“Making Conservation Pay”
Colin Bell
of Wilderness Safaris
Presentation at the fifth World Parks Congress 2003

Who are Wilderness Safaris?
- 20 years of experience in Africa
- Own or manage 44 safari lodges
- Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Seychelles, Zambia and Zimbabwe
- Employ 1700 people and have community partnerships that benefit well over 100,000 local villagers
- Host 25,000 guests on safari each year, or around 150,000 bed nights per annum
- Have private access to, or manage, 2.6m acres of prime wildlife reserves in Southern Africa on leasehold

The Wilderness “recipe”
- Three legged African pot analogy: conservation / guests / communities combine to create benefits for all.
- Low volume / high (ish) revenue tourism
- Small lodges, that are mainly tented, i.e. small footprint with low impact. Usually 8 rooms or less
- High levels of guest service with a high staff to guest ratio
- Bring communities where possible directly into the business so they earn a % of revenue / profits and all the jobs, skills transfers, upliftment
The Conservation Issues facing parks around the world

- No Money for conservation
- Communities that are getting more and more militant
- How are these problems solved?

How can the private sector benefit protected areas?

- Our Tanzania experience vs Botswana / Namibia etc...and now Makuleke and Mkambati in South Africa.
- Private sector can potentially solve many or all of park’s financial problems, if the plan to involve the private sector is fair and reasonable for all parties as well as the park’s neighbours.
- (But choose your private sector partner well!)
- The entire process must be practical & well thought through, so it can work in the long term;
- There must be security for the operator with checks / balances for the park authorities.
- A well thought out and detailed management plan is a must to guide the private sector

How can the private sector benefit protected areas?

- The Private Sector can deliver a cash positive situation to the parks (but be wary of mass tourism!)
- Partnership must have longevity, low volume / high revenue often the best way to go
- Private sector can help Communities and Parks to work together
  1. Feeling of ownership again within community therefore the communities come on sides and poaching stops. The Botswana example...45% of all jobs in N. Bots = wildlife.
  2. Cash
  3. Jobs
  4. Skills transfers and secondary businesses in the villages
- On sides communities are the best anti-poaching early warning devise
- Enhancing the reputation of the park

How can private sector investments be generated for protected areas?

- The Private sector needs:
  1. A park that must be a destination that tourists want to visit! Be realistic here.
  2. Fair lease tenure: 15 to 45 years. The longer the better to ensure environmental nurturing and a large investment. Don’t sell the land
  3. Reasonable zone of exclusivity for the lodges and for their guest’s including when they are on their activities. The larger the zone of exclusivity the more chance of success of the development.
- Put the area out to tender and attract the best operators;
- Award the tender to the best overall operator and not necessarily the one that offers the highest cash amount. Be seduced by the operator who has the best long term plan with the highest level of neighbouring community involvement and successful practical experience.
- First prize for parks = guaranteed fixed income per annum and % of turnover.
What mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that private investments benefit protected areas?

- The private sector cannot afford to have guest complaints, so they are the ones who will put in the most effort to ensure that their protected areas are perfect and pristine. Encourage and incentivise them to improve the park.
- Put away the fear that the private sector is the enemy and they are going to destroy the park! The private sector is potentially the park's biggest ally and is often the best conservationist.
- The authorities need a well thought out, practical and documented land management plan for the park, detailing carrying capacities, permitted land uses etc that forms part of the lease agreement.
- This plan must have the support of the neighbouring communities and other stakeholders.

A written tender document from the operator must be part of the process that forms the basis for all contracts and operations and must detail all operation issues (sewerage disposal / water usage / traversing, building plans etc) as well as payments, community liaisons and partnerships.

EIA's must be carried out and be part of the process.

Environmental and operational transgressors can lose their lease and investment if they fail to live up to their promises – the ultimate "persuader".

Annual inspections, to monitor the self regulation by the operator!

What institutional arrangements are required to attract private investments consistent with protected areas' objectives?

- The park must be such that visitors will be attracted to it.
- A clear understanding from parks as to what is going to work, is practical and be viable.
- A documented and practical land plan with full information that provides certainty for stakeholders:
  1. The neighbouring communities needs and involvement. Sharing!
  2. Hunting vs Photographic - core, prime, marginal
  3. Mass tourism vs low volume tourism. Hunting must be in marginal areas
  4. Clear zoning
  5. Agricultural vs conservation

Some Common Mistakes by Authorities

- The authorities sometimes act as though they are land owner rather than conservators.
- Double standards
- When to let the blossoming partnerships go, between the communities, the private sector and the authorities - and let the partnership develop its own energy.
- Over regulate certain issues that are inconsequential to the end game / big picture.
- Leases are often too short
- Choosing an operator on a short term basis
Some Common Mistakes by Authorities

- Middle management in the parks who don't have the big picture and who stifle the end game
- Conservators who think tourists and the private sector are the enemy
- Mixing hunting areas and photographic in the same area
- Do not lease out bad areas. Lease the best areas out, but at lower volumes for the maximum amount of money
- Lengthy decision making processes
- Over promising and under delivering to the neighbouring communities
- Don't always try to keep everyone happy

Conclusion

- The private sector can, if nurtured correctly, solve many of park's financial and other conservation problems
- The private sector will often put the protected area on the global tourism map and therefore other projects in the area have better chances of survival
- Private sector, if properly motivated has the ability to facilitate a far better working relationship between parks and communities by providing the cash / jobs so that the communities become game keepers and not poachers – and also in some cases even increase the amount of land under conservation
- Private sector can really enhance the visitors spiritual experience of these natural areas, thus promoting the concept of the parks needing to be protected