

The Role of Conservation Force in African Lion Conservation

“Challenges and Solutions for the Conservation of Lions and Other Large Carnivores in Sub-Saharan Africa” February 17th-18th Maroua, Cameroon

By John J. Jackson, III, Chairman, Conservation Force

I am going to tell you just a little about Conservation Force and more about some of its lion projects. The emphasis will be on the projects because I am sure they will offer you something of interest.

First, Conservation Force. The name stands for three different forces. Although we have offices around the world, our base is the United States. U.S. sportsmen, hunters and anglers have provided 85% of the conservation revenue in America for 110 years. The U.S. is known for its leadership in democracy, and now for President Obama, but it also has long been the conservation leader in the world. Conservation is part of the DNA of American sportsmen. The U.S. has a world renowned “user pay” system called the North American Model. The conservation infrastructure is provided billions of dollars a year from license fees and special taxes on hunting and fishing supplies. It works. It pays for the management, for the research, for the law enforcement, and for the habitat. No one pays more than the recreational hunters and anglers.

The second force stands for *joining forces*. Conservation Force has over 150 supporting organizations and many partners and allies beyond those, all combining resources and expertise to save wildlife, wild places and the sporting way of life. As well as sportsmen organizations, we have projects with WWF, WCS, IUCN, The Smithsonian, and others around the world.

The third is being a *force*. That is what our *smart* projects are all about. Being a driver; making a difference.

Our board members are experts at what they do. We serve on the Cat Specialist Group of IUCN and its affiliate, the African Lion Working Group. I’ve been participating in IUCN’s Sustainable Use Specialist Group from its inception and am the President of CIC’s Commission on Sustainable Use and other related committees, such as in the Wildlife Society and Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. That is about generating revenue for conservation infrastructure and management. It is also about creating incentives and tolerance that is so very important to reducing human-lion conflict. Let’s not forget that biologists are not the only scientists. To save the lion we need to call upon the other sciences such as sociology, anthropology and psychology. We need to approach lion conservation as a team if we are to save the lion because it is a people problem and “human factors” is a branch of science too. Let me add that benefits are not enough. The magic formula ingredient is proprietary interest, a sense of ownership that arises from authoring the solution, participating in the decision-making.

Conservation Force has invested millions of dollars in lion conservation since 2000, but let me start before that with the Predator Committee of the Namibia Professional Hunters Association (NAPHA). I serve on that committee. It covers all predators. Three things arise from Conservation Force’s work on the cheetah in Namibia that you may find of note for lion. The cheetah conservation strategy adopted by

Namibia in the early 90's was the first national strategic plan for any kind of cat in Africa. Second, it called for the creation of a staff post, a "Predator Coordinator", and third, it formed a Predator Committee made up of Ministry, private stakeholders and NGOs. We believe those components would be useful for national lion and/or predator action plans needed in all of Africa today - a staff coordinator, predator committee of stakeholders and explicit action plan.

Namibia has become renowned for its private and communal conservancies and Conservation Force has been partnering in both. We are proud to participate with WWF's LIFE Plus project that is evolving into 80 communal conservancies covering 49 million acres. In partnership with Dallas Safari Club we fund the Quota Coordinator. He goes into the field and meets with the communities, for they participate in the quota setting and decision-making process in meetings. It is an amazing thing to witness and, most importantly, it is part of the magic formula that transforms the local community into responsible stakeholders. The government grants them ownership if the communities gather together and satisfy the conservancy legal requisites, but it is not the benefits alone; it is the participation in the decision-making process that does the trick. We learned that in the CAMPFIRE Program of Zimbabwe and it works. The local people are full participants as they must be. What is remarkable in that program, and virtually all of the others that Conservation Force partners in across Africa, is that the lion population has doubled, then tripled, as has the prey base. It works. It can be done. We can really save the lion. Incidentally, Namibia has just held a workshop drafting a national lion action plan.

Moving over to Mozambique, Conservation Force Board member Philippe Chardonnet, under the auspices of IGF in Paris, the International Foundation for the Conservation of Wildlife, has just completed the preliminary field work to determine the status of lion. Philippe is under contract to assist in organizing a national workshop to establish a national lion action plan.

We also attended the Niassa Reserve PH Association annual meeting with Dr. Craig Packer to persuade the PH to adopt best tourist hunting practices. The PH in the Reserve and buffer zone volunteered to only take lions six years of age or older. They have elected to follow the guideposts of Savannas Forever, the six-year rule that Conservation Force has partnered in from the inception. The PH are also engaged in scientific data collection and sampling. They are working with and supporting the Beggs in all they do. Conservation Force in turn acts as a funding facilitator since we are a public charity and contributions by clients are tax deductible. Again, the lion population is growing.

In South Africa we participated in and authored and co-authored papers in the IUCN and CWS back-on-back regional lion workshops for Southern and Eastern Africa. We provided the funding for the Kruger Park survey work of Paul Funston – the first complete census of that park lion population.

