



ZAMBEZI VALLEY  
CONSERVATION NETWORK

*A conservation service to the people and environment of the Zambezi landscape*





In an exquisite landscape of vast contiguous wilderness, a community of conservationists are harnessing their collective influence to protect threatened wildlife and habitat. It is due to the committed efforts of these local authorities and other frontline conservation organisations that the protected areas of the middle Zambezi landscape remain iconic and of global ecological significance.

At the same time, the resident people of the region live out their lives along the borders of these protected areas with a very different agenda. Theirs is an ambition to prosper, albeit with scarce opportunity for employment or industry.

As human populations expand, it is an increasingly challenging and resource-intensive exercise to achieve consistent and optimal conservation across this vast landscape, both within and around the protected areas. Over the past 20 years, large and under-resourced stretches of wilderness have lost their wildlife, and now habitat; vulnerable to illegal activity, such as poaching, mining and deforestation, undertaken by local people in search of natural resources to support their livelihoods.

A combination of factors, including agricultural encroachment into the buffer zones which once separated communities from the protected areas, now contribute to a persistent pressure on natural ecosystems that demand sustainable solutions for both people and the environment.

*The Zambezi Valley Conservation Network has been created to assist the community of conservationists, environmentalists, indigenous communities, activists, civil groups and corporate organisations who are united by a shared love for the Zambezi Valley and a determination to protect and nurture this precious landscape and its extraordinary natural wealth.*





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*"The world is changing fast and we understand that we in Africa need to adapt and change too. One of the most pressing questions facing conservation is how local communities that live on the boundaries of wildlife areas can benefit from these assets, whilst at the same time protecting and preserving these last great wildernesses. We are all on a journey to unlock this answer and can start by recognising that by working together we have the greatest chance of success."*

*- Chief Chundu*





# WHAT IS THE ZAMBEZI VALLEY CONSERVATION NETWORK?

*The Zambezi Valley Conservation Network (ZVCN) is a landscape-focused organisation operating within the Middle Zambezi region. We identify needs both within the protected areas and also the communities surrounding them, and then provide professional services that are designed specifically to assist existing agencies with the delivery of enhanced conservation or development activity.*







## *How we contribute*

The Zambezi Network assists those on the frontlines of conservation and community development to scale their impact; helping reduce threats such as poaching, illegal mining and deforestation, and improve the delivery of management initiatives such as human-wildlife co-existence, education, fire management, research, communications and more.

We are therefore developing a suite of professional services that can assist the network of organisations operating in the landscape; from the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZPWMA), to other key conservation agencies. Through this model, we hope to enhance conservation consistency, efficiency and impact across the entire Middle Zambezi Valley.

## *What we want to achieve*

Our ambition is to help restore and secure the holistic health of the area's 5-million-acre wilderness, whilst also supporting community-based initiatives that have a huge role to play in the development of sustainable livelihoods within a wider landscape.

By supporting the collective efforts of an evolving network of conservation and community contributors, we can achieve sustainability; preserving wildlife and habitat, whilst optimising livelihoods for resident rural communities.





# THE MIDDLE ZAMBEZI LANDSCAPE

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*There is nowhere else on Earth quite like it...*

