
MT. ELGON NATIONAL PARK

General Management Plan



Uganda Wildlife Authority

December 2000

Executive Summary

Introduction

Mt. Elgon was first gazetted a forest reserve in 1938. It remained a forest reserve under the management of the Forest Department, with several relatively minor changes in designation, until 1993 when it was gazetted as a National Park.

During the period from 1938 - 1993 the reserve was managed primarily for protection of its water catchment values and for limited exploitation of its timber resources by commercial harvesting operations and pit-sawyers. From 1993 until 1996, the national Park was administered in accordance with the National Parks Act. In 1996, the Uganda Wildlife Statute No 14 superseded that act.

This Park management plan is a tool, to be used to guide the management of Mt. Elgon National Park. The plan identifies values of the Park and management issues that need to be addressed by the Park managers. Management objectives and actions to address these issues are outlined, together with priorities amongst these recommended actions. The plan is thus a primary resource to be used in the subsequent preparation of annual operational plans and provides the basis for evaluating operational performance in achievement of management objectives.

Management Objectives for Mt. Elgon National Park

The primary management objective for Mt. Elgon National Park has been defined as:

To conserve and manage the physical, ecological and cultural resources of Mt. Elgon National Park for the benefit of present and future generations.

Management Considerations:

Conservation Values and Significance

The conservation values of Mt. Elgon National Park are numerous and diverse. Some are primarily local or regional in character, while others are significant at the national or international/global levels.

Watershed/Catchment Area Values - Mt. Elgon has great value for local residents as a source of rainfall and water. Mt. Elgon receives large amounts of rainfall, which is of critical importance for both the vegetation of Mt. Elgon and the surrounding farming communities as well as communities further downstream.

Biological Values - The ecosystem of MENP sustains a considerable diversity of plants and animals. A number of Elgon's species of plants and animals are known to occur only in a relatively few other areas. These species in particular thus have value with respect to considerations such as biodiversity, gene pools, traditional medicines, and aesthetics. Mt. Elgon's rare and unusual species, its status as the eastern limit of various species characteristic of the tropical forests of West and Central Africa, together with its status as the western limit of various Afro-Alpine species, combine to make this area biologically significant on a global scale.

Aesthetic and Tourist Values- The plants and animals of Mt. Elgon also have great aesthetic value, and thus constitute important resources that are the basis of a small but growing tourism industry.

Cultural and Historical Values - Mt. Elgon has great cultural significance for local communities related to the tangible and intangible values associated with cultural sites and traditional foods and medicines obtained from the forests of the mountain.

Resources Used by Communities - Mt. Elgon National Park contains a wide range of natural resources which are of great value to communities living around the Park such as bamboo shoots, bamboo stems, poles, timber, firewood, medicine, and honey.

Plantation Resources - Mt. Elgon National Park includes two softwood plantation areas established when the area was under the management of the Forest Department as a forest reserve. These plantations represent an important wood resource for both local people (construction timber, firewood) and for meeting Uganda's need for timber. Revenue from the sale of timber can provide an important financial resource for the sustainable management of Mt. Elgon National Park and can contribute to sustainable development within neighbouring communities.

Educational Values - The Forest Exploration Centre at Kapkwai provides an important education resource for Mbale and Kapchorwa Districts in particular, and for Uganda generally.

Employment - Mt. Elgon National Park provides a range of employment opportunities for people living around

the Park. These include opportunities for employment as tourism guides and porters, Park rangers or office staff, or through development of tourist lodges or other facilities and services.

Values as a Carbon Sink - Reforestation of previously encroached areas within Mt. Elgon National Park can provide opportunities for trapping atmospheric carbon in trees, thus contributing to reduction of the Greenhouse Effect.

Threats and Potential Threats to Conservation Values

Agricultural Encroachment - Encroachment of cultivation into the national Park is a major threat to the Mt. Elgon ecosystem, due to both the area affected and the amount of degradation caused.. Encroachment has resulted in the destruction of approximately 25,000 hectares within the past generation, or about one fifth of Elgon's forest.

Grazing - Illegal grazing of cattle in the Park has a range of impacts on the conservation values of the Park, including loss of forest regeneration through grazing and trampling, damage to growing seedlings and shrubs and trampling causing erosion on trails used by cattle. The deliberate use of fire to encourage new grass growth also helps maintain grasslands.

