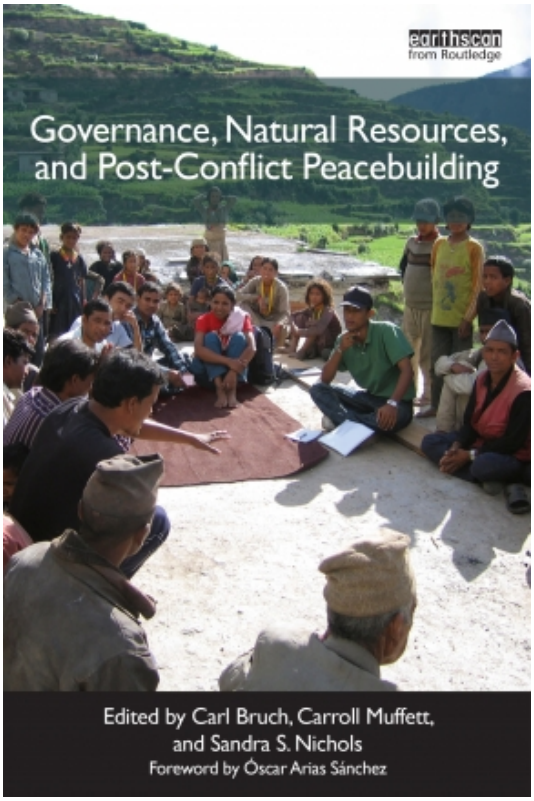

The Role of Conservation in Promoting Stability and Security in At-Risk Communities

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Online publication date: 30 November 2016

Suggested citation: P. Zahler, D. Wilkie, M. Painter, and J. C. Ingram. 2016. The Role of Conservation in Promoting Stability and Security in At-Risk Communities, *Governance, Natural Resources, and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding,* ed. C. Bruch, C. Muffett, and S. S. Nichols. London: Earthscan.

The role of conservation in promoting stability and security in at-risk communities

Peter Zahler, David Wilkie, Michael Painter, and J. Carter Ingram

Conservation organizations often work in conflict-prone settings where the rule of law is weak (Zahler 2003, 2005). As noted by Thor Hanson and his colleagues, such places often overlap with areas of high biodiversity value (Hanson et al. 2009). In conflict-prone areas, the protection of wildlife and wild places must extend far beyond the traditional, protected-area approaches: conservation means working closely with governments and local communities to develop natural resource management (NRM) institutions and practices that balance two goals: (1) secure and sustainable NRM and (2) the protection of species and habitats of global importance (Zahler 2010). Conservation organizations are helping to put in place local governance structures to regulate access to, and monitor the use of, natural resources. Once established, these structures can help restore, strengthen, and extend the rule of law where it is weak or absent, and can also help reduce or resolve persistent conflicts over land and other natural resources that the government has been unable or unwilling to adjudicate.

By developing and strengthening local capacity to implement transparent, accountable, and representative systems for managing natural resources, conservation nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are helping to build local understanding of the measures necessary to avoid conflict and govern well. In fragile states, where conflict is simmering, boiling, or threatening to re-erupt, local engagement with conservation NGOs may be the only mechanism available to maintain stability in local governance and build incipient demand for security and peace.

Using three case studies drawn from the work of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), an NGO that focuses on conservation and sustainable resource management, this chapter demonstrates that working with communities to build or rebuild equitable governance structures and processes for NRM can help to

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avoid or resolve conflicts, and can build demand for transparent and fair governance where none previously existed or was lost during civil war. As the case studies from Bolivia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Afghanistan illustrate, this approach can foster communication among rival parties, empower rural communities to engage with larger-scale political processes, and create positive connections between communities and the state that will encourage the extension of the rule of law into rural areas.