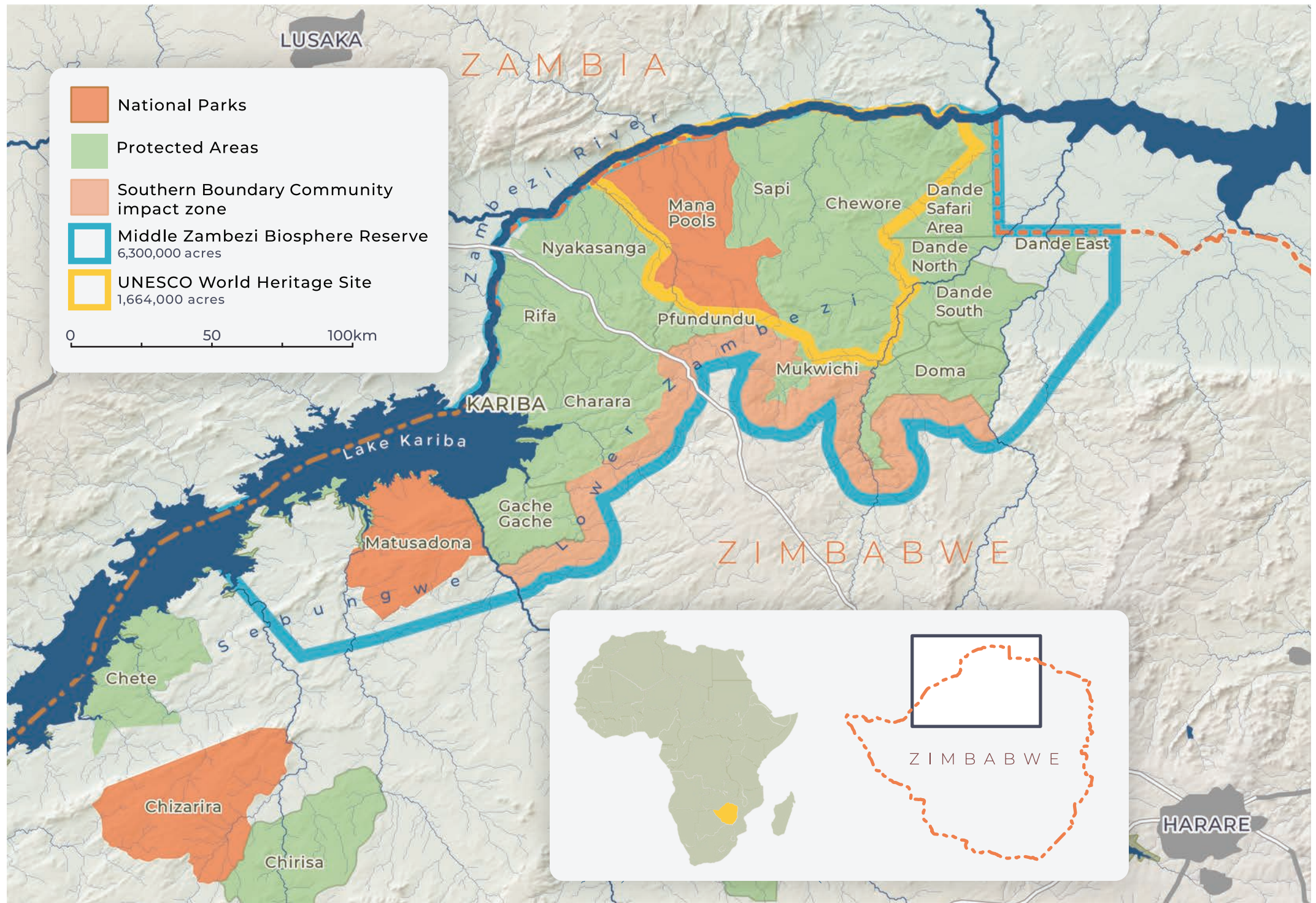
**T**he Zambezi Valley is an iconic, world-class wildlife and scenic resource. The area includes the Zambezi River's longest, contiguous expanse of riverine wilderness, which stretches 230 kilometres from Kariba Dam to the Mozambique border and represents the lifeblood of 5 million acres of ecologically significant and diverse habitat.

The Zambezi is the continent's fourth-largest river, and features dramatic and iconic floodplains, deciduous miombo woodlands and mineral-rich grasslands along its course; attracting a prolific and varied wildlife population of global biological significance.

Less obvious to its thousands of visitors annually, but equally important, the Zambezi landscape's great variety of ecosystems, habitats, soils and waters support a large and growing human population of fishermen, farmers, traders and entrepreneurs that rely directly on the natural resources that surround them for their prosperity.

The Zambezi Network's area of operation includes a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, a World Heritage Site, the Lower Zambezi Mana Pools (LOZA) Transfrontier Conservation Area (TFCA), and part of the Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Zambia (ZIMOZA) TFCA, as well as part of the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA).

