


NEWSLETTER




THE EAST AFRICAN
WILD LIFE SOCIETY

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 The East African Wild Life Society

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Conservationists in Kenya decry plans to weaken Forest Protection Law



Conservation organisations in Kenya on Monday demanded that parliament withdraw a proposed amendment to the country's forest protection law, saying that the intended changes would result in deforestation and the erosion of gains made in forest conservation.

The Rules Committee of the Kenyan parliament has initiated a move to amend section 34 of the Forest Conservation and Management Act (2016) that was inserted into the law to stop arbitrary excisions that led to wanton destruction of the country's forests in the 1990s and early 2000s.

"The proposed amendment seeks to vest the power to determine the fate of any such petitions on the Clerk of the National Assembly and the House Rules Committee without consultation with the Kenya Forest Service, which is the government's lead expert agency on forestry," the organisations said in joint statement read at a news conference by Elizabeth Gitari-Mitaru, the chairperson



TOP: Representatives from conservation organisations in Kenya at a news conference to demand the withdrawal of a law amendment they say would weaken the conservation of forests in the country.

BELOW: Elizabeth Gitari-Mitaru, chairperson, East African Wild Life Society, reads a joint statement by conservation groups in Kenya.

of the East African Wild Life Society.

The conservation organisations said they were strongly opposed to the intended changes in the forest conservation law and demanded that the amendment be withdrawn for the sake of the conservation of forests.

“Any changes [to the law] goes against gains made over the years,” said Joram Kagombe, the chairman of the Kenya Forests Working Group, an umbrella organisation. “We should not lose the momentum,” he added.

They noted that forest cover only 7.4 per cent of Kenya’s land area, but they host large amounts of the country’s fauna and flora species, hence the need to ensure that they are legally protected.

The proposed amendments would cause the Kenya Forest Service to lose its power to review and sanction any proposed public forest boundary alteration before being submitted to the National Assembly, the organisations said. Such an outcome would greatly weaken the governance mechanisms of public forests and deal a serious blow to conservation.

“We are fearful that the passing of the proposed amendment will take us back to the days before the enactment of the Forest Act of 2005 when forest loss through unwarranted excisions was the order of the day,” they said.

“The proposed repeal of Section 34(2A) will open avenues for the grabbing of public forest land. It will inevitably lead to the loss of forests. This will spell doom to our forestry sector and many other sectors that depend on the ecological services provided by forests. It will also set a bad legal precedent to other natural resource-related policies and legislation,” they added.

Nancy Ogonje, Executive Director, East African Wild Life Society, said the proposed amendment would “compromise the protection of our forests” and that the changes to the law appeared to have been introduced “in bad faith.”

Much of the destruction to Kenya’s forest happened when the powers to alter forest boundaries was vested in one person, the cabinet minister in charge of the environment, according to Christian Lambrechts, Executive Director, Rhino Ark Charitable Trust. He stressed the need for wide consultations among key stakeholders before any changes can be made to the law on forests.



TOP: Nancy Ogonje, Executive Director, East African Wild Life Society, speaks at the news conference.

MIDDLE: Dr. Joram Kagombe, chairman, Kenya Forests Working Group, addresses reporters at the news conference to call for the withdrawal of an amendment to the law that critics say would weaken forest conservation in Kenya.

BELOW: Christian Lambrechts, Executive Director, Rhino Ark Charitable Trust.

EAWLS and BDO East African Form Tree Growing Partnership

The East African Wild Life Society (EAWLS) and BDO East Africa, a member of an international network of public accounting, tax and advisory firms have formed a partnership to grow trees in Kenya as part of BDO's effort to boost a positive impact on the environment and communities. Some 5,000 trees will be planted in the initial phase of the partnership.

BDO International Ltd has stressed its commitment to supporting the goal of achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions globally by 2050.

The collaboration between EAWLS and BDO was launched at an inaugural tree planting event in Kinale Forest in Kiambu County on January 13. Kinale Forest is part of the larger Aberdare Forest Ecosystem, a key water catchment area that feeds rivers that supply residents of Kiambu, Nairobi and beyond with water. Ten trees were planted at the EAWLS-BDO partnership inaugural event attended by representatives from the two partners, Kenya Forest Service, the local Community Forest Association and Kiambu county administration.

The tree planting location was selected because it is one of the most degraded areas of the Kinale Forest Block. The forest was thick with red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) in the 1960s and 70s, but the species was extensively harvested for timber and poles over decades of weak forest management leaving much of the forestland bare, according to Paul Karanja, the Ecosystem Conservator in charge of Kiambu County.

Nancy Ogonje, EAWLS Executive Director, said the 5,000 trees that will be initially planted under the EAWLS-BDO partnership will have the capacity to sequester 109 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide when fully grown.

EAWLS in 2016 launched an initiative dubbed "The Forest Challenge" in which the organisation engages corporates, individuals and other stakeholders to actively participate and invest in the conservation of water catchment montane forests in Kenya. This has provided an opportunity for corporates such as BDO East Africa to partner with EAWLS through the Forest Rehabilitation Programme.