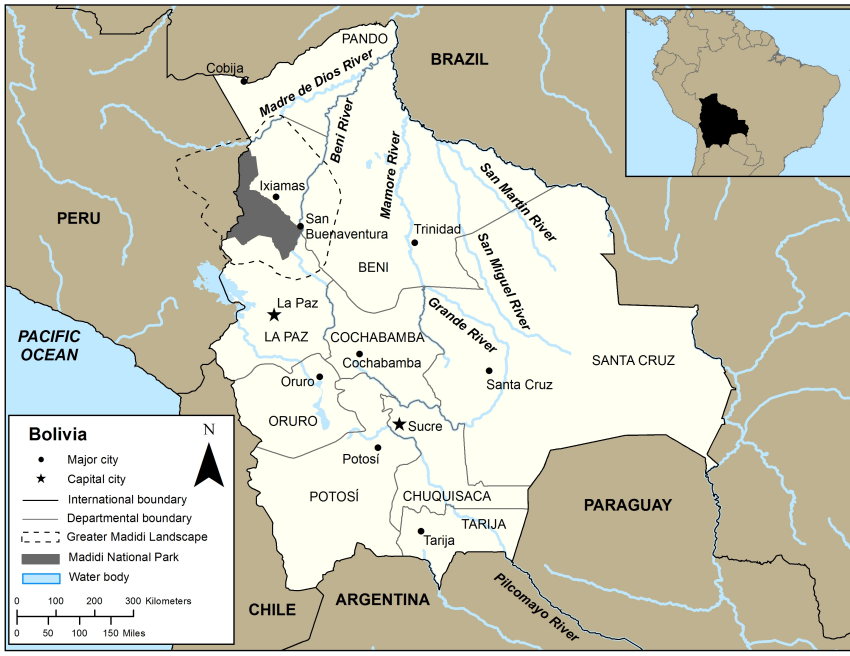
AVOIDING CONFLICT: THE BOLIVIA EXPERIENCE

Bolivia has not experienced the kinds of conflict and violence that formed the context for WCS work in DRC and Afghanistan. Nonetheless, Bolivia's history has been shaped by wars in which it lost important parts of its original territory —for example, the War of the Pacific (1879–1883) and the Chaco War (1932–1935); and it has suffered from deeply rooted social turmoil that has fundamentally affected natural resource use. This turmoil has been nurtured, if not directly caused, by two interrelated issues: (1) since early in its colonial history, Bolivia's economy has depended almost exclusively on extractive activities that respond to the demands of external markets (Dunkerley 1984; Klein 1992; Albó and Barrios 1993; Andrade de Sá and Belpaire 2007); and (2) state institutions and their associated governance structures have been weak, and their legitimacy has been questioned (Malloy 1970; Dunkerley 1984; Albó and Barrios 1993).

Among the commodities that have, at different times, dominated important portions of Bolivia's economy and society are silver, tin, quinine, rubber, pelts and feathers, timber, coca leaf and cocaine, and natural gas. The rise of these industries has often driven large-scale and coercive population movement; forced the reorientation of local production systems to provide food and labor to support export production; and caused environmental degradation, in the form of deforestation, erosion, overexploitation and destruction of wildlife habitat, and contamination of groundwater and aquatic ecosystems (Jones 1980; Gill 1987; Painter 1987, 1995, 1998; Salinas 2007).

As different productive activities have waxed and waned, the political fortunes of those tied to them have risen and fallen as well. As part of this process, interest groups associated with one extractive industry or another have seized control of the state and used it as an instrument to strengthen their position, at the expense of others. For example, during the last half of the nineteenth century, as silver mining experienced a resurgence and tin mining became important, mining interests controlled the state and focused investment on infrastructure to support the expansion of the mining economy. In the interest of supplying expanding mining centers with cheap foodstuffs, the state also promoted the expansion of large agricultural estates, which was based on the appropriation of indigenous lands and the undermining of collective landholdings (Klein 1992; Jordan Pozo 1999).

