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## Association for Tourism in Hwange

16 April 2019 | 9am-1pm at Hwange National Park, Main Camp

### MEETING MINUTES

The following participants were in attendance:

Chris Dube, Dumazulu Safaris  
Aaron Njoro, Elephants Eye  
Tendai, Forestry Commission  
Patience Moyo, Gwango  
Nyasha Mukarati, Gwango  
Elisabeth Pasalk, Gwango  
Forgie Wilson, Hwange Wildlife Safaris  
Njabulo Zondo, Imvelo Safari Lodges  
Terry Anders, Inganyana Tented Camp  
Joel Kasunungure, Ivory Lodge  
Nyasha Chinho, New Game Reserve Lodge  
Ludo Sibanda, Ngamo Safaris  
David Kavawoga , Painted Dog Conservation (PDC)  
Melissa Podayi, Sable Sands Lodge  
Brian Sebeta, Sable Sands Lodge  
Nikki Nyamaka, Somalisa Camp  
Albert Paradzai, Somalisa Camp  
Nongqabutho Ngwenya, Verney's Camp  
Arnold Tshipa, Wilderness Safaris  
Pedzisai Batisayi, Zimparks  
S Chibaya, Zimparks  
Gifford Chiwawa, Zimparks  
Alec Makumire , Zimparks  
Peace Madora , Zimparks  
Elson Maposa, Zimparks  
P Sithole, Zimparks

#### Introductions

Mr. Sithole of the Zimbabwe Parks & Wildlife Management Authority (ZimParks) welcomed the meeting attendees and introduced Mr. Chibaya the Cluster Manager of ZimParks who shared words of advice with the attendees. Mr. Chibaya provided the opening remarks, encouraging everyone to work together. Mr. Sithole then invited the operators to introduce themselves individually.

## **Agenda Overview**

Elisabeth Pasalk of Gwango reviewed the Agenda, saying that that there is a lot to cover in a short amount of time, however her goal would be to end the meeting in a timely manner. She thanked ZimParks, especially the representatives from Main Camp for organizing the venue and hosting the group.

## **Meeting Objectives**

Elisabeth Pasalk stated that working collectively as operators would enhance tourism in the region. She requested that the operators share their thoughts about what could be achieved during the meeting; the following were some of the objectives put forward by attendees:

- Improving communication and collaboration amongst operators
- Coming up with the solution to help parks maintain the road network
- Shedding light on developments in Hwange
- Clarification on Park regulations and better communication with the Parks officials
- Emergency planning
- Conservation and environmental protection
- Joint efforts for marketing and promoting tourism

## **Special Announcements**

Mr. Sithole stated that ZimParks has developed plans to build a new entrance for Hwange National Park, Main Camp. The entrance will be near the railway line at the first boom gate. The time frame for construction of the new entrance will be finalized in less than a month.

Forgie Wilson of Hwange Wildlife Safaris said she was concerned that the new entrance would affect her business since the new gate would require payment before entering. Her company vehicles are normally parked at Main Camp outside the Park entry gate, where they are able to have access to guests without having to pay entry fees. She also asked if ZimParks would be adding more game drive vehicles of its own, since this would further affect her business, reducing the amount of business she would have.

Mr. Sithole assured Forgie that ZimParks would review any issues concerning the entrance and parking logistics and that any additional ZimParks vehicles would not affect anyone because they would just be for guests that ZimParks accommodates.

Elisabeth Pasalk also asked if ZimParks has any plans to improve the condition of the roads within Hwange National Park, especially since budget appears to be available for large developments? Mr. Sithole responded that ZimParks is reviewing budgets for roads. Mr. Chibaya also mentioned that Khaza funds will assist with funding road construction and maintenance.

## **Projects and Developments**

In addition to discussing the proposed developments at Main Camp, the operators shared the following updates on projects and developments:

- Verney's camp started operating last year
- Giraffe Spade is now operating
- Shakanki is now operating
- African Bush Camp has a new camp

- Hideaways has a new camp that would start operating in May
- Gwango will be opening a BaNambya Cultural Exhibit in May 2019. It will be open to the public and guests from any camp are welcome to visit.
- Forgie Wilson asked for a piece of land along the edge of the park towards Dete. She stated that this would help her company operate better and could possibly reduce poaching.