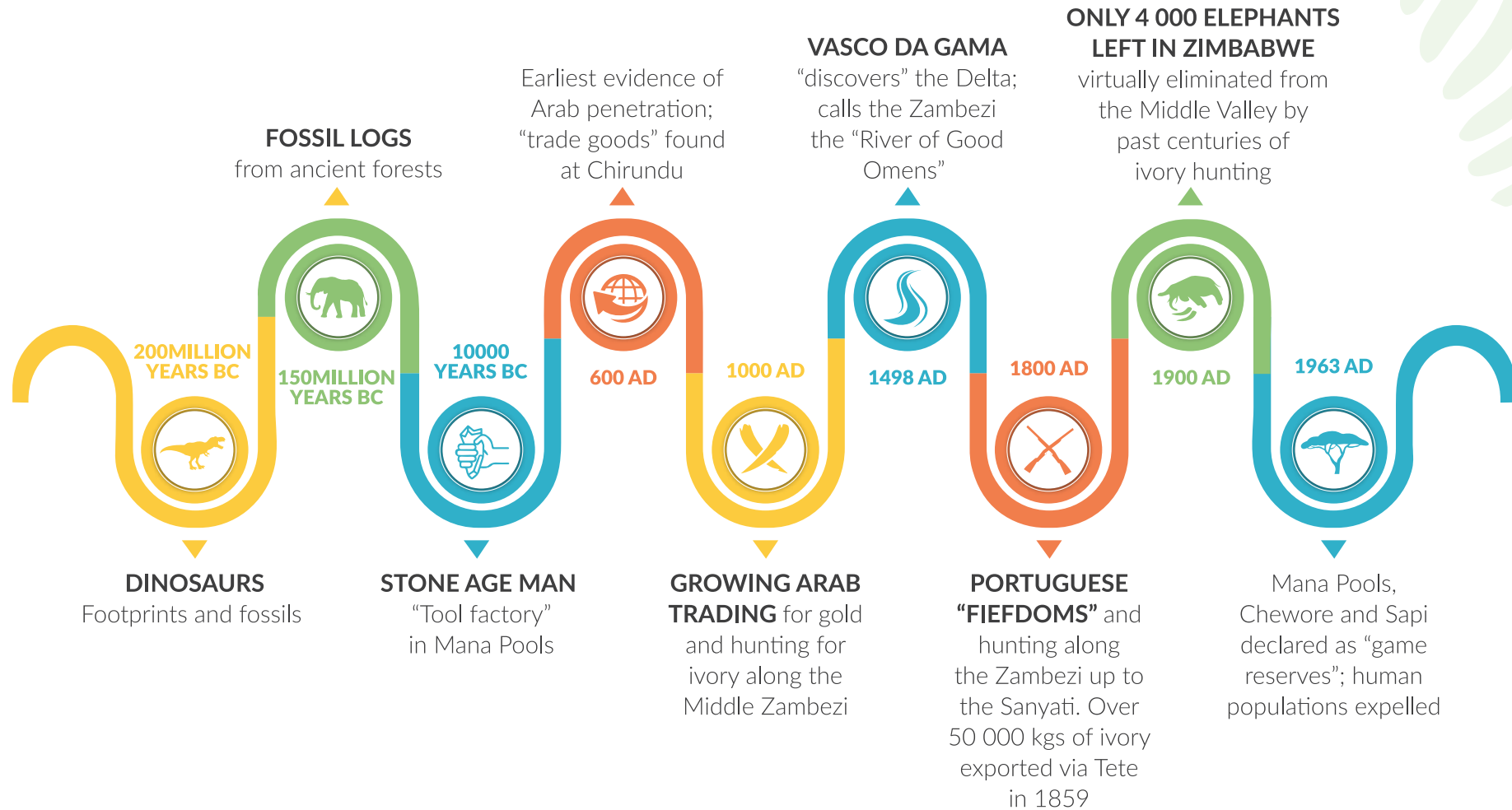






# THE ZAMBEZI VALLEY

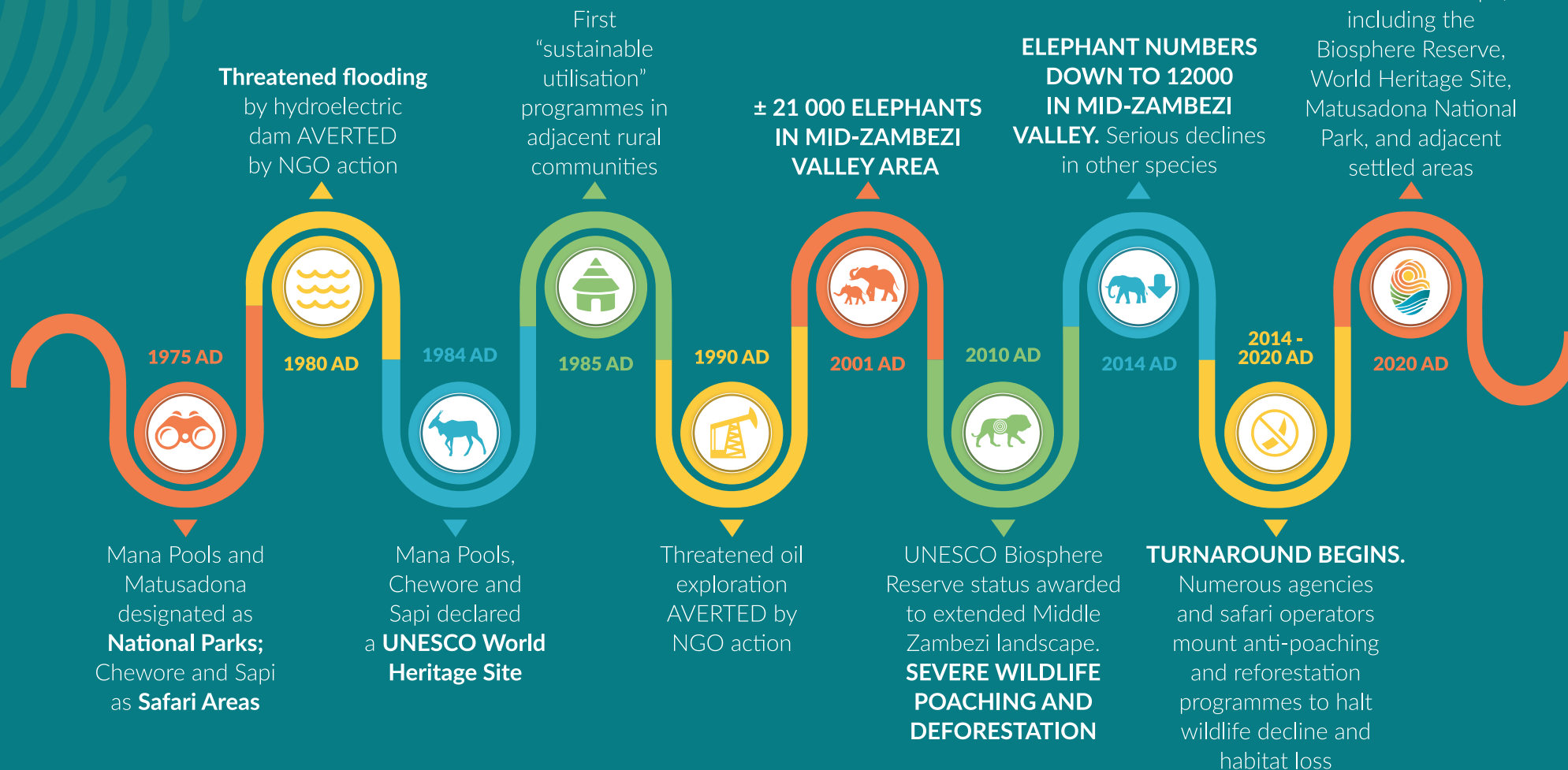
## - its history at a glance





## ZAMBEZI VALLEY CONSERVATION NETWORK

established to  
facilitate conservation  
action and communication  
across the Middle  
Zambezi landscape,  
including the  
Biosphere Reserve,  
World Heritage Site,  
Matusadona National  
Park, and adjacent  
settled areas





# THE RELEVANCE OF THE BIOSPHERE RESERVE

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*Biosphere Reserves place a strong emphasis on bringing together conservation and human needs at landscape scale.*

The boundaries of the Zambezi Network's current area of interest coincide closely with those of the UNESCO Middle Zambezi Biosphere Reserve (MZBR). Gazetted in 2010, the MZBR covers approximately 6.3 million acres, including two National Parks and part of Lake Kariba. Featuring riverine and terrestrial ecosystems which are unique to the subcontinent, the MZBR was elected due to its unique biodiversity and prolific wildlife, and its potential to support sustainable development.

Designated under the international UNESCO Man and Biosphere programme, Biosphere Reserve status is awarded to areas of globally-important ecological value and which aim to ensure a sustainable way of life for the people who live and work in the landscape. They are 'living laboratories' to test interdisciplinary approaches to managing interactions between social systems and ecosystems, and to explore local solutions to global challenges.