In 1899, as tin supplanted silver as the dominant export mineral, powerful business interests associated with tin mining, which were based in the departments



of Oruro and La Paz, adopted a federalist political platform, thereby gaining sufficient indigenous support to overthrow the government of the Conservative Party, which was associated with silver mining interests. Once power had been seized, however, the federalist platform disappeared, and many indigenous leaders who had participated in the rebellion were executed. With the tin mining interests in power, the major change was that infrastructure investments were shifted away from the silver mines around Potosí City, in favor of the tin mines around Oruro City. The rebellion ushered in a period of state dominance by the tin barons that eventually led to the nationalist revolution of 1952 (Jordan Pozo 1999; Klein 1992).

In the 1950s, U.S. economic assistance supported the growth of agro-industrial interests in the lowlands of Santa Cruz Department. As that sector grew in importance, it formed a powerful elite, which assumed an increasingly important political role. Beginning in 1962, agro-industrialists began influencing successive national governments to enact policies that supported settlement in the eastern lowlands, with the goals of alleviating social conflicts related to land scarcity in upland areas and providing the burgeoning agro-industrial sector with a nearby source of labor. In 1971, agro-industrial leaders in Santa Cruz lent their support to the coup that gave rise to the dictatorship of Hugo Banzer (1971–1977). Under the Banzer government, peasants were forcibly recruited from upland areas to work the cotton harvests, and military conscripts were put to work picking cotton on private farms (Gill 1987; Ybarnegaray de Paz 1992; Painter 1998; Demeure 1999).

Because the state has been under the control of successive export industries, it has never had the opportunity to consolidate a role as an entity that operates on behalf of all Bolivians, with the power and legitimacy to mediate or arbitrate conflicts among different sectors (Malloy 1970; Bascopé Aspiazu 1982; Dunkerley 1984; Gamarra 2007; Healy 1986; Klein 1992; Ybarnegaray de Paz 1992; Mayorga 1999).[1] In the absence of state institutions that seek to represent all Bolivians and mediate conflicts between different sectors of society, the lines of conflict tend to be drawn between different social groups competing for access to land and other natural resources. Local people, whose livelihoods depend on the direct use of wildlife, forest products, and other renewable resources, are often drawn into alliances with one or another dominant group, as they attempt to protect their access to land and other resources (Salinas 2007). Thus, conflicts tend not to be managed or resolved, but subordinated to the will of interest groups whose power is tied to the extractive industry that dominates the Bolivian economy and society at any given time. What remains constant, however, is the need of local people to maintain the viability of the production systems that satisfy their livelihood requirements (Arambiza and Painter 2006).

Over time, various conflicts are superimposed on one another, and may present themselves in unexpected ways. In the absence of institutional processes for managing conflict, where all are held accountable for their actions, complex interactions among parties to conflicts have often taken on violent manifestations (Albó and Barrios 1993; Salinas 2007), such as the numerous coups and insurrections that have marked Bolivia's history.

Initially, local populations often perceive conservationists as yet another group tied to external interests, seeking to control how land is used. However, many local populations share a fundamental interest with conservationists: identifying and supporting alternatives to conventional approaches to development that are based on principles of conservation and sustainable use of renewable resources (Arambiza and Painter 2006; Salinas 2007; Painter 2009). This shared interest has been the basis for constructing alliances among indigenous communities, protected-area administrations, and conservation organizations in northern La Paz, in an area known as the Greater Madidi Landscape.

The Greater Madidi Landscape is in northwestern Bolivia, on the eastern flanks of the tropical Andes. Falling within the Tropical Andes Biodiversity Hotspot identified by Conservation International, Madidi is one of the Global 200 Ecoregions identified by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and is also a region of great cultural diversity. The topographical and climatic diversity is largely responsible for the area's exceptional species and ecosystem richness. The eastern border of the Madidi National Park represents both an opportunity and a threat

[1] In December 2005, Evo Morales was elected president of Bolivia. One of the stated objectives of his presidency is to convert the state into an entity that represents all sectors of the population. Although the government has taken steps to achieve this objective, the long-term impact of the actions taken to date remains unclear.

for conservation: the region is an important stronghold for wildlife, such as the jaguar and the white-lipped peccary, while the road connecting San Buenaventura and Ixiamas encourages colonization, which threatens the environment upon which these and other species, as well as local communities, depend.

