



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

One of Kenya's last great wilderness areas under threat

Communities and conservationists are urging for the re-routing of proposed power line through Laikipia, Isiolo and Samburu Counties.

NAIROBI, 28-06-2013:- Representatives from community conservancies, conservation and human rights NGOs from throughout Laikipia, Isiolo and Samburu counties are expressing their grave concern over the proposed route of a high voltage transmission line through these counties. These organisations include Africa Wildlife Foundation (AWF), Indigenous Movement for Peace Advancement and Conflict Transformation (IMPACT), Laikipia Wildlife Forum (LWF), Mpala Research Centre, Naibunga Conservancy Trust, Ol Lentille Conservancy, Space for Giants, the Zeitz Foundation and the Zoological Society of London. They are calling for the reconsideration of an alternative route.

Whilst fully supporting the construction of the power line - which will be of major benefit to national development – the stakeholders have concerns that the route proposed by the Kenya Electricity Transmission Company Limited (KETRACO) through the very heart of these Counties, will destroy the unique wilderness experience on which wildlife tourism depends and urge the re-routing of the power line alignment to avoid wildlife and community conservancy areas.

“We wish to advocate for an increase in cheaper power for Kenyans but not at the price of the degradation of the livelihoods of our people or of our environment. We have proposed an alternative routing for the current alignment of the KETRACO Moyale to Suswa HVDC power line but this has been rejected. We strongly urge that the alternative be fully considered. We firmly believe that all affected people be consulted and their views heard before decisions are made and written agreements adopted and signed where necessary by all stakeholders”, says Ole Kaunga, Executive Director of Indigenous Movement for Peace Advancement and Conflict Transformation (IMPACT).

Laikipia, Isiolo and Samburu Counties support some of the most diverse wildlife populations in Kenya – including globally important populations of endangered species such as the Grevy's Zebra, wild dog, cheetah, lion and elephant - and these in conjunction with the dramatic natural landscape offers a wilderness experience that is unique and irreplaceable. As a result, this region is a critical tourism anchor for Kenya and its economy.

The current alignment of the power line, set to begin construction in December 2013, has approximately 120km passing through this unique area and will result in the loss of thousands of jobs and millions of dollars generated by tourism and undermine the Counties' future economic development opportunities. The Environmental Impact Assessment report (EIA) prepared by KETRACO, and regarded by us as deeply flawed, is currently under consideration by the National Environment Management

Authority (NEMA). Members of the consortium have filed comments finding the EIA inadequate.

In Laikipia, the current alignment will affect approximately a quarter of the tourism properties. Research demonstrates that thousands of jobs will be affected if tourism becomes unviable in the area, which will have a significant impact on community conservancies and rural livelihoods. The affected properties in Laikipia contribute USD 1 million a year in tax to government; USD 4 million on goods and services locally and nationally; and another USD 1 million as donations to local economic development. The area is a global hotspot for successful sustainable community-based wilderness tourism, and is a valuable Kenyan resource that other countries look to as an example.

We urge Kenya to consider the long-term economic, social and environmental impacts of the existing proposed development. We recognize this will take more time and funding, but in the long run these costs will be outweighed by the benefits and enable Kenya to realise the full potential of its natural capital across the Nation under Vision 2030.

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