

As a result of the increasing pressure on the Babilie ES and increasing reports of human and elephant conflict and ivory poaching, WSD initiated the Babilie ES Community Conservation Project in February 2008. The project has the following major activities:

1. Define the boundaries of the Sanctuary and human settlements

Over the last 40 years, local communities have not been fully involved in the management of Babilie ES and have not recognized the value of protecting the wildlife resources. Over 45 villages have been established inside the original Sanctuary boundary and Sanctuary land has been cleared for agriculture. The expansion of biofuel investments since March 2007 in the elephant areas has aggravated the situation.



In March 2008, WSD in partnership with the local communities, Ethiopia Wildlife Conservation Authority, and the Oromia Region started the demarcation of the Sanctuary. To date, 26 villages on the Oromia Region side of the Sanctuary have agreed and finalized boundaries. The work continues on the Somali Region side of the Sanctuary. Based on the approval of the new Sanctuary boundaries, the Government of Ethiopia has promised to upgrade the Sanctuary to National Park status.

2. Gather scientific data in order to plan conservation strategies

In order to reduce the conflict between humans and elephants and formulate land use plans, it is essential to collect baseline data on the home ranges and movement patterns of the Babilie elephants. Tracking elephants from the ground is not easy due to the difficult terrain, limited road networks and security issues. In August 2008, Global Positioning System (GPS) satellite collars will be fitted to five adult elephants. The 'Scout Data' collars have been manufactured for

this project in South Africa. The skilled collaring team includes experts from South Africa, Kenya and Ethiopia. The location of the collared elephants will be recorded at two-hour intervals daily for a minimum of two and a half years. To collect data on herd activity and demographics these elephants will also be tracked from the ground using VHF radio transmitters and a handheld GPS. Data on elephant home ranges and movements will be superimposed onto vegetation and human settlement maps. These results, combined with data on weather and social economics, will form the basis of future elephant conservation planning.

3. Build a conservation partnership where local communities derive economic benefit from the Sanctuary and humans and elephants co-exist

The involvement of local communities is key to the WSD project and future conservation of the area. WSD will initiate an environmental education program with various support materials to raise awareness of the importance of elephants and the impact of unsustainable utilization of natural resources.

Natural resource utilization agreements will be developed to ensure sustainable harvesting of firewood, water collection and livestock grazing. Elephant-friendly farm management strategies will be encouraged. WSD will help communities develop ecotourism in the area. Selective and responsible use of the GPS recordings will enable visitors to be taken on guided tours that guarantee an elephant sighting. Many local communities have lived alongside elephants for generations and can also share how elephants play an important role in their traditions and culture. The project will work with communities to prepare guide materials, establish campsites, train tour guides, and promote the Sanctuary to tour operators.

4. Develop institutional and human capacity

Capacity building of the Sanctuary, local communities, and WSD is vital for the success of the project. Dutch Government funding through the Ethiopian Forum for Environment continues to strengthen the capacity of the various stakeholders.



5. Develop and implement a long-term Sanctuary management plan

Creating and then implementing a management plan for Babilie is fundamental for conserving both elephants and other wildlife. Using scientific data collected between 2003 and 2009, WSD will develop a management plan that will encourage communities to appreciate the value of monitoring and protecting the Sanctuary resources. The plan will also highlight ways communities can derive economic benefit from sustainable income generating projects such as ecotourism.