For indigenous people in the Greater Madidi Landscape, designing and promoting alternatives to development based on extractive industries begins with securing their rights to land and other natural resources. Securing rights reduces local communities' vulnerability to the land grabbing often associated with outsiders encroaching on natural resources, creates a basis for more equitable social and political participation, and reduces the risk that violence will be used to resolve conflict. Working with the Takana People's Indigenous Council (Consejo Indígena del Pueblo Takana, or CIPTA), WCS provided technical assistance to support CIPTA in securing title to the Takana territory, and to develop an NRM strategy to guide its management.

The planning process in the indigenous territory followed a bottom-up approach: it began in 2000, with participatory rural appraisals at the community level, then built up to a higher management level. All twenty Takana communities participated in the process, and WCS took care to work separately with the different user groups. Community-level zoning proposals were then combined in subregional workshops, where disputes between different communities were resolved through participation by community leaders. Finally, the subregional proposals were integrated at a workshop that addressed the indigenous territory as a whole.

During the land titling process, the zoning proposals and maps that had been developed during the planning phase proved useful in resolving conflicts between CIPTA and other interest groups. The planning process also helped Takana representatives develop more confidence in negotiating with the owners of neighboring properties. Thus, a technical process—territorial planning—helped reinforce land titling efforts that were designed to return to the Takana people their traditional rights over natural resources. For example, the zoning proposal for the indigenous territory documented that the Takana needed a larger area than the one that the land titling authorities were originally disposed to grant. Territorial planning also helped the Takana gain more confidence in the democratic process, as they experienced tangible success in (1) constructing participatory processes for completing and implementing a management plan and (2) securing their territorial claim by asserting their legal rights. As a result, CIPTA has become increasingly assertive in proposing collaboration with the Bolivian National Park Service in managing Madidi National Park, and in making proposals to municipal, departmental, and national authorities that reflect a development vision grounded in NRM.

The inability of the state to establish itself as a representative of all citizens and a legitimate mediator in conflicts between different interest groups, combined with long-standing unresolved social conflicts, has made Bolivia especially vulnerable to stresses—from natural disasters and climate change to adverse

international financial conditions—that can intensify natural resource scarcity or heighten competition over natural resources. The experience of constructing local democratic processes that are grounded in specific land management issues sets a precedent for resolving other local conflicts and for developing mechanisms under which those who are charged with management responsibilities are held accountable to their constituencies. Because Bolivia has a dynamic civil society, experiences like those of the Takana can be found in other areas of the country. Collectively, such experiences offer a source of strength for managing conflict and avoiding violence.

CONFLICT SITUATIONS: EXPERIENCES FROM THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

By the mid-1990s, Zaire (present-day DRC) had experienced decades of corruption, the collapse of its infrastructure, and almost total abdication of the state's role in providing social services and law enforcement. As a result, the economy was in ruins, and families in the eastern forests were isolated from markets and almost completely dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods. The combination of economic necessity and weak or absent law enforcement left the nation's incredibly rich natural resources, both within and outside protected areas, exposed to untrammeled use by any and all who had the means to hunt, mine, or fell trees (Hart, Hart, and Hall 1996).

In October 1996, Laurent Kabila, with support from Rwanda and Uganda, launched a full-scale rebellion against President Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, whose kleptocratic regime had reigned unchallenged for thirty-one of the thirty-seven years since independence. This first civil war ended on May 17, 1997, when Mobutu fled the country and Kabila declared himself president. In August 1998, a disgruntled military, backed by Rwanda, mutinied—setting off a second civil war, which lasted until December 2002 (Hart and Mwinyihali 2001). In what is now the eastern DRC, frequent and often extraordinarily violent conflicts were ongoing at the time of writing.