The success of these ambitions will depend heavily on strengthening the benefits to local councils and communities, and developing landscape environmental protection frameworks and solutions that are inclusive of the needs of the local people.







*The Zambezi Valley Conservation Network assists those on the frontlines of conservation and community development, to scale their impact; helping reduce threats such as poaching, illegal mining and deforestation.*



A close-up photograph of a person's hand, with dark skin, gently touching a cluster of small, green, oval-shaped leaves. The background is blurred, showing more of the same foliage. The lighting is soft and natural, highlighting the texture of the skin and the leaves.

# OUR APPROACH TO ADDRESSING THE NEEDS AND THREATS OF THE LANDSCAPE

The last 20 years have seen a gradual degradation of the Zambezi Valley's wildlife and some vital habitats, particularly in those marginal or buffer wilderness areas that were once delivering business and investment opportunities through tourism, but are now no longer viable. The landscape now features a patchwork that includes vast areas with a vacuum of commercial or conservation activity therein; 'stranded assets' that are desperate for new economic models to enable their preservation. Increased threats to wildlife and wilderness are of course directly linked to the economics of local communities, who will resort to the extraction of natural resources where no other livelihood options exist. The combination of these threats and challenges require the solution of extensive, targeted, appropriate and consistent intervention, delivered by a wide variety of agencies in step with each other and with collaborative vigour.



# Threats

## *Poaching and Illegal Wildlife Trade*

Illegal hunting or 'poaching' continues to be a major concern throughout the landscape (significant in the more remote and less closely managed regions). Poaching includes both subsistence-level hunting by those living nearby the protected areas – a consequence of household poverty – and also the bushmeat business, whose gangs and syndicates have been responsible for the destruction of massive numbers of antelope species. The illegal killing of high-value species for international trade also remains a consistent threat.

## *Mining and Extractives*

Interest in minerals and hydrocarbon exploration has been a constant threat to the Zambezi Valley ecology for some years. The conflicting land use issues highlighted by mining claims must be countered by illustrating that the value delivered by sustainable wilderness preservation can provide equal or greater economic and social benefits to mineral extraction.

## *Habitat Loss*

Conversion of natural woodland to agricultural land is an alarming and growing trend in the area, made worse where poor soil management delivers meagre cropping yields. Deforestation due to wood fuel demand has also accelerated in the last decade, aggravated by the wood-fired tobacco curing process which triggers a massive loss of natural forest habitat in tobacco growing regions.





# HOW WE WORK

## PROVIDE EXPERT TEAMS TO MEET CONSERVATION AND COMMUNITY NEEDS

We identify specific needs within the landscape and put together bespoke professional teams and services that can be offered to assist local authorities and partners to deliver specified tasks and impact. These services are available on contract, via service agreements that are time-based and include clear deliverables. Service fees are covered by contracting agencies or through subsidy by donors.

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## DEVELOP A CONSISTENT INFORMATION REPOSITORY FOR STAKEHOLDERS

We aim to be a trusted information resource, accessible to stakeholders who would like to know more about conservation and development activity within the landscape. We promote optimal communication between agencies and share information to guide conservation priorities; helping to encourage wider conservation efficiencies.


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## BRIDGE THE CONSERVATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT SECTORS

The aims of economic development versus wildlife and natural habitat preservation are sometimes at odds with each other. We therefore recognise the opportunity for mainstream conservation to play a greater role in community development programmes, whilst NGO's within the development sector can be guided to better align to conservation objectives. The ZVCN is placed in a valuable role to encourage catalytic links and meaningful partnerships between these sectors.





A photograph of two elephants walking from left to right across a dry, dusty path in a savanna landscape. The background is filled with trees and foliage, with a warm, golden light from the setting or rising sun filtering through the branches, creating a soft, hazy atmosphere. The elephants are in the foreground, their dark grey skin contrasting with the lighter ground and background. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image, in a white, italicized serif font.