At the request of PHASA, the Professional Hunters Association of South Africa, and Sarel van der Merwe of the African Lion Working Group that we partner with and are members of, we have been supporting the effort to end "canned" lion hunting in South Africa. It is not an acceptable practice to the hunters themselves. The Professional Hunters Association of South Africa is behind the effort to improve practices. I have reminded them that the first ethic is conservation of the species being hunted, not what is

fashionable or not fashionable at the present time. For example, the white rhino has been saved in large part because of so-called canned rhino hunting, so should we not do the same with the black? They have supported the government which has passed regulations controlling the practice. But there is a point to this for our purposes today. There are more captive-bred lion in South Africa than all of the lion in West and Central Africa together, and that is because of the revenue and incentives that are no longer acceptable to mainstream hunters and society. Peter Jackson, the long-time chair of the IUCN Cat Specialist Group, was fond of stating that the tiger could be saved through captive breeding for hunting. The point is not the acceptability of that practice, but the possible power from the revenue and incentives to produce lion positively if we put human incentives to work for the lion. My point is that perhaps in our search we can find other incentive combinations that can work to save the lion across Africa.

Zambia just held its workshop to develop a national action plan for lion and Conservation Force supported Philippe Chardonnet's participation and paper presentation. We have also just contracted with lion researcher Paula White and will shortly produce a book on lion aging in that region. She has found that tooth dentine rings are not a reliable indicator of the age of a lion. She analyzed the corresponding teeth from both sides of the mouth and they indicated different ages! You know what that means. That said, we have found x-rays of the pulp cavity a reliable indicator of age. Conservation Force has provided x-ray machines in both the Serengeti in Tanzania and in Botswana and the surrounding countries for pulp cavity viewing in Botswana. In those instances, even if the age of the lion can't be pre-determined, it can be determined from the teeth after the lion is taken. Then the quota can be adjusted accordingly (downward if less than five years of age, but of no biological consequence if over five years of age).

We helped initiate and continue to fund an extremely successful program with WCS in Zambia: the *Poacher Retraining Program*. It was found that only a small number of individuals were doing most of the poaching. The poachers are identified and given a voluntary opportunity to be retrained in a more lucrative occupation if they sign an agreement not to poach. It has worked and worked well – and why shouldn't it? That program was a strategy developed by Dale Lewis of WCS, a long-time partner of Conservation Force.

In Botswana we have helped fund or participated in three predator workshops, but they still don't have a national action plan. We have long funded the Winterbach's calling station, whisker pattern lion surveys in the Okavango that have shown a very healthy population. We are currently funding a project in the Kalahari that is ground truthing the reliability of lion and prey aerial surveys. We are comparing the ground sightings and signs on the ground to the aerial reports in hope of developing a formula for adjusting aerial survey estimates that Botswana has customarily used.

It was in Botswana that Conservation Force created the 2.5 million dollar *Lions Forever Trust Fund*. It was to be funded by each hunter being asked to donate \$10,000.00 above the cost of their lion hunt to Conservation Force, which is a 501 (c)(3) public charity in the U.S., so the sum would be tax-deductible to the hunter. Though the Fund was ultimately rejected by the President-elect of Zambia for reasons I still fail to understand, the concept carried over. It was followed by our *Rann-Force Project*. In that project, Rann Safaris asked each of its lion hunters to contribute \$10,000.00 above the cost of the hunt as a tax-deductible contribution. Half of that money went to lion

conservation within Botswana and half was expended Africa-wide where needed, such as in Paul Funston's Kruger Lion Study. The hunters care and, through Conservation Force, have been made a greater force for conservation.

In Zimbabwe, our most recent work was to help institute better lion hunting practices, particularly around Hwange National Park. We were asked by the leading PH in the Guayi Valley Conservancy to persuade the private landowners to treat lion as valued trophies instead of cattle-killing vermin; not to shoot females and young males, but instead to let them mature into valuable trophy assets worth more than cattle. The conservancy members signed on – but soon they lost their lands and conservation roles altogether.

In Zimbabwe we still do coordinate and communicate with the Director of Parks and others. Zimbabwe may be the first country to draft and adopt a final national lion action plan demonstrating something remains of its historic leadership.

That brings us to Tanzania, the lion capital of the world which has developed a national action plan at a workshop. *The Chardonnet Lion Study* as it has come to be called was also funded by Conservation Force. It found that the Tanzania lion population, like the prey population and habitat in that country, may be greater than all the rest of the wild world. Incidentally, Kristen Nowell describes the Chardonnet Study as being the most comprehensive and complete lion study ever done at that time of any wild cat species. We at Conservation Force are proud of that contribution towards the study of the status of the lion. It is important to understand that it did not pre-date the Sarel-Bauer population estimate by two years. Both were completed in 2002. The confusion that the Sarel-Bauer survey demonstrates a decline is because of the 2004 publication date, but the material in the estimate actually preceded the Chardonnet Study by months. It is an absolute mistake to compare the two and treat the Sarel-Bauer material as reflecting a decline between 2002 and 2004. The data was gathered in the same year. The greater number in the Chardonnet report, 2002, is due to the fact that it is substantially more comprehensive. The Sarel-Bauer estimate was largely limited to protected area populations and did not include even half of the protected areas in Tanzania, which has the largest populations in the world. The Sarel-Bauer estimate was only “a partial” estimate and even the Chardonnet estimate funded by Conservation Force was only represented as “a contribution” to an understanding of the status, not all-inclusive.