Over a decade of civil strife has exacted a terrible toll on the communities and biological wealth of eastern DRC (Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers 2004; Wilkie 2005; Wilkie and Morelli 2005; Draulans and Van Krunkelsven 2002; Dudley et al. 2002; Debroux et al. 2007). In Virunga National Park, over half the hippopotami were killed to feed soldiers and refugees, and over one hundred square kilometers of forest was cleared for firewood (Vedder et al. 2001; Collin and Kaboza 2007). In 1997, former combatants invaded the core of Kahuzi-Biega National Park—where, according to Amy Vedder and her colleagues, they hunted out most of the elephants within a matter of months and killed an estimated 15 percent of all the eastern lowland gorillas in the park (Vedder et al. 2001). Illegal miners have been operating at several sites in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve (OWR), and wildlife populations everywhere have been subject to increased hunting, as militias and miners slaughtered tens of thousands of duikers (small antelopes)

and monkeys for food and for sale. Ready access to guns among soldiers and rebels increased elephant poaching for ivory and meat (Debroux et al. 2007).

For poor rural families who depend directly on natural resources for their livelihoods, armed conflict has had two key impacts: loss of food stores and loss of land. During the civil wars, armed personnel fed off the land, taking seed stores and raiding fields. Unable to safeguard their food stores, local people often planted small fields that barely fed their families but that, with luck, might go unnoticed when militias moved through the area. (As of this writing, the almost constant threat of food raids by armies and militias had abated, but not completely disappeared.) Loss of land occurred both during and since the end of the civil wars: as people moved out of danger zones in search of safety, they often settled in areas to which others had prior and legitimate claims, resulting in conflicts over the land itself as well as its natural resources.

Since the early 1980s, WCS has been working with local communities and the staff of OWR, in northeastern DRC, to conserve biodiversity and secure use and access rights to natural resources. During periods of conflict, governments are typically preoccupied, while bilateral and multilateral donors often withhold support for conservation activities. Nongovernmental funding, in contrast, is often more consistent during such times, even if it is markedly less. A 2005 study found that in times of conflict, conservation is most effective at sites where an NGO or nonpolitical organization has demonstrated a long-term commitment (Zahler 2005).

WCS's long-term presence in the Ituri District (in Province Orientale) and in the OWR has helped build trust among local actors, including Mbira and Lese farmers; Mbuti and Efe hunter-gatherers; local traditional authorities; and state authorities—all of whom have developed confidence that WCS will continue to support them during times of stress. For example, national park staff who remained at their posts during the conflict were often motivated by the sense that WCS would maintain its commitment to the site and to them personally. Others continued to work because they felt that they were doing something important for the country—a remarkable show of courage, considering that between 1994 and 1999, in Virunga National Park alone, thirty-five park staff were killed while carrying out their duties (Vedder et al. 2001). Unfortunately, sites in eastern DRC that lacked the continuous presence of an NGO fared much worse during the decade of conflict.[2]

Since the end of the civil war, in 2002, WCS has focused on helping local communities to (1) secure more formal tenure over their lands and natural resources, and (2) build the governance structures that they need to manage their lands sustainably (Brown 2010). Helping local people who have prior legitimate claims to zone their lands for agriculture and hunting, and gain recognition for these plans from government authorities are important steps in securing the communities' rights and protecting against land grabs by recent immigrants. Securing rights and establishing zoning, in turn, help reduce conflict over access to and use of natural resources within the OWR.

As an NGO with a long-term presence in the area, WCS was perfectly positioned to help local communities fill the governance void created by the combination of civil war and a weak or absent state. Helping marginalized communities to establish norms for natural resource access and use—as well as the management systems needed to enforce them—is a key component of successful conservation programs. For many communities in the OWR, the efforts to establish land tenure and good governance not only provided an essential opportunity to promote sustainable natural resource use, but also to build faith in and demand for transparent and democratic governance structures—both within their communities and at higher levels of political organization.

POST-CONFLICT SITUATIONS: THE AFGHANISTAN EXPERIENCE

In the wake of conflict, people who were poor before may be left even poorer. Conflict leaves governance and cultural institutions severely weakened and often in disrepair; not infrequently, fragile states relapse into violence within five years (Collier et al. 2003).