*Our mission is to enhance the sustainable health and protection of the middle Zambezi region through the delivery of conservation and socio-economic development solutions and services that address the critical gaps, threats and needs of the landscape.*



# NEEDS OF THE LANDSCAPE AND OUR SERVICES TO ASSIST

Our contribution is to assist conservation and development organisations with our bespoke professional services  
– designed to support and enhance solutions to the most critical social, economic and environmental needs of the area. These needs and gaps have been identified by stakeholders of the Zambezi Valley.

NEEDS OF THE LANDSCAPE	 <b>FRONTLINE PROTECTION SERVICES</b>	 <b>COORDINATED SCIENCE &amp; RESEARCH</b>	 <b>COMMUNITY LIASON &amp; STEWARDSHIP</b>	 <b>EDUCATION, AWARENESS &amp; YOUTH LEADERSHIP</b>
ZAMBEZI NETWORK SERVICE OFFERING	<p>Support ZimParks to strengthen law enforcement by deploying an auxiliary ranger unit, developing an anti-mining rapid response facility and habitat preservation services to deter wood poaching and agri expansion.</p>	<p>Assisting data gathering and research coordination, such as wildlife population data and survey coordination, monitoring of exotic species, erosion and siltation, and provision of disease and veterinary services.</p>	<p>Assisting in human-wildlife conflict management and mitigation, including boundary and wildlife corridor management, legal counsel and community education programmes.</p>	<p>Providing work experience opportunities for young, skilled conservation enthusiasts. Supporting ZimParks and other agencies with education programme coordination in schools and communities peripheral to the protected areas of the landscape.</p>





### **OPTIMISED INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS**

Ongoing information gathering to develop and grow the Zambezi information library. Includes coordination and sharing of information across the landscape.



### **WASTE MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS**

Offering waste management and refuse solutions, including litter control and supporting community waste awareness programmes and campaigns.



### **LANDSCAPE PLANNING IMPLEMENTATION & PROJECT MANAGEMENT**

Management plan implementation, including stakeholder communications and coordination services. Includes Middle Zambezi Biosphere and transfrontier liaison, and cross border project management.



### **RESTORATION & MAINTENANCE OF INFRASTRUCTURE**

Road network and access maintenance contracting, as well as engineering consultancy services and ranger facility assessments.



### **COORDINATED HABITAT & FIRE MANAGEMENT SERVICES**

Deployment of a professional fire management unit with rapid reaction capacity and assistance with burning protocols. Includes road and access maintenance and fire case monitoring and surveillance.



# THE LANDSCAPE APPROACH TO CONSERVATION

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Until now, wildlife-based conservation activities largely concentrated on 'protected areas', the majority of which fall under the management of the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZPWMA) with some under administration by Rural District Councils. Today, there is a growing recognition that conservation of these important biological assets is best achieved by regarding them as 'focal points' within a broader landscape that includes neighbouring communities that co-exist with wildlife.

It is therefore essential to accommodate communities in conservation planning, and where possible, share the benefits that wild areas generate. For many communities, the prospect of abundant wildlife nearby is simply a threat to their livelihoods and their attitude to wildlife is typically at loggerheads with conservationists.

*A new paradigm of conservation action at landscape level is therefore required, where a focus on human wildlife coexistence alongside economic resilience features prominently. Landscape level programming is shifting towards reconciling competing forms of land use through a reduction in human-wildlife conflict and provision of catalytic economic opportunities for rural communities.*











## WHAT LIES AHEAD?

We know that a sustainable Valley landscape is possible if we make vital changes now. This requires innovative methods of income generation and a balanced allocation of natural resource benefits for the future welfare of habitat, wildlife and rural people. This process is underway in the protected areas and the settled lands on their boundaries.

The future will see a growing scope and scale of the Zambezi Network's response to conservation and community development. The Zambezi Network's landscape-wide operational area need not be defined by national or international legislation. Its boundaries are therefore inherently flexible, and this allows for timely additions and modifications should this become appropriate in future.

With this flexibility, the Zambezi Network will also be able to adapt quickly to changing circumstances that may require the inclusion and support of further participants. One example is the swiftly-evolving global response to climate change, which has already identified the urgent need for biodiversity maintenance in all its aspects, including species and genetic diversity through the preservation of precious wilderness assets.





The Zambezi Network thanks the following for the use of their beautiful images:  
*Graham Cochrane, Simon Smith, Jazzy Middleton, Craig Martin, Tim Marks, Milo Harrup, Michelle Morgan,  
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