### **Hwange National Park**

Regarding Park fees, Mr. Sithole stated that he was aware that there were concerns about the Park fees and that he would be submitting a report with the opinions of the operators. The group was advised that fees are now as follows:

For locals, Park entry fees are now \$15 RTGS

Walking safaris \$600 USD or \$1,800 RTGS

Operators Permits \$800 USD or \$2,400 RTGS

Operators asked if it was possible to appeal for the entry fees to be reduced and pointed out the example of Victoria Falls where the Park entry fees increases were reversed. Operators also requested that when making decisions to increasing Park entry fees, the operators should be consulted, and any changes should be communicated to the operators with adequate notice. The current fee changes were implemented with no notice or consultation at all.

Terry Anders of Inganyana Tented Camp brought up an issue concerning the time delays when groups arrive at the Main Camp office. It is taking too long to make payments and receive receipts. He suggested that office opening times should be adjusted in the summer time for sunset. He also asked about the possibility of driving in the park days when there are full moons for night drives.

Mr. Chibaya stated that if operators feel that the opening and closing times of the park need to be adjusted operators can feel free to communicate their suggestions. It won't be a challenge to adjust the times as per request.

Mr. Chibaya also stated that a reason for the delays might be because of the swipe machine since network signal is a challenge at times. He suggested that payments can be done in advance to avoid such difficulties. It was also mentioned that there is a sign in book at the office which allows operators to sign for guests.

Peace Madora from ZimParks requested that game drive vehicles maintain safe speeds when driving in the Park, in accordance with the Parks regulations.

Forgie Wilson raised an issue concerning the platforms within Hwange National Park, stating that they are lacking maintenance. At times you find that baboons have destroyed the platforms and the surrounding areas.

Forgie Wilson also added the issue of red plate vehicles from Victoria falls being accepted in the Park, even when these vehicles do not have a Parks permit. She stated that this reduced the opportunities for Hwange based operators with permits.

Forgie Wilson also stated that when driving in other areas where an operator might not hold a permit, ie. Robins etc., she proposed that such vehicles be charged an extra fee for going outside their areas, rather than holding several permits.

Peace Madora said the platform areas will be improved to create more space for clients and everyone else to use. Operators were encouraged to contribute towards the repair and upkeep of picnic sites. He suggested that operators could perhaps put their company names on a board at a picnic site that they have helped to maintain (subject to proposal).

Elisabeth Pasalk raised the issue of accounting, stating that there had been many inconsistencies in the manner in which Parks accounting records are managed. She suggested that Parks develop an electronic system which would enable the Park to bill operators for any fees due, and in turn, operators would also be able to login to the system to see their account status and payments due. She also suggested that a more organised property management system would enable the Park to process clients more quickly at the entrance. Elisabeth stated that if help was needed, she can develop the software needed (for a fee). Mr. Chibaya stated that this was something the Park is looking into.

Peace Madora asked the operators to make their payments on time.

### **Hwange National Park Airport**

Elisabeth Pasalk suggested that an airport representative should be invited to the next ATH Meeting. Albert Paradzai and several other operators were supportive of the idea of flights coming to Hwange, airlines have the potential to come to Hwange airport.

Elisabeth Pasalk asked if there is any way to promote tourism at the airport, by perhaps having an information desk for tourists passing through the area. It was decided that this would not be of any real benefit.

There was some discussion about fees for private planes, but the operators agreed to continue the discussion between the parties involved.

### **Emergency Planning**

The discussion on emergency planning began with a review of the types of emergencies faced by operators in the Hwange area. These include:

- Fire
- Wildlife
- Vehicle accidents
- Air accidents
- Riots, civil unrest
- Illness
- Natural disasters

The group agreed that the topic of emergency planning needs further discussion in future meetings as each area is quite involved. There was a general agreement amongst the operators that the best way to manage emergencies was through neighbourly cooperation. There was then some discussion about communication since most of the Hwange safari areas have poor phone signal. It was agreed that the whatsapp chat group serve as the primary mode of communication in the case of an emergency.

