Report on the Fact-Finding Field Visit to Naretunoi Conservancy on 11th June 2020

A Report Prepared for the Conservation Alliance of Kenya

Report Prepared by

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The Conservation Alliance of Kenya is an umbrella body for conservation institutions in Kenya. The alliance aims to advance the preservation, protection, and management of wildlife and its habitats; places of natural beauty; locations of zoological, botanical, geographical, scientific interest, features of the landscape with geological and physiographical value in Kenya.

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Executive Summary

On 11th June 2020, the Conservation Alliance of Kenya, following an invitation from the Naretunoi Community Conservancy and The Wildlife Foundation set out on a fact-finding mission to the Conservancy. The mission was aimed at establishing on-the-ground facts as they relate to the proposed Nairobi National Park Management Plan. In particular, the team wanted to understand the concerns raised around the plans to install a fence around the Conservancy and to provide support for the alliance's contribution to the development of the park management plan.

The team utilized the one-day trip to engage with The Wildlife Foundation Staff and to visit several sites of interest within the Conservancy to observe and document the status of the conservancy resources, the contribution of conservancy activities to local livelihoods, and some of the key challenges. Furthermore, the team looked into the issue of fencing the Conservancy and made several recommendations for ways forward.

Despite the limited time available for the fact-finding mission, the team managed to establish certain facts that could serve as the starting point for a more comprehensive assessment of the Conservancy and its intersection with the proposed Nairobi National Park Management Plan.

1. Naretunoi Community Conservancy and the neighboring Sheep and Goats Ranch constitute a rich dispersal area with resident and migratory wildlife from Nairobi National Park. The Conservancy and the ranch should be considered significant components of the Nairobi National Park Ecosystem. The NNP management plan has already acknowledged this and included the Conservancy and the ranch under its "Community Zone and Buffer Zones," respectively.

2. The Conservancy is supporting local livelihoods in different ways, including through nature-based tourism, direct and indirect employment, and the lease program. Furthermore, TWF, through its human-wildlife conflict mitigation program, is enhancing local communities' ability to mitigate livestock predation and hence supporting pastoral livelihoods.

3. The lease program currently being implemented in the Conservancy is based on the voluntary participation of local landowners. The landowners are paid USD5 per year per acre of land to incentivize them to support conservation compatible land use activities on their land. The program is supported through revenue from tourism activities.

4. The Conservancy has resources such as natural resources that can support the diversification of tourism and income generation activities among local pastoralists and women. These opportunities have been highlighted in the NNP management plan, and hence the community has an opportunity to leverage the support structures for the implementation of the plan.

5. The proposed fencing will undermine the current conservation and nature-based tourism activities, hinder the diversification and development of potential alternatives, disincentives local communities from leaving their land open for conservation. However, this argument is inconclusive as it is based only on partial views and perceptions of the local stakeholders.

6. Key challenges include the proliferation of human infrastructures such as roads, quarrying, fencing, farming, and permanent and semi-permanent settlements. Furthermore, the lease program model is threatened by external factors that affect tourism revenue generation, such as COVID-19, climate change, and other operational challenges.

Given the findings, this report does not provide a conclusive recommendation and instead recommends a comprehensive assessment of the Conservancy's intersection with the proposed NNP Management plan be carried out within the shortest time possible before the finalization of the NNP Management plan.
1. Introduction

This fact-finding report is jointly produced for the Conservation Alliance of Kenya (CAK) ’s effort to engage with the Kenya Wildlife Service in the development of the Nairobi National Park (NNP) Management plan. This report strategically considered information on the reported inconsistencies between the proposed NNP management plan with the Naretunoi Community Conservancy's conservation, livelihoods and land management strategies in the Kitengela-Isinya wildlife dispersal area. The Kenya Wildlife Service has put forward a draft park management plan for stakeholder consideration before finalization. The plan identifies key environmental and social challenges associated with the conservation and management of the park and the park adjacent communities and outlines four pathways to addressing them. In particular, the management plan singles out "Habitat improvement in the park coupled with progressively fencing willing landowners in the park's buffer zones" as the most preferred pathway. This pathway identifies Naretunoi Community Conservancy and the Sheep and Goats Ranch as one of the seven zones. In this case, Community Zone developed to facilitate the achievement of the park's management objectives as well as aspirations of the community in the park’s buffer zone.

