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TRANSFRONTIER CONSERVATION AREAS – COMPATIBILITY WITH ANIMAL AND HUMAN HEALTH: A SOUTHERN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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As Africa's conservation areas come under increasing pressure from expanding human subsistence resource needs, as well as commercial agriculture, water extraction and impoundments, as well as logging and oil exploration, the development of transfrontier conservation areas (TFCA's) are a welcome breath of "fresh air" for biodiversity conservation.

The concept of TFCA's, also known as Peace Parks, involves the opening of transboundary landscapes to allow for protection of habitats and dispersal of wildlife. The TFCA initiative explores the possibility that the changing of land-use practices from subsistence farming on marginal land to community participation in nature-based ecotourism, may have sustainable economic and ecological benefits for all. In addition, the integration of land across international borders, as well as the consolidation of state, privately owned and communal land in joint eco-tourism ventures, may have major positive economic "spin offs" for specific regions. In the Southern African Development Community (SADC), there are currently 13 TFCA projects, involving land from two or more participating countries. Of these projects, three have treaties signed, seven have Memoranda of Understandings (MOU's) negotiated and three are still in the conceptual phase.

These initiatives are strongly supported by conservationists, ecotourism enterprises and the urbanized population at large. However, the management of wildlife, livestock and zoonotic disease within larger transboundary landscapes remains unresolved, and is of major concern.

The various ecozones and habitats present in the TFCA will determine the animal species mixes that occur, which may include some important wildlife disease maintenance hosts or disease vectors that pose an animal or zoonotic health risk. In sub-Saharan Africa, certain wild ruminants and wild suids are recognized as potential high risk mammalian species for specific livestock diseases. High disease risk vector invertebrates include tsetse flies, argasid and ixodid ticks, mosquitoes and midges, and their distributions are linked to preferred habitats. Conversely, domesticated animals infected with non-native diseases, may also be a source of disease for wildlife at the interface.

The challenge is how to achieve compatibility between the TFCA concept and local animal and human disease issues at the interface, as well as finding solutions to address incompatibilities between international standards for managing transboundary animal diseases (TAD's), and the removal of barriers that may allow expansion of the interfaces between wildlife and livestock.

This paper will discuss the complexities of addressing these challenges including national and international land use planning, participation of affected communities, development of TFCA Joint Management Plans supported by a Joint Management Board plus specialized Committees, sensible alignment or re-alignment of disease control fences, development of effective and regionally appropriate vaccines, exploring the possibilities of commodity-based trade and possibly adapting TAD disease management guidelines to dissociate the disease status of livestock from the endemic disease status of regional wildlife.

