

HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT: A CASE FOR GLOBAL COLLABORATION

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Abstract: Human-wildlife conflict (HWC) hinders conservation globally and will continue to become more widespread as human population and development increase. Conservation and development efforts often lack knowledge, tools, and resources needed to address the complexities of HWC, especially when working in isolation from one another. Practitioners in all sectors would benefit from opportunities to exchange ideas and information across project sites and with other organizations, in order to learn about and develop best practices in preventing and mitigating HWC. The Human-Wildlife Conflict Collaboration (HWCC) aims to prevent and mitigate human-wildlife conflict (HWC) through a global network and partnership of diverse stakeholders across sectors and disciplines that facilitate collaborative learning, innovation, scientific analysis, and development of best practices. Targeted activities of the collaboration will meet the collective need for improved information exchange, awareness raising and communication among key sectors; capacity building and training among practitioners; improved decision making and policy development; and enhanced understanding of the human dimensions of HWC.

Key words: best practices, capacity building, collaboration, conservation, development, global, human-wildlife conflict, information sharing

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INTRODUCTION

Human-wildlife conflict is a serious obstacle to conservation and wildlife management world-wide and is spreading as human population and development increase. When working separately, conservation and development organizations, government agencies, land-use planners, agri-business and other sectors and organizations whose projects are affected by HWC often lack knowledge, tools, resources and expertise needed to address the complexities of HWC. Practitioners in all sectors would benefit from opportunities to exchange ideas and information across project sites and with other organizations, in order to learn about and develop best practices in preventing and mitigating HWC. The Human-Wildlife

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NEED

HWC typically involves a direct and intense competition for resources resulting

in real or perceived individualized harm to wildlife, humans or their property. HWC may be characterized by instances of crop raiding, livestock depredation, destruction of property by wildlife, disease transmission, or killing of wildlife by people who experience or perceive actual or potential threats to themselves, their family or their property. While the most serious conflicts are outwardly distinguished by death to humans and/or wildlife, the intensity and severity of the conflict is often determined more by social, cultural, historical, political and psychological factors that have exacerbated the outward conflict. While HWC can be defined by a complex mix of characteristics, in every case HWC poses a serious threat to the success of conservation efforts around the world.

The challenges posed by HWC are increasing with population growth, success of conservation efforts and expansion of human settlement and development. The conflict is linked also to other factors such as poor land use planning and flawed development policies, in ways that are not always fully understood. HWC reduces local support for conservation and engenders resentment and opposition to it. It can also hinder the pursuit of development and poverty alleviation goals when development projects inadvertently cause or exacerbate HWC.

Conservationists typically address the biological needs of wildlife, and fail to anticipate or address the human dimensions of potential or current HWC. Solutions to HWC typically offer economic fixes or technical short-term mitigation efforts, like fences and livestock husbandry methods. While such measures are important, proactive and preventative solutions that aim at the driving factors of the conflict, like land-use planning, are critical to achieving balance in conservation and development. But development is typically planned

without consideration of HWC and thus often contributes inadvertently to it. Examples include the promotion of cash crops attractive to wildlife and the encouragement of settlement on migratory pathways. Because these professionals too often operate in isolation, their projects and missions drive policies that guide conservation and development to actually risk increasing opportunities for HWC. Consequently, addressing HWC also requires greater interaction between conservation, development, and other policy and program areas such as land use planning, infrastructure development, agricultural policy and poverty alleviation.

Improving our responses to HWC demands greater consultation and exchange of information between individual sites and programs and the institutions that support them. Successful responses to HWC frequently require individual professionals to reach outside their own disciplines for needed tools, skills and perspectives. For instance, the biological training and perspective typical of many conservation managers does not generally provide a basis to address the human side of the conflict, including its social, cultural, political, and historical roots. Such interdisciplinary collaboration is critical to improving the understanding of underlying causes needed to shift the emphasis from reactive mitigation of HWC to a greater reliance on proactive prevention strategies.

Practitioners have already recognized that human-wildlife conflict must be addressed to meet the respective goals of conservation and human development. Creative, innovative measures are being tested and some are succeeding. Others are failing, but with failure comes lessons learned that result in better methodology. These methodologies are not widely shared yet could benefit practitioners able to adapt them to local circumstances

and mitigate the ecological, social, and economic costs of human-wildlife conflict. Finally, long term solutions that are proactive and preventative in nature and require skills and an understanding currently lacking among HWC professionals are in the conceptual stages of development and require collaboration and dedicated resources to ensure their further development, implementation and success.

APPROACH

The HWCC is a global partnership that supports greater collaboration on HWC across disciplines, sites and policy areas. Its mission is to prevent and mitigate HWC through a global network and partnership that facilitates collaborative learning, innovation, scientific analysis and the development and improvement of best practices and policies. It seeks to promote adoption of best practices for HWC prevention and mitigation by conservation, development and planning professionals and institutions. Improved prevention and mitigation of HWC will avoid or reduce its economic and social costs, in turn reducing the real and perceived costs of conservation to local people, improving quality of life and fostering greater tolerance of wildlife and support for conservation.

HWCC evolved out of consultations among HWC practitioners who realized that sharing ideas, information, and experiences was an essential resource in preventing and minimizing HWC in the areas where they work, despite differences in culture, language, wildlife species managed, ecological conditions, and political obstacles. The need for a partnership initiative like HWCC was identified by a workshop of HWC practitioners at the 5th IUCN World Parks Congress in 2003, in Durban, South Africa, and recognized in the Congress's formal recommendations.

In November 2006, more than fifty professionals representing over forty organizations convened in Washington, D.C. to identify priorities for collaboration in HWC and to develop a framework for pursuing those priorities. The result was the launch of the HWCC.

HWCC is working to improve collaborative learning, information exchange, innovation, and capacity building among professionals across relevant institutions, disciplines, and regions; to ensure that HWC tools, resources, best practices and guidelines are developed and incorporated in conservation, development, land-use planning and other program and policy decisions; and to use our collective strength to better address HWC and support the efforts of individual member organizations to be more effective in addressing HWC where they work.

If you would like more information about HWCC or if you or your organization would like to join this innovative, new collaborative partnership, please visit our website at www.humanwildlifeconflict.org or contact Francine Madden, Executive Director, HWCC via email at fmmadden@comcast.net or via telephone at 1 202 986 0067 or via letter at: c/o The Wildlife Society, 5410 Grosvenor Lane, Bethesda, MD USA 20814.