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GROWING THE SUSTAINABLE AGRO-ECOLOGICAL WILDLIFE ECONOMY OF SOUTH AFRICA

TEN GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRO-ECOLOGICAL WILDLIFE PRODUCTION ON PRIVATE AND COMMUNAL LAND IN SOUTH AFRICA

Context

We can never manage emotions and ethics; we can only manage REALITY!

WRSA is committed to growing the South African Wildlife Economy in the spirit of developing and enhancing sustainable rural economies, supported by an anthropocentric ('PEOPLE FIRST') government that provides an enabling and progressive regulatory (legal) environment within which the total rural community may prosper. The game rancher is an integral part of the rural community, and the sustainability of their livelihoods are of vital importance for the socio-economic upliftment of rural communities. Game ranchers and their diverse sustainable use enterprises contribute uniquely and play an important role in stimulating and supporting the rural wildlife economy across various value chains. These different value chain actors are distinctively important to the rural economy, and no individual or group who chooses to engage the wildlife economy, in the same spirit, may be excluded on any basis whatsoever. Towards a sustainable wildlife economy, no individual should be denied their place under the African sun.

The wildlife ranching sector, including related activities, operate as a livestock production commodity within the rural communities of South Africa, as part of the broader agricultural economy, on private agricultural land, and potentially on communal land. Primarily game animals are produced (protected & multiplied) for their food/cultural/trophy/viewing value. Value adding is conducted, and retained, almost exclusively within rural communities, and not outsourced/exported to the urban/industrial environment. It therefore plays a critical role as a catalyst in rural economies. The sector is rapidly transforming previously-marginal agricultural land into sustainable agro-ecological units, to the benefit of people and biodiversity.

Management units are constantly increasing in size, contributing to de-fragmentation of habitat, and accommodating multi-species production, as opposed to conventional livestock production. Maintenance (protection) of habitat for other (non-game) species on the same land, and the inherent biodiversity conservation benefits, are concomitant, but is not the primary objective.

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This is the fundamental difference between public protected area management (state owned, under conventional conservation practice) and South Africa's private wildlife management model. Any attempt to equate and merge the two, and regulate the two under the same principles, would be futile and counterintuitive. It is guaranteed to fail! It would be like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. The current legislation & regulations are NOT YET fit-for-purpose in terms of South Africa's private wildlife management model.

The fundamental basis, and catalyst, for the success of the wildlife ranching sector (private wildlife model) is ownership (private property) rights in terms of land, or use of land, as well as ownership of the wildlife. This includes absolute ownership (exempted) afforded mainly through the Game Theft Act, as well as partial/temporary/seasonal ownership afforded mainly through provincial ordinances and proclamations. The key to the success of the sector lies in the ability to trade with such privately owned assets under free market conditions. In South Africa there is not a single species (population), privately owned and traded freely under these conditions, that is in decline or under any threat.

Western "conservation" ideals (mostly bio-centric/preservationist/protectionist) can never be applied to, or merged with, the South African private wildlife management model, and should never displace the basic rights of our rural communities. All NGO's, local or international, that receive donation/grant income have a potential conflict of interest, they are not shareholders in the rural economy, and should not be allowed to influence or manipulate sustainable wildlife production practices on private or communal land in South Africa. As much as the general public and biodiversity conservation may potentially benefit from what we do, it is OUR LAND & OUR GAME!

The Ten Guiding Principles

Any action or proposal towards growing the wildlife economy must, IN ORDER OF PRIORITY:

1. Speak to the reality at grassroots level in the rural community;
2. Be conceptualised from an anthropocentric ('People First') point-of-view;
3. Not hinder any other community member from earning a livelihood through whichever legal means they choose;
4. Not be manipulated or unduly influenced by external non-affected parties;
5. Not be influenced in any way by external parties with a conflict of interest;
6. Not impose conventional conservation practice, or protected area management principles and regulations/legislation, onto the management of wildlife on private or communal land. The legal framework must be FIT-FOR-PURPOSE;
7. Not detract in any way from the constitutional rights of the rural community, especially not property rights;

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8. Not interfere with the principles of the free market system;
9. Remain focused on the principle of positive reinforcement, in order to remain sustainable;
10. Prioritize sustainability in terms of:
 - Economic sustainability first, in order to be;
 - Socially sustainable second, in order to be;
 - Environmentally sustainable third, and then;
 - In order for the production system to be sustainable, it must remain true to the agro-ecological principles of:
 - Conservation and wise use of the abiotic environment, including soil, water, and unpolluted air, in order to enable;
 - The conservation and wise use of vegetation (grass/browse), in order to enable;
 - The conservation and wise use of the wildlife, in order to;
 - SUSTAIN THE LIVELIHOODS OF THE RURAL COMMUNITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

Proposition

Although not absolute, these guiding principles are not negotiable, and any attempt to deviate would be to the detriment of the rural community and wildlife economy of South Africa, and would ultimately compromise the action and the actor. Any such deviation would render the action or proposal unsustainable.

No exceptions,

WE ARE THE SUSTAINABLE AGRO-ECOLOGICAL WILDLIFE ECONOMY OF SOUTH AFRICA

IT IS OUR GAME !

Context-specific Definitions

GAME

Game is defined here as “Any specimen of non-domestic animal, either indigenous or non-indigenous (‘alien’), that can be legally hunted in South Africa”. Wildlife species that do not fall within this category are at a distinct disadvantage, since there is currently no substantial & tangible incentive for their protection on private and communal land in South Africa.

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AGRO-ECOLOGY

Agro-ecology is an integrated approach that simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of food and agricultural systems. It seeks to optimize the interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment while taking into consideration the social aspects that need to be addressed for a sustainable and fair food system.

Agroecology is not a new invention. It can be identified in scientific literature since the 1920s, and has found expression in family farmers' practices, in grassroots social movements for sustainability and the public policies of various countries around the world. More recently, agroecology has entered the discourse of international and UN institutions.

Agroecology is fundamentally different from other approaches to sustainable development. It is based on **bottom-up** and territorial processes, helping to deliver contextualised solutions to local problems. Agro-ecological innovations are based on the co-creation of knowledge, combining science with the traditional, practical and local knowledge of producers. By enhancing their autonomy and adaptive capacity, agroecology empowers producers and communities as key agents of change. Rather than tweaking the practices of unsustainable agricultural systems, agroecology seeks to transform food and agricultural systems, addressing the root causes of problems in an integrated way and providing holistic and long-term solutions. This includes an explicit focus on social and economic dimensions of food systems. Agroecology places a strong focus on the rights of women, youth and indigenous peoples...

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