

Thursday, March 22, 2007

For Immediate Release

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The Nature Conservancy Teams with African Wildlife Foundation to Conserve Africa's Zambezi River

ARLINGTON, VA — The Nature Conservancy and The African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) today announced a partnership to protect and manage the Zambezi River for people and nature alike. The collaboration includes the addition of the Zambezi to the Conservancy's Great Rivers Partnership. The Zambezi winds 1,500 miles through eight countries before emptying into the Indian Ocean and is the lifeblood for much of southern Africa.

"More than 42 million people and large and diverse populations of wildlife depend on the Zambezi River for survival," said Steve McCormick, President and CEO of The Nature Conservancy. "Protecting rivers like the Zambezi is essential to achieving our mission to preserve life on Earth."

With a generous \$12 million grant through Caterpillar Inc.'s foundation, The Nature Conservancy created the Great Rivers Partnership in 2005 to help guide protection of the world's vanishing freshwater supply and transform the way large river systems are preserved and protected. In addition to the Zambezi, the Conservancy's Great Rivers Partnership is working to advance conservation of the Yangtze River in China, the Paraguay and Paraná rivers in Brazil and the Mississippi River in the United States.

The Zambezi is the fourth largest river in Africa. More than 30 million people within the Zambezi River basin depend on agriculture for their livelihood. The Zambezi River system provides people with water for crops as well as fish to eat. One third of the basin's population relies on the river's fish for food.

The Zambezi basin supports more than 250 species of fish that are vital to the ecosystem and serve as a key food source, such as the tigerfish and the great Vundu catfish. Hundreds of bird species reside within the basin - including the snake eagle, African fish eagle and the Marabu stork. Plus, the Zambezi and its tributaries provide habitat for the world's largest herd of elephants, lions, zebras, hippos, African cape buffalo, monkeys, baboons, crocodiles, monitor lizards, and black rhinos.

But rapid human settlement, incompatible agricultural practices, water pollution, alteration of natural flooding and flow patterns, poaching, unmanaged fire, unsustainable fishing, deforestation, invasive vegetation and the introduction of non-native fish from aquaculture operations, have all taken a toll on the Zambezi's ecological health.

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“Despite all these threats, the Zambezi remains one of the world’s great rivers and it can continue to provide for both people and for nature if we apply the lessons we’ve learned on other river systems,” said Michael Reuter, director of the Conservancy’s Great Rivers Partnership. “Rivers must maintain their natural ability to provide clean water, convey floodwaters and vary their flow seasonally so that fish and other aquatic species can migrate. Healthy rivers support all life.”

“Maintaining the Zambezi River’s role as a functional lifeline from an economic and ecological standpoint is the overall vision for this initiative,” said Jimmiel Mandima, Director for AWF’s Zambezi Heartland. “Cross-site exchanges and lessons learned from other great rivers should come to bear and contribute to the formulation of an appropriate integrated water resources management strategy that fosters sustainable freshwater conservation.”

The African Wildlife Foundation is the only international conservation organization focused exclusively on the African continent. The Conservancy provides technical and financial resources to AWF to help support its African Heartlands Program. Heartlands are vast landscapes in which the African Wildlife Foundation works with stakeholders to balance the needs of people and wildlife. Two of the AWF’s eight Heartlands – the Kazungula Heartland and the Zambezi Heartland - are located along the Zambezi.

The Conservancy’s Great Rivers Partnership and the African Wildlife Foundation will collaborate in supporting the Zambezi River Authority and other stakeholders interested in developing a comprehensive basin-wide assessment of the Zambezi River system. A conservation vision and action plan for the Zambezi River basin that identifies critical ecosystems as well as current and emerging threats to their viability is also planned.

Constituencies will be engaged in developing priority conservation actions, measures and monitoring strategies. In addition, the Conservancy and the AWF will work with communities and the government in Mozambique’s Cahora Bassa Reservoir in the Zambezi River Valley to develop a pilot sustainable commercial fishery. The goal of this initiative is to simultaneously improve human livelihoods and protect the long-term viability of the fishery through improved monitoring and resource management. Efforts such as the fishery will support the African Wildlife Foundation and The Nature Conservancy’s objective to promote conservation and human well-being in Africa.

“This collaboration will unite the financial, scientific and on-the-ground conservation strengths of The Nature Conservancy with the position and expertise that The African Wildlife Foundation holds in the region,” said David Banks, director of the Conservancy’s newly-created Africa Program. “Scientists and conservation leaders from both organizations also will be able to exchange information and ideas to help conserve the Zambezi.”

The Conservancy also works through AWF and additional partners in Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Botswana and Namibia to help protect a variety of habitat types including grasslands, savannas and forests.

The Nature Conservancy is a leading international, nonprofit organization that preserves plants, animals and natural communities representing the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. To date, the Conservancy and its more than one million members have been responsible for the protection of more than 15 million acres in the United States and have helped preserve more than 102 million acres in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific. Visit us on the Web at nature.org.

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Founded in 1961, the **African Wildlife Foundation** (AWF) is the leading conservation organization focused solely on the African continent. AWF's programs and conservation strategies are based on sound science and designed to protect both the wild lands and wildlife of Africa and ensure a more sustainable future for Africa's people. Since its inception AWF has protected endangered species and land, promoted partnerships with the private sector for ecotourism to benefit local African communities as a means to improve livelihoods, and trained hundreds of African nationals in conservation – all to ensure the survival of Africa's unparalleled wildlife heritage. AWF is a non-profit organization headquartered in Kenya; with offices in South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia and is a registered 501(c)(3) in the United States. Visit www.awf.org.