

The Future for Hunting



The best chance to secure social acceptance for hunting lies primarily in the transparent implementation of and compliance with scientifically grounded sustainability rules, secondly in the full recognition of the role of local rural people in wildlife management, and thirdly in the behavior of hunters in the field and how they present themselves to the public. These three tenets, important as they are individually and in combination, should be adaptable and sensitive to varying local cultural, political and social contexts, and integrate local knowledge and cultural practices.

There are several interconnected segments of land use, viz. agriculture and livestock husbandry, forestry, hunting, gathering of wild foods, and non-extractive nature-based leisure activities, in a complex supplier/user system of stakeholders. Due to this complexity, the future of habitat and wildlife conservation depends on trust building and concerted efforts of all invested stakeholders to explore common ground and determine shared objectives.

The romantic-utopian preservationist view of a vociferous minority from the urbanized western consumer-society, which pursues the elimination of any human impact on nature, is largely emotive, shows an almost irresponsible lack of knowledge, and is dangerously detached from the realities on the ground; it is also mischievously deceitful and full of hypocrisy. Its perpetrators want to convert more and more lands to strictly protected areas. They are presenting foggy concepts of wildlife being a globally owned asset, and tout proposals of substituting present and future economic benefits derived

by Gerhard R Damm & Kai Wollscheid

from sustainable extractive and non-extractive natural resource use with foreign aid, philanthropy, carbon offset payments, etc.

This is a fallacy and will accelerate the onset of a conservation tragedy of the commons. Most protected areas in Africa and Asia are already severely underfunded; existing foreign aid and donor funding fall pitifully short to even pay for their existence value and are very susceptible to shifting political imperatives. Designating more lands as protected will not prevent the intensification of human pressures, but rather exacerbate the funding gap and merely create parks on paper. Nobody can really want such a development.

The lands where most of the wildlife still occurs, exist outside formally protected areas. These lands, which encompass nearly two-thirds of the world's most remote and least-inhabited regions, are to a large extent still owned, managed or influenced by Indigenous peoples and rural communities. They are in much better condition nature-wise than the rest, and thus most valuable for conservation. Reducing the rural stewards of wild lands and wildlife to charity objects at the mercy of instable external funding has already undermined many practical conservation efforts.

The sheer number of the world's population should be compelling reason to adopt a more anthropocentric stance towards nature. Of course, the intrinsic and intangible worth of the natural world needs recognition and practical protection, but at the same time we need to conserve and wisely use its utilitarian values for human well-being.

In other words, nature conservation in the 21st century must seek the proper and wise use of nature, now and to posterity, by unlocking the economic value of natural habitats through privatization of conservation. Private investors and global asset managers will direct funds into scalable and sustainable conservation finance projects. These projects ideally encompass a combination of hunting tourism and eco-tourism. The latter probably receiving more emphasis in areas where large animals roam and the scenery is spectacular. The former is critically important in the substantially larger areas, where the landscape is mundane, animal variety and density are lower, infrastructure is marginal, and habitat degradation and/or conversion are a threat.

The cultural and ideological choices of some social-media-active urbanites and rating-obsessed talk show hosts cannot be allowed to obliterate the values of 4 million years of hunting and gathering, just because they don't fit their globalist utopian world view and ideals.

All those who hold wild spaces and wildlife close to their hearts need to cooperate with the traditional land custodians to develop private conservation funding mechanism that contribute to resource conservation and rural livelihoods. This has to happen inside, and even more importantly outside of formally protected areas.

A utilitarian approach involves, however, certain social, political, and personal restraints and imperatives, which affect all stakeholders at different levels and with varying intensity.

User and beneficiary groups need to contribute meaningfully to nature conservation by reducing habitat

degradation or conversion, lessening the key threats of illegal wildlife trade, and promoting ecosystem-wide habitat and wildlife management. They need to better understand the economic, ecologic and social linkages of extractive and non-extractive use of nature and make them work for conservation in adaptively adjustable actions and processes.

In today's dramatically changed and changing social environment, hunters in particular must accept the challenge to play a visible role in this process. User-rights come with user-responsibilities and -obligations. To that end, hunters should provide tangible proof that recreational hunting generally, and hunting tourism in Asia and Africa specifically,

- is conducted in ways that are adapted and sensitive to diverse cultural, political and social contexts, and integrates local knowledge and cultural practices;
- enhances investor attraction as well as diverse local livelihood options based on sustainable use of wild resources – landscapes, plants and animals – in ways that incentivize conservation and meet the aspirations of the rural land stewards;
- supports the establishment of physical and virtual platforms for meaningful dialogue on, and practical implementation of investment projects in wildlife management and research;
- provides the international stage for Indigenous peoples and rural community organizations to showcase their individual wildlife conservation models and market the products of their land under Fair Trade conditions.