Whereas the management pathway has good strategies, the Naretunoi Community Conservancy has raised concerns with the "proposed fencing of the conservancy within or outside the Nairobi National Park" since it does not conform with their long term conservancy management plans. Because of its strategic location along the park boundary, relatively intact and contiguous landscape, limited human settlement and infrastructural growth, and pastoral livelihoods compatible with wildlife conservation activities, Naretunoi Community conservancy is among the last remaining islands of conservation amidst a sea of human development. The Conservancy has emerged as a critical refuge and dry seasonal dispersal area for resident and migratory bird and mammal species and offers ecological connectivity for the Nairobi National Park to other wildlife dispersal areas further south.

Considering that the Conservation Alliance of Kenya is focused on ensuring inclusivity, accountability, and transparency in decision making and implementation around the governance of natural resources, the alliance took the initiative to extract ground information on the reported concerns to produce a report for all alliance members and stakeholders to facilitate an evidence-based contribution to the proposed NNP management plan and to ensure that justice is served to the Naretunoi Community Conservancy.

1.1 Objectives

The objective of this report is "to inform the Conservation Alliance of Kenya members and stakeholders about the state of conservation and resources, and livelihoods in Naretunoi Conservancy in relation to the proposed Nairobi National Park management plan to identify areas of conflict and convergence and actions in advancing aspirations of the community in the park's buffer zone. The report, in turn, hopes to serve as one of the reference points for the public participation process guiding the implementation of the management plan."
1.2 Methodology

The process of fact-finding reporting applied a simple field visit and making a visual observation of various resources, including wildlife and their habitat, breeding zones, wildlife crossings. We also engage in a round table discussion with The Wildlife Foundation staff to get their perspectives on the implementation of various collaborative projects with the conservancy membership and the context of their concerns with the NNP Management plan. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, we did not get the opportunity to engage with the local community members directly or undertake a structured and systematic inquiry and investigation of the issues.

1.3 Naretunoi Community Conservancy and Sheep and Goats Ranch

Figure 1 Naretunoi Community Conservancy

- The Naretunoi Community Conservancy was registered by the Ministry of Labour, Social Security, and Services, Athi River Sub County, as a Community Based Organization (CBO) on 8th June 2016. The Conservancy is registered by the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association, Registration No. 045.
- The Conservancy is also registered with KWS and the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association (KWCA).
- The Conservancy is currently covering approximately 2200 acres made up of an amalgamation of land parcels that are not contiguous within the 1st Triangle of the Kitengela wildlife dispersal area (Figure 2).
- Adjacent to the Conservancy is the Sheep and Goats Ranch, which is a critical wildlife dispersal area for the park. It is approximately 3,000 acres (Figure 3), is unfenced, and therefore allows movement of wildlife to and from Naretunoi Conservancy and the Nairobi National Park.
- The Conservancy is supported by The Wildlife Foundation (TWF), an NGO, through a lease program (approx. 5USD/acre/year) and employs eight community conservancy scouts. The average acreage is 200 acres per household.
- The program addresses the reasons why people sell land, which is primarily to pay school fees but also an alternative source of income for participating households; beneficiaries use the funds to pay school fees and buy foodstuffs.
- The members of the Conservancy by 11th June 2020 were Thirty-one (31), comprising 200 households against a total human population of 7000 people (KNBS 2019).
- Key wildlife species include zebras, reticulated giraffes, impala, Grant's gazelles, and wildebeests, among others.
- The Conservancy is found in both Machakos and Kajiado Counties.

Figure 2: Map of Nairobi National Park and Kitengela dispersal area (Source: Makini 2018)

Figure 3: Map of Nairobi National Park and Kitengela dispersal area (Source: KWS 2020)

Whereas the current area under TWF Lease Programme is only 2200 Acres, the map shows the entire area targeted for fencing as a wildlife dispersal area.
1.4 The Nairobi National Park Management Plan 2020-2030