Collection of Fuelwood - Communities surrounding Mt. Elgon rely heavily on firewood and charcoal for their energy needs, with much of this collected from the National Park. Current levels of firewood collection do not appear to be having a major impact where only dead wood is collected, but the sustainable level of harvesting is not known.

Harvesting of Construction Materials - Pit-sawing for timber occurs at fairly low levels from Mt. Elgon National Park. The removal of split and round poles for construction occurs at higher levels and has the potential to have a serious impact on the Elgon ecosystem, particularly on species which are favoured for this purpose.

Harvesting of Non-Timber Forest Products - A wide range of forest products such as medicinal herbs, honey, bamboo shoots, mushrooms, ropes and vegetables are collected from Mt. Elgon National Park. Many of these are collected at what appear to be sustainable levels and are not considered to pose a serious threat to ecosystem viability. However, sustainable levels of harvesting of each product, or of particular species, are not known.

Poaching of Animals - Poaching of animals remains a serious potential problem in Mt. Elgon National Park, although current levels of poaching are low as a result of the numbers of animals being low.

Tourism Activities - The number of tourists visiting Mt. Elgon National Park is low but increasing. Tourist impact on the Mt. Elgon environment is thus currently low. However, there is some evidence of erosion on tourist trails (often exacerbated by use by local resource collectors and grazing animals) and firewood is collected around camping areas. As tourist numbers increase, these and other impacts such as rubbish or effluent pollution, will require more management

Research Activities and Park Operations - Past research activities do not appear to have had any significant negative impact on conservation values of Mt. Elgon National Park. Park operations have also had only minor impacts such as clearing small areas of vegetation for establishment of rangers huts or other infrastructure.

Insecurity - Insecurity within communities living adjacent to the Park as a result of cattle raiding from Karamoja has a negative impact on grazing in the Park. Cattle rustling through the Park, between Uganda and Kenya and between communities living around the Park, also creates insecurity for both local residents and tourists.

Benet Resettlement - In 1983, a decision was made by the Government of Uganda to excise 6000ha of the (then) Mt. Elgon Forest Reserve to resettle the ethnic Benet community who had previously lived in the heath and moorland vegetation belts of the reserve. Unfortunately the implementation of the resettlement exercise suffered from a range of problems and consequently the resettlement exercise was not successful, and people from the Benet area have continued to live and practice agriculture inside the National Park.

Fire - Uncontrolled wildfire does not have a major impact on the conservation of Mt. Elgon National Park due to the relatively high rainfall and moist vegetation types. However, wildfires do occur in some areas such as the moorlands, grasslands and bamboo forests.

Other Management Considerations and Constraints

Community Issues - Since 1993 Uganda Wildlife Authority has increased its emphasis on working more closely with communities rather than taking a strictly law enforcement approach to Park management. Through this work and other consultations a wide range of issues have been identified which are of concern to these communities. These include:

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- Resource Use - Communities, particularly the resource collectors, place a high priority on continued access to Park resources to meet their needs, and are interested in working with Park authorities to develop agreements to allow resource harvesting on a sustainable basis.
 - Agricultural land and boundary disputes – there is an ongoing demand amongst communities living around the Park for more agricultural land in the Park, which is incompatible with the conservation of Park values as required under the UWA Statute.
 - Insecurity - Insecurity as a result of cattle raiding, particularly in Kapchorwa District, is given by communities as a cause of grazing and cultivation in the Park, as land outside the Park which had previously been available has become unavailable as a result of the insecurity.
 - Cultural - Access to traditional cultural sites and collection of resources associated with cultural ceremonies within the Park is important to communities living around the Park.
 - Employment opportunities - Communities have expressed a desire to obtain employment through providing services (such as food, accommodation, guides, and porters) to tourists visiting Mt. Elgon National Park. Assistance from the Park authorities in developing these opportunities is desired.
 - Revenue sharing - Communities are also eager for Park authorities to implement tourist revenue sharing arrangements as per UWA policy.
 - Problem animals - Although this is not a major problem around Mt. Elgon National Park there are some cases of crop raiding by wild animals such as pigs and baboons from the Park. Communities would like assistance from the Park in controlling these animals and/or compensation for losses incurred.
 - Community development and infrastructure - Communities feel that there is a need for development of improved agricultural practices to provide alternatives to people who currently rely on the Park for resources and to increase incomes to reduce dependency on the Park.
 - Plantation management - Communities living in and around the softwood plantations at Kapkwata and Suam are interested in sharing the benefits of these plantations and being involved in replanting and management operations.
 - Conflict resolution - Conflicts between members of the community and Park staff sometimes occur for a variety of reasons. Both the communities and Park managers would like to avoid conflict and resolve management issues through discussion and negotiation.