Elisabeth Pasalk asked if there is a need for the operators to organise some sort of rescue or recovery vehicle that would for example retrieve vehicles when they break down. Arnold Tshipa of Wilderness suggested there would

be no need for a towing company within our area. Neighbors can assist each other when a break down occurs. When there are hurt clients in the vehicle during the accident the relevant authorities and the embassies should be notified immediately.

Regarding Fire management, Tendai Serima of the Zimbabwe Forestry Commission stated that diesel donations would help ensure that Forestry vehicles can assist with fire rescues. He also advised that the group that the deadline for completing fireguards is the 31<sup>st</sup> of July. Elisabeth Pasalk asked if the Forestry Commission could assist operators with the fireguards, and Mr. Serima said that an arrangement could be made with operators needing such assistance.

Forge Wilson stated that she would be donating 100 litres of diesel for the processing of fireguards. Terry Anders volunteered to look for information about radio communication to assist the operators with better communication since network is a challenge. The majority of the operators present agreed that having radios would be beneficial.

### **Community**

Mr. Sithole stated that the Park is running conservation programs in the surrounding communities. They are asking for donations such as fuel, food, and any other useful in-kind donations such as vehicles to use. They would also welcome the involvement of operators who could assist with sharing information or participating at community events.

The operators each provided a brief update on their own community related projects and programs:

- David Kavawoga from Painted Dog Conservation (PDC) reported that his organisation is running a number of programs in the community including helping the clinic and arts centre, they run 4-day programs for students at PDC. The students learn conservation, they also assist police in the area with transport to reach where they would have been requested to go to.
- Njabulo Zondo of Imvelo Safaris stated that his company also has a number of programs. They are assisting in Tsholotsho on with human wildlife conflict. Their guests also assist with funds to build schools and compensation to community when their livestock is affected by wildlife.
- Nikki Nyamaka, of Somalisa stated that they are assisting in the building of schools.
- Elisabeth Pasalk stated that Gwango is focused on promoting science education for children attending secondary schools in the area surrounding Hwange National Park. They also have been working on the BaNambya exhibit, which will raise awareness of the community. Some of the fees generated through the Exhibit will be used to support science education and STEM projects.
- Arnold Tshipa reported that Wilderness has a number of projects assisting the community.

### **Tourism**

Elisabeth Pasalk suggested that the operators create a website which will promote the entire Hwange region, each operator would be listed individually and would have control over their own content. She also mentioned that there is a billboard available at the entrance to the Victoria Falls airport which could provide significant visibility for Hwange. Mr. Chibaya stated that Khaza funds could assist with the billboard costs. All operators agreed that a website and billboard would be a good idea.

David Kavawoga suggested having an annual event. This has been done successfully in other parts of the world. Elisabeth Pasalk suggested that this would be an excellent idea, if the right sort of event occurs consistently, it could draw attention to the region and could become something that Hwange is known for.

On the subject of tourism, the question about fuel was raised, and Mr. Chiwawa from ZimParks stated that the Main Camp filling station would soon be open with diesel available for purchase at a cost of between \$1.42 USD to \$1.45 USD.

#### **Other business and date of the next meeting**

Elisabeth Pasalk stated that the date of the next meeting is still to be announced, however Verney's Camp has generously offered to host the group in 6-months.

#### **Closing and remarks thanks**

Mr. Chibaya gave thanks for the well-attended meeting and for the opportunity for ZimParks to host the meeting. The meeting ended at 13:05pm.

#### **Action Items:**

- Inviting an airport representative to the next meeting
- Inviting a ZTA representative to the next meeting
- Main camp nurse to be invited to the next meeting
- Inviting service providers for emergency services to the next meeting such ie. MARS, Satib etc
- Inviting someone to speak about radios (Terry Anders)
- Appeal for park entry fees to be reduced to \$5 RTGS for locals
- Developing an idea for the annual event to improve visibility for the Hwange region
- Designing and printing Hwange themed t-shirts
- Developing a website for ATH
- Streamlining accounting at National Parks offices
- Improving guest processing time when entering Main Camp