The Nairobi National Park Management Plan is anchored on the need to address, habitat loss and fragmentation in the dispersal areas; decline in wildlife population; poaching, Human-Wildlife Conflicts; alien and invasive species; pollution; mining and quarries; climate change; low park visitation; increased urbanization; settlement threats on the Sheep and Goats Ranch; and infrastructure development. To do this, the plan proposes an ecosystem zoning approach and hence seven zones: Closed Zone (CZ), High Use Zone (HUZ), Low Use Zone (LUZ), Development Zone (DZ), Special Use Zone (SUZ), Buffer Zone (BZ) and the Community Zone (CZ). Naretunoi Community Conservancy and Sheep and Goats ranch falls under the Community and Buffer zones, respectively (Figure 3). The table below describes the zones, including the proposed contribution to the achievement of the park's management objectives as well as the aspirations of the communities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone type</th>
<th>Zone purpose</th>
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| 6. Buffer Zone| ► The purpose of this zone is to buffer the park from impacts of human activities e.g. pollution, visual intrusion, destruction of the riparian vegetation, soil erosion, and HWC.  
► To promote eco-tourism.                                           | ► This includes the Mtmagathi River frontage land parcels  
► Tourism facilities such as Emakoko Lodge, Masai Lodge and Ololo Lodge are located in this zone  
► The zone also includes the government owned Sheep and Goats Ranch. | ► Land use and land subdivision will strictly be guided by the Kajiado County Physical Planning (Land Subdivision and amalgamation) regulations 2018  
► The minimum permitted land subdivision size is 4 Ha within 5km from the park boundary  
► Land use in this zone is low density residential use and eco-tourism.  
► Cultural and educational tourism will be encouraged.  
► Memorandum of Agreements on wildlife conservation and management in this zone will be drawn between KWS and land owners. |
| 7. Community Zone| ► To provide an area where local communities can participate in wildlife conservation and derive tangible benefits from conservation.  
► To promote conservation education and awareness.  
► To integrate livestock production and wildlife conservation | ► The zone includes Naretunoi Community conservancy and other settled areas within five kilometres from the park whose residents interact positively or negatively with the park's wildlife. | ► Integrated land use (Livestock and tourism) will be promoted in this zone.  
► Eco-tourism is encouraged within 5km from NNP boundary.  
► Cultural tourism will be encouraged.  
► Memorandum of Agreements on wildlife conservation and management in this zone will be drawn between KWS and Naretunoi Community Conservancy. |

Table 1: National Park Management Plan Zone Types

(Source: KWS 2020)

Within these zones, the plan has proposed a set of "four management options" to resolve most, if not all, ecological and economic issues associated with the plan. According to the
plan, option 4 envisions an integrated land use management in the park's buffer zone and wildlife dispersal area, thereby maintaining ecological integrity, enhancing visitor experience, enhancing community benefits from wildlife, minimizing Human-Wildlife Conflicts and improving wildlife security. One of the proposals here is the fencing the southern park boundary, Naretunoi Conservancy, and the Sheep and Goat Ranch (Figure 4).

It is this plan to fence the community and buffer zones that has led the Naretunoi Community Conservancy to raise concerns since it does not conform with their long term conservancy management plans. To understand the issues on the ground, the Conservation Alliance of Kenya (CAK) of which Naretunoi Conservancy is a member asked its members to undertake a field visit on a fact-finding mission. The fieldwork was not organized as a scientific investigation, but all the same generated significant insights and observations.

**Fencing Naretunoi Conservancy and Sheep and Goats Ranch**

The fourth option proposes fencing the southern park boundary, but since the park boundary is at the centre of Mbagathi River, river frontage land owners with significant land parcels will be fenced in. This is expected to ensure that dangerous wildlife cannot access high density residential areas around Tuala and Ole Kasasi. Properties that have wildlife crossing points will either be fenced in or out depending on the decision of the land owner. It also proposes to fence in Naretunoi Community Conservancy and the Sheep and Goats Ranch, and encourage development of viable tourism ventures in the conservancy and ranch. A park entry gate will also be provided to serve visitors accessing the park from the conservancy. However, if Naretunoi Community Conservancy and Sheep and Goats ranch do not want to be fenced in, then the fence will follow the park boundary to join the eastern park boundary fence. Community access to Mbagathi River will, however, be provided.

*Figure 4: Proposed fencing phases (Source: KWS 2020)*
2. The Findings

This report presents findings based on the observations made during a very limited field visit, conversations with readily available Conservancy, and TWF staff. This report, therefore, will not give some compressive findings, all of which can only be obtained based on structured and systematic fieldwork. We restrict the current findings to subsections discussed below.

2.1 Status of the Conservancy Resources

Wildlife resources

During the fact-finding mission, dozens, if not hundreds of zebra, were sighted, several of them lactating females. The group also saw impala, Thompson's gazelles, wildebeest, ostriches, and giraffes. Participants in the trip, privy to wildlife distribution and presence around Nairobi National Park ecosystem, observed that the numbers of zebra in the Conservancy far exceeded those in the park. They postulated that due to regular grazing of cattle and sheep in the area, the landscape in Naretunoi Conservancy and the Sheep and Goat Ranch (with shorter grass) was well suited to the calving of the species.