Collaborative Management - Uganda Wildlife Authority policy encourages the development of collaborative management mechanisms and practices, with a view to having communities and Park staff share in the benefits and responsibility for management of the Park ecosystem. Consultations carried out in the preparation of this management plan also indicate that communities are ready and willing to work with Park staff in developing collaborative approaches to Park management

Financial Sustainability - Management of Mt. Elgon National Park is constrained by limited funding available from Government, and currently relies heavily on funding from external donors for its operations. Opportunities for generation of revenues, flowing either directly or indirectly from Park operations, are thus critically important to the future financial sustainability of the Park. Opportunities for revenue generation in Mt. Elgon National Park are mainly through tourism and through harvesting of the softwood plantations included in the Park.

Management and Operational Capacity - Many of the staff of MENP have valuable knowledge and skills. However, levels of formal education are generally low and the experience that many have gained working in the Park, and in the forest reserve that preceded it, has not equipped them to implement the new UWA statute and policy. This deficiency necessarily acts as a constraint on management options, and also means that training requirements are high.

Physical Environment - Mt. Elgon is extremely rugged, particularly on the mountain's highly dissected lower slopes, both inside and outside the park. The rugged terrain, limited road network and poor roads make Park operations difficult and costly. Access is particularly difficult during the rainy seasons.

International Frontier - The fact that MENP lies on the Kenya-Uganda border introduces certain specific problems which occur occasionally such as smuggling and cross-border raiding, and makes it more difficult to co-ordinate management actions to deal with these problems when they occur.

External Support - Mt. Elgon National Park receives funding and technical support from the Mt. Elgon

Conservation and Development Project which supports a range of activities both inside the Park and in surrounding communities. The Project is expected to continue for the duration of this management plan. Support is also received from the UWA-Face project (Forests Absorbing Carbon Emissions), funded by a Dutch foundation, supports the replanting of trees in areas of the national Park that were previously encroached. Although support from these two projects enable many Park management activities to be carried out which would otherwise not be possible, it does not fully fund all required Park operations, thus emphasising the need for the Park to generate its own revenue. Also, as both projects inevitably have finite lifespans, the Park needs to begin planning for the time when donor funding is no longer available. However due to low revenue it is recognised that donor support will be required for some time to come.

Park Village in Kapkwata Plantations - In Kapkwata plantation there is a village that was set aside at the time of plantation establishment to cater for forest and sawmill workers. As the population of the village continues to increase through reproduction and in-migration, thus leading to increased potential for impacts on the resources of the National Park, there is a need to develop management strategies to limit population and minimise negative impacts on the Park.

Management Programs

Six management programs have been developed in this management plan. Each program has a series of sub-objectives and management actions. These are explained briefly below.

Resource Management and Protection Program

Until recently, the major focus of management activities for the lands now within Mt. Elgon National Park has been law enforcement. Mt. Elgon National Park now places more emphasis on working in co-operation with communities adjacent to the park, in order to achieve conservation and development goals. Discussion and education will thus be emphasised through community conservation activities, in combination with law enforcement activities.

Law enforcement will, however, continue to be an important Park management activity. It is important that the laws governing Park management are carried out in an unambiguous and transparent manner, and that they be seen to be an integral part of an overall Park operation that also includes community conservation activities. Every effort will be made to ensure that all Park staff, regardless of function, are considered and perceived, to be integral components of an effective team. The members of that team should be seen to share a commitment to a common set of goals, and to carry out their responsibilities in accordance with a common standard of professionalism. All staff thus need to be well trained and knowledgeable about all aspects of Park operations.

