



THE ROLE OF THE WILDLIFE RANCHING INDUSTRY IN SOUTH AFRICA'S GREEN ECONOMY

10th of February 2016

Start

The Endangered Wildlife Trust has recently completed an 18 month national study on the wildlife ranching sector of South Africa, a form of land use that has become increasingly prevalent over the last 40 years. The study assessed the social, economic and conservation benefits provided by wildlife ranching and was conducted with the intention of addressing a lack of information about the extent and value of the sector. Such gaps in knowledge made it difficult to ascertain the circumstances under which the benefits from the sector are greatest and for the government to support the sustainable development of the wildlife ranching industry as part of the green economy agenda in South Africa. Further reasons for the study were to help develop best practice and incentives to promote the industry as a means of helping South Africa achieve commitments to international conservation targets and to develop appropriate legislation to regulate the industry.

For the purposes of the study, a wildlife ranch was broadly defined as a privately owned wildlife enterprise that generates some form of commercial benefit from wildlife. A range of property types were thus included, from small intensive game farms to large extensive private game reserves. Mixed livestock/game farms were included, but properties generating no revenue from wildlife were excluded.

Wildlife ranching is being conducted on a large scale in South Africa, with an estimated 9 000 wildlife properties covering an area approximately 17 million hectares, which is 2.2 times greater than the state protected area network of the country. The majority of such ranches have been converted from livestock farms after it became more economically viable to keep and use wildlife for commercial purposes. Wildlife ranching covers four main subsectors, often referred to as 'pillars', including live game sales, hunting, game meat production and ecotourism. Most ranchers conduct more than one land use practice in order to diversify and make their operations more profitable.

Information was gathered widely from the literature, and stakeholders with expert knowledge were interviewed to gather further insights. Possibly the most important aspect of the study involved surveying 251 wildlife ranchers across South Africa, whose properties cover an area of 1.4 million hectares. The results from these surveys were then used to extrapolate up to all wildlife ranches across the country. Participants were asked about many different aspects of their operations including types and scale of land use practiced; species and numbers of each species kept; numbers of people employed; and incomes generated from different enterprises. The main findings of the study were:

Conservation findings include:

- The total number of large herbivores on all private wildlife ranches across South Africa was estimated to be approximately 6 million animals during 2014. This number excluded animals on private properties that may have wildlife but that do not obtain any commercial benefit from it, such as those conducting more traditional forms of agriculture. It also excludes animals on state protected areas. Small uncommon herbivore species such as Suni, Red and Blue Duiker and grysbok species were not counted and neither were Warthogs or Bushpigs;
- This number is lower than previous estimates of approximately 18 million wild animals across the country, and the disparity has inadvertently created some controversy due to perceived negative implications if our estimate is correct. We do not see the need for a controversy, however, for two reasons:
 - Firstly, 6 million large herbivores is a very large number and represents a ten-fold increase since the boom in private wildlife ranching started in South Africa. This makes South Africa unusual among African countries, where wildlife numbers have either remained the same or have decreased (Namibia being an exception). This increase in wildlife numbers, along with other environmental improvements that often go hand in hand with converting livestock farms to wildlife ranches, represents a net positive contribution to biodiversity conservation.
 - Secondly, not only were the methods of calculation for the two outcomes different, but they were made for different areas, with the figure of 18 million animals representing the whole country;
- Not all wildlife on wildlife ranches can be considered to be 'wild' however, because they are generally kept in breeding camps, fed supplemental food to stay alive, protected from predators and given veterinary care. Although 'wild' is difficult to define precisely, it implies an animal that has to fend for itself. The study estimated that around 6% of the area used by wildlife ranching comprises intensive breeding camps for high value species such as buffalo, roan, sable and colour variants of plains game. This statistic does not necessarily present a problem for conservation on private land if the remaining 94% of wildlife ranching areas are managed extensively and in line with biodiversity conservation principles. However, an issue of concern is that the area under intensive management is increasing and we cannot say that the remaining land is indeed being managed for biodiversity conservation. This may lead to increasing amounts of fencing, which fragments the landscape further, and may also result in breeding management practices that select animals according to human preferred characteristics rather than naturally selected traits.

Economic findings include:

- Live sales generated R4.3 billion during 2014, of which R2.5 billion was generated by private game sales between ranchers (these figures only represented the value of the animals and exclude multiplier effects);
- Hunting generated R2.6 billion during 2014 (this figure only represents the value of the animals and excludes money spent by hunters on lodging, food and professional hunting fees);
- Game meat production generated around R610 million; and
- No estimate has yet been made for ecotourism.

Social findings include:

- Overall, 65 170 permanent jobs were supported during 2014. This figure excludes temporary employees and people working in wildlife ranching who were not employed by the ranchers themselves. Such industries include wildlife translocators, fencing businesses, and taxidermists; and
- Game meat production generated approximately 21 million kilograms of meat during 2014 (21 000 tonnes), excluding the meat obtained for personal use by biltong hunters.

Main recommendations include:

- Provincial nature conservation departments need to create centralised, electronic permitting systems to monitor and manage all permitting requirements;
- There is a need to ground-truth the impacts of wildlife ranching management practises on biodiversity; and
- National and provincial legislation need to be brought into alignment to ease the burden of permitting requirements for wildlife ranchers

According to Dr. Andrew Taylor, “Our study reiterates earlier findings that wildlife ranching is a thriving industry in South Africa and that the sustainable use of our wildlife resources can contribute important conservation, economic and social benefits to the biodiversity economy when it is practiced responsibly.”

This study was funded by the Green Fund, but all findings and opinions are those of the EWT and do not represent the official view of the Green Fund.

End.

Contacts: Dr.Andrew Taylor
Wildlife Trade and Ranching Project Manager
Endangered Wildlife Trust
Tel: +27 11 372 3600
andrewt@ewt.org.za

Carla van Rooyen
Communications Manager
Endangered Wildlife Trust
Tel: +27 11 372 3600
carlav@ewt.org.za