The dispersal area

The habitat has a dispersal area that is used by wildlife populations from the National Park to the conservancies. In addition, the dispersal area is used for livestock production by the resident pastoral communities. A few weeks before the fact-finding mission, three elephants from Mosiro were spotted in the area.

![Figure 5 Naretunoi Conservancy Dispersal area](image)

Although the dispersal area is contiguous and relatively intact, we observed several smallholder settlements with what would pass as subsistence farming enclosed within live hedge fencings and barbed wire fencings. In addition, some sections had large fenced off farms and seemingly large scale agriculture going on. Furthermore, we observed that quarrying activities and road construction were going on. Telecommunication infrastructure and consumer electrification infrastructure can be seen across the landscape where several
permanent and semi-permanent housing structures have been constructed or under construction. Meanwhile, there are plans to have road connections run through the dispersal area (Fig).

The dispersal area is known for some specialized wildlife breeding areas. During the fieldwork, the team visited critical breeding areas for lions, vultures and hyenas within site. One of the zones is down a gorge with rough terrain and is not easily accessible to people and livestock. It was not clear whether these sites have been mapped out and the plans to secure them put in place. However, it was clear that these sites might be coming under pressure and will require immediate action if they are to continue supporting wildlife.

2.2 Contribution to local livelihoods

During this fieldwork, we did not get a chance to engage with the local farmers and pastoralists directly. We could not, therefore, establish the contribution of the conservancy activities to their livelihoods based on their personal evaluations. However, during our roundtable discussions with the TWF staff, we learnt that the Conservancy had existing and potential tourism benefits, direct employment opportunities for locals and direct financial benefit in the form of lease payments to landowners. In addition, we learnt that the TWF has a human-wildlife conflict mitigation program to help minimize incidents if livestock predation and hence support the pastoral livelihoods of the local communities.

Tourism Activities
According to The Wildlife Foundation, the Conservancy has several tourism programs, particularly targeting students from foreign universities who volunteer in the Conservancy while staying at TWF Centre built on Naretunoi. Presently, the students and other visitors are engaged in cultural exchange with the local Maasai community, installation of predator deterrent lights to prevent human-wildlife conflict, and guided nature walks and camera trap placement to track wildlife.

**Direct and indirect Community benefits**

The revenue from the tourism activities supports the lease program. We learnt that, before the current lease program, an initial donor-supported program had failed back in 2012. This was mainly due to a lack of a sustainable funding model and reliance on fixed-term donor funding. TWF stated that the present model is dependent on the revenue from tourism activities and some donor support that offers conservancy members a per-acre financial benefit. These payments allow members to maintain their traditional lifestyle without pressure to sell their land, provide funds to cater for high school and university fees for high-achieving student community members. This Conservancy model, though not explicitly explained during the visit, provides direct employment opportunities for local through game scouts program and working as staff of TWF at the center staff.

**The COVID-19 and other challenges**

Due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the Conservancy and TWF have seen a downturn in tourism revenue. While this is not unique to TWF, it is one of the most traumatic experiences that nature-based tourism-dependent conservation and development institutions have faced worldwide, and which will undoubtedly remain a challenge to the sustainability of TWF and Naretunoi conservancy activities. Even so, this has provided an opportunity to shift focus to the untapped local tourism market, especially being a stone throw away from the city. Those on the field trip noted that the creation of a southern gate and route out to the Conservancy has the potential to expand the Nairobi National park circuit to unlock the tourism potential of the Buffer Zone and Community Zones as designated by the management plan.

The lease program is currently based on the voluntary participation of local landowners. Although the TWF team reiterated the willingness of locals to join the lease program, we could not independently verify this, either through documented previous engagements or present engagement with the local communities during this trip. Participant drop-out and shifting of interest due to competing incentives remains a big threat to the program. Furthermore, TWF acknowledged that the current lease rates are very low compared to the market value of the land in the Kitengela area. Thus there is a risk of losing out to the competing land-use demands. However, TWF was quick to point out that the local landowners had expressed their unwavering desire to keep the land open to supporting conservation.