Community Conservation and Development Program

This program is based on the premise that long term conservation of the Mt. Elgon ecosystem can be assured only if residents of adjacent communities understand Park management issues, and share both in the benefits flowing from the the protected area and in the responsibilities for managing that area. Park managers must also understand and take appropriate action on issues that are of concern to local communities. The emphasis in community conservation programs will thus be in the following areas:

- liaison and discussion with communities and local government to identify and develop appropriate actions to deal with issues of interest and concern to communities living around the Park
- community education programs focusing on Park values and management issues and aiming to build support for conservation of the Mt Elgon ecosystem
- sharing both of the responsibility for resource management and of the benefits flowing from that management through collaborative management and revenue-sharing arrangements
- co-operative action to reduce and ultimately eliminate agricultural encroachment, unregulated pitsawing, and uncontrolled hunting and grazing
- control of problem wild animals
- planning and implementation of projects designed to enhance living standards in communities

Tourism Program

Mt. Elgon National Park has the potential to attract considerably more visitors than it attracts at present, and to generate correspondingly greater revenues. This can be very significant in communities with a subsistence economy and with limited opportunities for earning cash income, and can play a significant role in ensuring the financial sustainability of Mt. Elgon National Park operations. With appropriate planning, development, and

operating practices, tourism development can be carried out in a manner fully consistent with long term conservation of the Elgon ecosystem.

Key issues that need to be addressed to realise the tourist potential of Mt. Elgon National Park include:

- improved publicity and marketing
- well-trained and component staff, working both for the Park and for the private sector tourism industry
- public safety and security
- provision of appropriate tourist infrastructure and services
- provision of improved information and interpretative materials and services
- involvement of local communities in provision of tourist services and in receiving benefits
- monitoring and management of impacts from tourist activities.

Support Systems

The plan addresses the support systems needed to implement the management programs. These include staffing, staff training, welfare and remuneration, funding sources and financial management, capital development and equipment needs. As Mt. Elgon National Park is a relatively new Park and Uganda Wildlife Authority has limited resources there are deficiencies in all of these areas that need attention.

Research and Monitoring Program

Mt. Elgon National Park conducts its own research with a view to strengthening specific management programs. The Park also welcomes researchers from other institutions that wish to study certain aspects of the Park's biophysical and cultural resource themes.

Monitoring will focus on collecting data that can be evaluated and applied to management decisions relating to many different aspects of the Park operation. Monitoring priorities will include the following parameters:

- incidence, location and type of illegal activities occurring within the Park
- volumes of forest products harvested (legally and illegally) from the Park and the impact of this harvesting on the Park ecosystem
- populations and distributions of plants and animals that are rare or that are particularly significant in the management of the park
- patterns and levels of visitor use, together with impacts associated with that use, and visitor satisfaction with facilities and services
- numbers of participants, activities, and attitudinal/behavioural results relating to environmental education and interpretation programs
- health, education, and socio-economic circumstances of residents of communities in the vicinity of the park.

Plantations Management Program

As the softwood plantations within Mt. Elgon National Park are considered to be an important resource, for local and regional wood supplies, revenue generation and to reduce the impact of illegal harvesting from natural forests in the Park, the Uganda Wildlife Authority Board has decided that they will be managed on a sustainable basis for wood production. Management plans for harvesting, replanting, protection and management of the plantations are thus required. Involvement of local communities in these programs, and benefit to local communities, is considered to be important to the long-term sustainability of these operations.

Management Zones

The zoning plan for Mt. Elgon National Park is based on the idea that although various activities and management regimes may be considered appropriate within the Park, some of those activities and management regimes are more appropriate in certain areas of the Park than they are in other areas. The zoning therefore allocates specified activities, facilities, and management regimes to certain defined areas of the Park based on an analysis of criteria such as sensitivity of biophysical features, compatibility of planned activities and priorities for particular areas of the Park.

Six zones have thus been created to facilitate implementation of the management programs. These are:

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1. Preservation Zone
 2. Integrated Conservation Zone
 3. Tourism Zone
 4. Intensive Use Zone
 5. Restoration Zone
 6. Boundary Zone

Review and Amendment of Park Management Plan

Preparation of a Park management plan is an essential step in the establishment and use of a sound approach to Park management. However, the management plan should be considered to be an evolving document rather than one that is unchanging. As more information is obtained concerning Park resources and the ways in which those resources are used, and as more experience is gained in managing those resources, it is entirely appropriate that the management plan be modified and improved.

Under normal circumstances the plan will be reviewed and amended every 5 years. If new circumstances or information require it, the plan may be amended at any time before this.