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[2] J. J. Mapilanga, conservator, International Center on Conflict and Negotiation, Okapi Wildlife Reserve, personal communication, 2009.

After thirty years of conflict, the global community has been pouring enormous resources into Afghanistan to assist in reconstruction. Unfortunately, because of a combination of low capacity, poor infrastructure, confusing mandates, and continued insecurity, little funding reaches places outside the capital city of Kabul. Thus, while the central government has made some strides in its short history, which for all intents and purposes began in 2003, much of the rest of the country remains relatively unaffected by these improvements.

What seems to have been ignored in the international rush to rebuild Afghanistan is that in an agrarian society, NRM must be the foundation for reconstruction. In a country where 80 percent of the populace depends directly upon the natural resource base for their survival and livelihoods (UNEP 2003), and where decades of conflict have badly degraded the environment, sustainable resource management is key to improving lives and livelihoods and providing long-term stability. At the same time, NRM provides an opportunity to build and strengthen rural governance structures and link them to the central government, a process that can greatly strengthen the reach and rule of law.

In Afghanistan, decades of conflict have laid waste to the environment. More than 50 percent of the country's forest cover has been cut down for firewood, building materials, or quick profit (UNEP 2003). Overgrazing and dry-land (nonirrigated) agriculture have led to massive erosion and soil loss. With the influx of modern

weapons, a tremendous amount of wildlife has been killed. Local NRM practices have been abandoned or lost—and, with them, the ability to moderate the strains on resources created by millions of displaced people.

If environmental conditions continue to degrade, it will no longer be possible to carve a living out of the mountains and desert steppes, as Afghans have done for centuries. Poverty can spread, communities can dissolve, and rural migration can further erode cultural connections—negatively affecting neighboring communities, regions, and potentially (given Afghanistan's location and recent history) the global community. On the other hand, helping local communities undertake reforms that support environmental sustainability and stability will help mitigate the poverty, out-migration, and cultural dissolution that continue to threaten the region. Because of the importance of natural resources to local communities, assistance that is designed to help them manage these resources more effectively provides a unique opportunity to build relations with local communities; achieve sustainable natural resource conservation; and build and strengthen local governance structures. Experience has shown that once such structures are in place, they can readily be linked to the larger government agencies that are responsible for oversight of NRM. These linkages, in turn, can lead directly to improved rule of law and, thus, greater regional stability and security.

Through a USAID-funded project, WCS developed valuable models for sustainable NRM, governance building, and improved livelihoods in Afghanistan. The project was designed to build NRM capacity at the central government and rural community levels, then to link the newly strengthened institutions together to form a support network (Zahler 2010).

As part of their work with the central government, project staff provided training courses, study tours, and mentoring; helped to write seven new environmental laws and regulations; and created multiagency and ministerial working groups on environmental legislation and management. One of the subjects addressed in the training courses was how to ensure compliance with international accords, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

The community work has focused on the following:

- Providing outreach and education on natural resource and conservation issues.
- Developing natural resource bylaws for community development councils (CDCs), which are the existing governance structures.
- Helping to hire and train community rangers to monitor natural resources and enforce local rules and national legislation.
- Facilitating the creation of overarching committees that knit multiple CDCs together to make natural resource decisions for a region.
- Developing protected areas that are defined by the local communities living in or near them and that will be comanaged by those same communities, using the governance structures that are being put into place.

The initiative that led to the creation of Band-e-Amir, Afghanistan's first officially recognized national park, is an example of how such efforts work.[3] In 2006, WCS began partnering with NGOs, the national and provincial governments, and local residents to create the Band-e-Amir Protected Area Committee (BAPAC), a collaborative management committee made up of (1) elected representatives from all villages in the park area and (2) representatives of various ministries and levels of government. The role of the BAPAC is to develop and approve all management initiatives in the park. Because community representatives make up the majority of BAPAC members, they control the direction of park policy and management.