Dr. Craig Packer originated *Savannas Forever* in Tanzania, the program to experimentally limit trophy lion hunting to lion six years of age or older. Conservation Force partnered with Craig Packer on that from its inception. After two years and consultation with 12 experts across Africa, Conservation Force contracted with Karyl Whitman to produce the *Aging Guide* and we have hawked it in presentations before most of the professional hunter associations and leading safari companies from Tanzania to Mozambique. The *Simba Simba* model suggests that the taking of lion five years of age or older has practically no effect on the population to such a degree that no population estimate or quota may not even be necessary. Of equal importance to Conservation Force was raising the esteem of lion as a trophy of greater value. There is merit to discouraging the taking of juvenile males. It goes hand in hand with raising the economic value of this important, renewable resource that in turn can be translated into community benefits and local tolerance and incentive.

Conservation Force also funded Dr. Packer's research into how to reduce lion man-eating in Tanzania.

That brings me to our premier community development project in Tanzania, the *Cullman-Hurt Community Development Project* that has recently been renamed the *Robin Hurt Wildlife Fund* after Joseph Cullman's death. I serve as a Board member and Treasurer of that Fund and Conservation Force acts as its U.S. charitable partner. It was conceived by billionaire Joseph Cullman and his hunting buddy Russ Train, the father of WWF in the U.S., while on an elephant hunt in Tanzania with Robin Hurt. This is how it works. The hunting clients donate 20% above the cost of their trophy fees to Conservation Force as a charitable contribution. Most contribute more! This appeals to hunters with a conservation ethic. The project has constructed more than 50 schools in 33 communities, operates 12 medical dispensaries, two of which are mobile units, operates four fully equipped and vehicled anti-poaching units and much more. The lion population is growing or stable. Importantly, it was intended to act as a model for other safari operators across Africa. Through Conservation Force, it is multiplying. We have similar conservation partnerships across Africa and around the world. Without going into detail, I have here half a dozen different brochures of those projects from Tanzania to Mozambique that are marketed to hunting clients around the campfire in the night, in part thanks to American movies that have romanticized Africa and the safari so well. Incidentally, such periodic movies can go a long way to saving the lion by recruiting donors. American hunters are conservationists at heart, as I've already explained. Conservation Force is just representative of that and in the non-profit business of putting that conservation DNA to work for the African lion and people that are inseparable. It is our niche. It goes beyond the mandatory user-pay system. It is volunteer conservationists tapping volunteered and untapped funds.

In Kenya, we have supported the mitigation work of WCS and Laurence Frank in Lakipia and also his mobile community education project. Like Conservation Force, he is focused on private lands and beyond the park borders. Although it is beyond controlled hunting habitat, what he learns may be invaluable to all.

That brings us closer to your direct interest, West and Central Africa. Conservation Force and its leaders have a long history here in Cameroon, primarily in elephant conservation. Unfortunately, that has folded because the USF&WS will not let elephant hunting trophies be imported because they are listed on Appendix I of CITES. It has been practically impossible to establish import of new listed Appendix I species into the U.S. Your Secretary General of MINFOF, Dennis Kolunga, worked hard and did everything within this country's means to satisfy the USF&WS, but was rebuked to put it mildly. Seven years in court did not help. Back to the lion, luckily a CITES import permit is not needed from the USF&WS at this time.

Of course Conservation Force participated and authored and co-authored papers at the WCS/IUCN West and Central Africa Regional Lion Workshop in Douala in December 2004. We have also supported IGF's Carnet De Brousse, which engages the PH and hunting companies throughout West and Central Africa in field data collection and recordation of sightings of key species, particularly the lion and its prey.

We have been concerned with the apparent lack of progress in the two regions with the development of national action plans and were glad to learn in the seminar of the draft lion action plan for Cameroon and site-specific plans for some protected areas.

Without national action plans, lion have little chance of survival in viable numbers. It is for that reason that Conservation Force and our technical partner IGF have launched an initiative to complete action plans in 2009 in Benin, Burkino Faso and C.A.R. The preliminary gap analysis and data collection is just now beginning and will be completed during this dry season. National workshops will shortly follow. The blight of the world economy delayed it a month, January, but it is now getting underway. Many of you in this room are expected to be consulted. In total, the project may exceed \$300,000.00 U.S. dollars.

Since arriving here, another project is taking shape to have U.S. sportsmen seeking an eco-darting experience assist in darting and radio collaring lion for research in WAZA National Park. That should provide \$250,000.00 or more for that project. How is that for a micro-project in partnership with ROCAL, Leiden University and CEDC of Moroua, Cameroon?

Thank you so very much for having me here today and for partnering to save the African lion. We can do it, I really believe we can.