Although there seems to be momentum and enthusiasm to secure and extend the space for wildlife conservation in the dispersal area, the stakeholders (Naretunoi conservancy and TWF)
do not currently have a management plan in place to guide this vision. For example, the game scouts pointed that "the conservancy and lease program is going to be there for the next ten, twenty or even thirty years to come," yet they were not sure "how" it will be made possible. In addition, there seems to be an existing land zoning plan that runs up to 2026, yet it is not clear the extent to which the current conservancy strategies have picked lessons of adopted recommendations from this broad-based document.

The current tourism opportunities and hence revenue generation are minimal. This means the Conservancy and TWF are currently struggling to meet the costs of the lease program and other operational costs. The Conservancy will be better advised to consider diversifying income sources and tourism opportunities that do not only target the current clientele. Furthermore, viewing the positive effects, traditional pastoral practices have had on the wildlife could spur discussions on the ecosystem values of community conservation in the country.

2.3 **Fencing Naretunoi and Sheep and Goats Ranch**

The Conservancy is currently unfenced and allows for open access to several resources and free movement of wildlife and livestock. However, the NNP management Plan 2020-2030 proposes to fence the Conservancy into the park. In their considered opinion, the NNP fencing plan has considered several merits and demerits of this move. It is predicated both on the community members' participation and support, as well as the logic to "ensure that dangerous wildlife cannot access high-density residential areas around Tuala and Ole Kasasi." (See Fact Box, Pg. 7). However, it does not consider the Conservancy's long term plan to keep the corridor or dispersal area south of Naretunoi open, a potential pathway for wildlife and livestock that goes as far as Athi Kaputie. Fencing the Conservancy out by positioning a fence at the park boundary would invariably close the dry season grazing passage for a plethora of wildlife, rendering the park an island.

Furthermore, the plan has considered "fencing" as a panacea to addressing HWC and has made an assumption that "Properties that have wildlife crossing points will either be fenced in or out depending on the decision of the landowner." Whereas these are good intentions, the plan does not consider the complexities associated with wildlife fencing, which extends beyond the technical specifications to social, economic and political considerations. Indeed, experiences from diverse social-ecological systems point to a complex "arms race" between wildlife authorities, communities and problem animals around the fences. According to Nyumba and Graham's experiences in Laikipia, "fences, in their own right, do not represent a solution to the human-wildlife conflict but a thin edge of a wedge of a particular type of adaptive and flexible management approach that can mitigate human-wildlife conflict to tolerable levels if properly implemented. Fences, therefore, form a nucleus around which several management activities can be undertaken. It, therefore, goes to state that the plan to put up the fence is just but one layer of a set of social, political, economic and ecological steps that must be addressed if the fence is to be constructed, let alone supported, owned and maintained to achieve its goals.

2.4 **Suggestions and Conclusion**

Cognisant of various other benefits captured by the NNP Management plan, the Naretunoi Conservancy and TWF felt that deriving these benefits might be hampered by the plans to install a fence around the Naretunoi conservancy. However, the extent of which is yet to be
established. To ensure a comprehensive account of these threats and opportunities as they relate to the fencing plan, we recommend the following.

- As this was an initial and unstructured fact-finding mission, we recommend a more comprehensive investigation around the ownership and structure of the Conservancy, its wildlife and cultural resources. The structured mission should involve the Kenya Wildlife Service, Naretunoi stakeholders, neighbouring conservancy stakeholders and interested parties. This will enable more informed input into the overall management plan.

- Clarify community participation in the process: This initial mission did not engage directly with community members. We only managed to meet with The Wildlife Foundation staff, and briefly the Chairman of the Conservancy. More broad participation of the Naretunoi landowners is necessary to bolster understanding of the owners' aspirations.

- Strategic thinking around the "fencing" as an initiative in this landscape is required. While the goal to reduce human-wildlife conflict is not only noble but necessary, the resources required to fence any portion of land with taxpayers' money are not insignificant. Therefore, more thought is required to ensure that if a fence is indeed deemed necessary, it is located in the region most impacted by conflict, and least likely to form a barrier which reduces wildlife flows or restricts access to dry season grazing or calving areas. This must be ascertained scientifically with historical and current data on wildlife trends and conflict hotspot mapping (Consider alignment, specification and configuration).

- KWCA involvement: Naretunoi conservancy is the 45th member of the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association, and as such should be working directly with them as a conduit to the national government to ensure all that occurs is in accordance with the National Land Act, Environmental Management and Co-ordination Act, and all other relevant legislation.