In close consultation with each of the local communities in the area, project staff facilitated the development of a preliminary management plan that documented the human and natural environments and identified immediate strategies that could be undertaken to support conservation and improve livelihoods. Project staff also supported the BAPAC in its efforts to grapple with controversial issues related to land use and infrastructure planning and development. Finally, WCS helped to hire and train four rangers to implement and enforce management decisions and rules. Simultaneously, WCS partnered with the United Nations Environment Programme and the Afghan government to develop the necessary legislation to create an officially protected area. Project staff also trained officials and central government agencies that were tasked with managing the park.

These efforts culminated in April 2009, when Band-e-Amir was designated as a "provisional national park"; the ribbon-cutting ceremony held several months later was attended by Afghanistan's vice president, the provincial governor, the director-general of Afghanistan's National Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. ambassador, and a host of other dignitaries. While very much a press event, the celebration was also intended to inspire Afghans with a sense of pride in having joined the greater global community in the protection of the natural environment.

Band-e-Amir currently has improved road access, an international profile that is attracting donor funding, and a thriving tourist bazaar; and nearby communities have gained an appreciation for the benefits of democratic institutions. The next steps are to further develop legal mechanisms for sharing park fees and other benefits; complete the planning and construction of tourist infrastructure; develop community-based conservation programs; strengthen the management

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[3] Afghans have regarded Band-e-Amir as a national park for many years. In 1973, the Afghan Tourist Organization declared Band-e-Amir a national park (although it lacked a legal mandate to do so), and it is listed on the World Database on Protected Areas of the UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre and the International Union for Conservation of Nature. In the late 1970s, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations was assisting the Afghan government to create legal and management institutions for protected areas, but these efforts were interrupted by the decades of conflict that followed.

capacity of government; and complete a final management plan that, pending approval from parliament.

Similar work is under way in other areas of Afghanistan: in the Wakhan District of Badakhshan Province, where snow leopards still hunt Marco Polo sheep in the High Pamirs;[4] and in Nuristan Province, along the Pakistan border, where Afghanistan's last extensive conifer forests still house Asiatic black bear, yellow-throated marten, leopard cat, and a host of other species, images of which have been captured in camera trap photos taken by residents of local communities. These sorts of long-term efforts at building local capacity and linking local governance institutions to the central government are critical to sustainable NRM, and crucial to the stability and security of Afghanistan and the region.

CONSERVATION NGOS AND STABILITY AND SECURITY IN FRAGILE STATES

This chapter has highlighted the critical role of conservation NGOs in conserving natural resources, supporting good governance, and securing livelihoods. In three very different cases where both biodiversity and peace exist under precarious conditions, WCS has used approaches that have long-term and potentially far-reaching benefits: it has helped to rebuild communities by fostering the adoption of democratic processes and institutions for the common management of natural resources; assisted rural communities to secure tenure over their lands and natural resources; and linked communities to the national government.

Robert Zoellick, then president of the World Bank, noted that fragile states pose the toughest development challenge of our era, and named ten priorities to meet that challenge (Zoellick 2008):

- Focus on building the legitimacy of the state.
- Provide security.
- Build the rule of law and legal order.
- Bolster local and national ownership.
- Ensure economic stability as a foundation for growth and opportunity.
- Pay attention to the political economy.
- Crowd in the private sector.
- Coordinate across institutions and actors.
- Consider the regional context.
- Recognize the long-term commitment.

The local, national, and international conservation NGOs that are working in many of the most isolated places within fragile or conflict-affected states may be the only actors with the skills, experience, and resources to help achieve some

[4] On March 30, 2014, Afghanistan provisionally established the Wakhan National Park, the country's second national park (Pamir Times 2014).

of these priorities. Thus, these organizations have the opportunity not only to support conservation efforts, but also to increase stability and security by helping to establish governance and conflict resolution mechanisms that are the foundation of stable and democratic nations with vibrant economies. Conservation NGOs may have a mandate to preserve biodiversity, but their work is not and cannot be just about wildlife; to succeed in their missions, conservation NGOs must also be about stability, security, and good governance.

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