These objectives cannot be reached without adhering to standards. Not only regarding the economic, ecological and social sustainability of wildlife use, but in the case of hunting also of measurable standards regarding individual choices and preferences. We do not suggest to unduly restrict independence, self-governance and personal freedom, the freedom of the markets, or burden stakeholders with additional administration; over-regulation is not intended! Yet, in the world of the 21st century, with the increasing development juggernaut on wild habitats and the threats of climate change, some constraints are essential.

1. Transparent parameters that measure the results of sustainable wildlife management and use against internationally agreed frameworks for sustainable use of biodiversity (e.g. Addis Ababa Principles and Guidelines for Sustainable Use; Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its 2050 Vision; the Aichi Biodiversity Targets; UN Sustainable Development Goals, etc.).
2. Aspirational, innovative and tailor-made instruments, like Charters for Hunting, Wildlife Conservation and Habitat Protection, designed for specific regions or sub-regions in Asia and Africa that create trust across sectors and borders (e.g. the European Council's "Charter on Hunting and Biodiversity" adopted in 2007 by the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, and the "Charter on Recreational Fishing and Biodiversity", adopted in 2010).
3. A matrix of region-specific principles, criteria and indicators (PCIs) as a basis for adaptive wildlife management to transparently document and monitor the ecological, economical and societal impacts and consequences of hunting in general and hunting tourism in particular, and its interfaces with other natural resource use sectors.

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Conservation success is the effort of many, and hunters can perform an important role as partners. Recognizing the deep connection Indigenous peoples and rural communities to the lands they inhabit, their aspirations, and their customary forms of wildlife stewardship, will open innovative avenues for natural resource use and conservation funding. Wildlife researchers and conservationists welcome the cooperation of hunting citizen-scientists to complement and expand data collection on climate, landscapes and wildlife to better understand wildlife population and other natural dynamics. Last not least, hunters can effectively self-check the sustainability of their actions, when they hunt with all senses and faculties focused on expanding individual proficiency and knowledge.

Hunting is an individualistic passion, traditionally occurring in places where few are watching. There is no space for narcissistic self-aggrandizement on social media or for gung-ho television shows focusing on the kill and on the mostly staged 'hunting prowess' of equipment-touting (and sponsored) 'hunter-actors'.

To hunt right means observing the 3 Rs - respect, responsibility and reverence - for the game you hunt, the people who own and care for the land, for your fellow hunters, and last but not least for those fellow citizens who chose not to hunt. African, European and American authors and filmmakers created some truly inspirational reading material on authentic hunting and inspirational movies on the conservation and hunting imperatives - let's have more of this, and less hunting porn!

Let's catalyze the enthusiasm of young communicators and influencers within the global hunting community; young people who share an inspiration rooted in the rich history of authentic hunting and are passionate fighters for the conservation of wild spaces and wildlife. Leading by example, they will be able to communicate their knowledge and experience as first line content to a receptive audience amongst their Generation Z and Millennial peers. Their savvy to operate the multiple social networks day and night will serve hunting and conservation better than anything else.

National and international hunting associations, booking agents and consultants, private and communal hunt operators or concessionaires, equipment manufacturers, and last but not least, every single individual hunter who has the future of hunting at the heart, should take some time to ponder these ideas. Together we need to develop a better narrative of factually, morally and ethically sound pro-hunting arguments.

As editors of Conservation Frontlines, it is our objective to provide you with the tools and arguments that hunters were, are and will be an indispensable part of nature conservation.

The Conservation Frontlines E-Magazine and the ad-hoc newsletter Frontline Dispatches will directly deliver information, evidence and opinion on these matters to your email inbox. The Conservation Frontlines Website provides additional information and an extensive thematic library.

Together with you, we want to expand horizons, step out of the box, and seek innovative, solution-oriented and realistic scenarios for the survival of wild habitats and wildlife in the 21st century. We invite you to join the dialogue, express your own views, and take up the challenge of being a communicator on THE FUTURE FOR HUNTING!