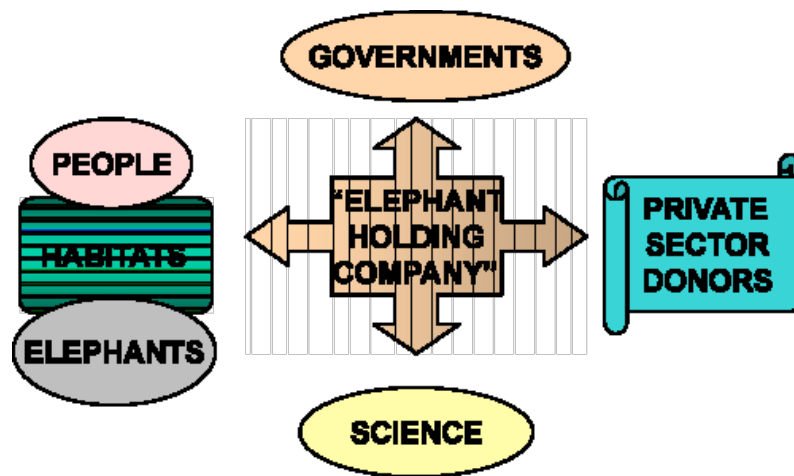
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<sup>2</sup> The Amboseli research synthesis contribution to the comprehensive program proposal is already well underway, under the management of Cynthia Moss, AWF/AERP, and the joint editorship of Ms. Moss and H. Croze.

## Conceptual framework

20. The concept of an “Elephant Holding Company” is the crux of the proposal. At this formulation stage, it is not possible to say what form an “EHC” might take: an NGO, an intergovernmental project, a trust, an international consortium... The challenge is to conceive and implement an “honest broker” mechanism that is able to develop a construct for the environmental services provided by elephants and their habitats, to calculate and finance the costs of those services in order to meet elephant opportunity costs, and to manage and distribute assets.

21. The entity must have strong international credibility and a sound management structure in order to negotiate effectively with potential private sector partners. It must operate with total transparency, unfettered by national pressure groups. At the same time it has to have the agility and expertise to be able to interface and work with local enterprises and be flexible and responsive to local customs and aspirations. It must be fuelled with resources from those who can afford and are willing to contribute to meeting elephant habitat opportunity costs, and at the same time be founded on the best scientific information available. A tall order indeed, but not beyond imagination to create and put in place.



## Activities

22. The Pilot Project will comprise review, networking and planning, involving 120+ person days over six months.

### *Review*

23. A rapid review of current African elephant conservation and research activities will be undertaken tapping the information resources of all available private, NGO and inter-governmental sources. An initial compilation of potential international private sector and NGO collaborators will be developed. One component of the review will be to identify potential gaps in current efforts and the areas and circumstances wherein an “Elephant Holding Company” might help to fill such gaps. Another component will be to evaluate and, as necessary, modify and develop further the concept and approach of an “EHC”.

### *Networking*

24. Extensive contacts will be made with a wide range of conservation and development professionals via email, fax or phone to extend the process of developing the conceptual framework and to identify potential programme collaborators. At least one site visit will be

undertaken to each of the three regions (West/Central Africa, southern Africa, East Africa) to canvass support for the concept, identify potential regional workshop participants and secure their commitment in principle to participate in the proposed workshops, and to develop contacts with possible partners on the ground to help with workshop organisation. Networking will include building an initial list of private sector partners as well as tapping the expertise of those bodies that attempt to influence private sector policy and behaviour, such as the International Chamber of Commerce, the UNEP Industry and the Environment Office, and numerous foundations.

### ***Planning of workshops***

25. The Pilot Project will, in conjunction with suitable partners, such as Conservation International and its regional offices, develop a plan and do the groundwork for a series of stakeholder workshops in each of three regions – Eastern, West/Central and Southern Africa (for example, in Nairobi, Johannesburg and Abidjan). The workshops that are seen as a crucial “next step” to engage local participation both at the formulation stage as well as in a future implementation stage.

### ***Concept development***

26. It is proposed to follow up the review and networking activities on the conceptual framework by holding a brainstorming workshop with a selection of economists and biologists in order to develop a preliminary model for the “Elephant Holding Company” mechanism. Outside partners (for example, the Ford Foundation, Conservation International, the UNEP Industry and the Environment Office) will be approached for in-kind and cash support.

### ***Strategy elements***

27. A programme strategy will be set in place during the Pilot Project. However, already it is clear that the key elements will include those listed below.

28. *National partners:* A key Pilot Project element will be to establish contacts with potential government, local and NGO partners through correspondence and the proposed regional brainstorming workshops.

29. *Counterpart contributions:* The research compendium on the Amboseli elephant population is well underway, with cash and in-kind support from the Howard Gilman Foundation, the University of California Santa Barbara/National Science Foundation’s National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS), the Amboseli Elephant Research Programme and the African Elephant Conservation Trust. The East African office of the Ford Foundation has expressed a willingness to discuss further the issue of local enterprise development.

30. *Sound science base:* The University of Chicago Press has agreed to publish synthesis of 30-years research on the Amboseli elephant population, arguably the best-known non-human population of animals in the world. The syntheses of elephant society, habitat interaction, ranging, reproductive strategy and relationships with local people will finish with an analysis of scenarios for the future and a research and conservation agenda.

31. *Science partnerships:* Dialogues have already begun with other researchers. Further close multi-disciplinary consultation and review of the literature will be essential, particularly for analysis of cause and effect in elephant problem spots. NCEAS has expressed an interest in principle to participate in the conceptual framework development and possibly apply their Sites spatial modelling tool to elephant problems. Linkages with local research projects and continent-wide assessments will need to be forged,.

32. *Private sector partnerships:* The key to the meeting of opportunity costs will be to leverage financing from the private sector, or devising incentives or levies from appropriate sources. The

Pilot Project will scope a tactical campaign for engaging and tapping the resources of appropriate private sector partners. The strategy will be to engage those that are a threat, tap those that are sympathetic, and strive to educate the customers of both.

33. *Stakeholder involvement*: The objectives of western conservationists are not always those of the people on the ground who bear the opportunity costs of conserving species and habitats. A major challenge of the programme will be to identify those costs and enterprise opportunities (initially of a tractable number of populations).

34. *Local enterprises*: The “Elephant Holding Company” will need to work on the ground in communities evincing a wide range of local capabilities and value sets in order to ensure that costs are identified clearly and met equitably and effectively.

### Implementation and management of Pilot Project

35. The programme will be formulated and run by two senior conservationists with proven management experience of international science-based programmes in the African context (see H. Croze and K. Lindsay *curricula vitae* attached). It will be implemented under the aegis of the funding body and its regional representatives in consultation with appropriate experts and stakeholders.

### Budget

36. The total budget for the Pilot Project comes to \$108,000, \$93,000 (86%) of which is requested from the funding body. It is proposed that 20% be paid upon agreement to this proposal, 50% upon receipt of a mid-term progress report and the balance of 30% on delivery of the report (end April 2001). Counterpart support will be sought for a graduate assistant and to host the proposed opportunity cost workshop

				Pilot Project	Other Sources	Totals	Counterpart sources
	No.	Units	Unit cost				
PI No. 1	60	day	450	27,000			
PI No. 2	60	day	450	27,000			
Graduate Assistant	5	month	3,000		15,000		Ford Foundation?
Workshop				23,000	Hosted by		UNEP IEO, Paris?
Travel				13,000			
Communications				3,000			
Office Supplies				500			
<b>Totals</b>				93,000	15,000	108,000	

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