The initiative is also intended to support the livelihoods of local communities through the purchase of tree seedlings from community nurseries. The community will also be involved in providing care for the saplings until they reach maturity.

"We are happy to note that BDO East Africa is taking the lead in exercising environmental responsibility by partnering with us in this noble cause of growing trees in a degraded forest to not only offset carbon emissions but also to heed the call to end deforestation in East Africa," said Ms Ogonje.

"We will endeavour to jointly meet the objective of combating deforestation

while addressing the problem of climate change in East Africa through tree growing. We wish to encourage more corporates to partner with us in support of environmental conservation in the region," she added.

TOP: Nancy Ogonje, Executive Director, East African Wild Life Society and Trond-Morten Lindberg, BDO Regional CEO for Europe, Middle East and Africa, sign the partnership contract in Nairobi

BELOW: EAWLS and BDO East Africa representatives at the inaugural tree planting event at Kinale Forest, Kiambu County.

World Wetlands Day Marked across the Globe



The World Wetlands Day was marked across the globe today with events and statements to raise awareness on the importance of wetlands to ecosystems and underline the need to protect them from anthropogenic activities that cause degradation.

The theme of World Wetlands Day 2022 is *Wetlands Action for People and Nature*, which is an appeal to invest financial, human and political capital to save the world's wetlands from disappearing and to restore those that have been degraded.

In Kenya, an event to mark the day was held at a remarkable 'quaking bog' known as Ondiri Swamp, a critical source of water for the Kenyan capital, which is situated in the Kikuyu area, about 20km northwest of Nairobi.

The East African Wild Life Society led advocacy for the conservation of Ondiri

TOP: Ondiri Wetland or Ondiri Swamp is a protected wetland and peatbog that is the source of the Nairobi River near Kikuyu, Kenya in Kiambu County. The wetland is under pressure because of water extraction, deforestation and accelerated erosion.

Swamp in 2018 by profiling threats to the swamp, including pollution from urban effluent and agrochemicals; encroachment for agricultural expansion and settlement and unregulated abstraction of water. As a result, the National Environmental Complaints Committee (NECC) convened a multi-stakeholder meeting in September 2018 to investigate all the concerns raised about the wetland.

At the meeting, it was decided that a task force chaired by the Kiambu County government Executive Member in charge of the environment, water and natural resources be formed. The National Environment Authority (NEMA) and Water Resources Management Authority (WARMA) are working closely with the county government to enforce the necessary laws, such as issuing metered water pumps and inspecting the greenhouses around the wetland for legality and compliance. The wetland has also been partially fenced off and restoration efforts initiated. These efforts, among many others, have seen the Grey Crowned Crane return to the swamp, which is a clear indication of improving the health of the ecosystem.

Wetlands, such as lakes, rivers and marshes, provide almost all of the freshwater humans consume. Economies depend on them and they are crucial in maintaining water quality. By absorbing and storing water they also reduce flooding during heavy rainfall, and provide water for dry seasons, preventing the onset of droughts.

World Wetlands Day is marked every year on 2nd February. The day marks the date of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands on 2nd February 1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar on the shores of the Caspian Sea.

Wetlands have often been seen as impediments to the expansion of agriculture and continue to be drained and reclaimed to make way for farmland. In Kenya, many communities engage in farming activities in or around wetlands. The challenge is how to ensure agricultural practices and technologies are adapted to local needs to strengthen ecosystem and community resilience, especially in the face of a rapidly changing climate.

The EAWLS has been advocating for sustainable utilization and protection of wetlands through its own initiatives and working with multi-stakeholders through the Kenya Wetlands Forum (KWF). EAWLS through KWF assisted the Kenyan government to develop the first national wetlands map. Since then, EAWLS has advocated for the protection and sustainable use of wetlands and wetland resources across the country. In 2018, EAWLS successfully advocated for the gazettelement of Lake Ol'Bolossat as a protected wetland. The alkaline lake is designated as an Important Bird Area in central Kenya.

As we mark this Day, EAWLS urges the Kenyan government to designate Ondiri Swamp and many other wetlands as protected wetlands. The county government of Kiambu should also enact legislation requiring inventories of wetlands in its jurisdiction for ease of prioritization, protection and management. We also call upon stakeholders to step up efforts to protect, conserve and manage wetlands in the East African region.

Forest Partnership Award Presentation

Let's Go Travel was awarded the Forest Partnership Award in the Forest Challenge 2021 in recognition of the company's seven-year sponsorship of the Challenge. Nancy Ogonje, Executive Director, EAWLS, paid a courtesy call to the Managing Director, Let's Go Travel, Alan Dixon, to express appreciation of the company's support and present him with a trophy.



TOP: From Left: Felix Ongoma (Let's Go Travel), Mark Manyim, (Let's Go Travel), Gideon Bett (EAWLS), Nancy Ogonje, Executive Director, EAWLS, Alan Dixon, Managing Director, Let's Go Travel, Elizabeth Muthoni (Let's Go Travel), James Ngugi (Let's Go Travel), Paula Okello (Let's Go Travel), Simon Njuguna (Let's Go Travel)

BELOW: Nancy Ogonje, Executive Director, EAWLS and Alan Dixon, Managing Director, Let's Go Travel

