

MOTORISED BOATING IN MANA POOLS – A SURVEY DEC 2020

PLEASE GIVE US YOUR URGENT SUPPORT BY 31ST DECEMBER 2020.

Zimbabwe's Parks & Wildlife Management Authority (ZIMPARKS) is carrying out an urgent review of the use of motorized boats for leisure/fishing/transfers on the Zambezi River in Mana Pools National Park. They are asking for stakeholder responses to a new survey on this subject BEFORE 31st December 2020!

PLEASE HELP THE ZAMBEZI SOCIETY TO ADD WEIGHT TO OUR PROPOSED RESPONSE TO ZIMPARKS

We ask you to:-

- 1. READ THE BELOW INFORMATION, CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FIRST**
- 2. COMPLETE THE ZIMPARKS SURVEY** and include **YOUR OWN CONSIDERED AND DETAILED COMMENTS IN THE RELEVANT SECTIONS OF THE SURVEY**

ALL RESPONSES ARE TO BE SUBMITTED BY 31 December 2020.

A link to the ZimParks survey is provided at the end of this article, but we urge you to please read the full text before completing the survey.



SOME BACKGROUND

Pleasure boating was originally introduced in 2009 on a “trial basis” during the rainy season only (15 November to 28 February) with a restriction of engine capacity to a maximum of 60hp. Boating was allowed only downstream of Nyamepi.

At the time, The Zambezi Society consulted its supporters on the new “trial” and received an overwhelmingly negative response (83% of respondents to our consultation exercise felt that motorboating in Mana Pools should be discontinued immediately and not undertaken at any time of the year). Concerns raised at the time included the following:-

- **increased erosion of the riverbank** due to motorboating activity (even with the restriction on engine capacity) and resultant destruction of fragile Mana “floodplain” habitat

- **negative impacts on breeding birds** during the wet season e.g. carmine bee-eaters (which nest in the riverbanks), African Skimmers (which nest on shallow sandbanks in the river)
- **negative impacts on wildlife** in terms of the harassment of hippos, crocodiles and other species living in the river and along its banks
- **disturbance of fish species during the breeding season** (Zambia imposes a moratorium on river fishing during the rainy season, which allows important species like the tigerfish to breed freely).
- **Additional noise pollution** (there is already prolific noise pollution from the Zambian boats which echoes off the Zambian escarpment hills straight back to Mana).
- **a reduction of the wilderness quality of the Park** that is so sought after by visitors to Mana Pools, due to the presence/noise of boats been seen and heard.
- **further destruction and erosion of the Mana access road system** with heavy boats being towed in during the rainy season
- **the “thin end of the wedge” scenario** – i.e. an overall feeling that if boating was introduced (even on a trial basis), then an opening would be created for operators/sport fishermen etc to push for motor boating to be fully introduced at all times of the year, regardless of the impacts on conservation and wilderness quality.

The difference between the Zambian and Zimbabwean geology: It must also be pointed out that, although motorboating has always been allowed on the northern (Zambian) side of the Zambezi River, the riverine geology on the northern bank is very different in character to the southern bank, and its susceptibility to erosion is different.

The Zambezi Society submitted the results of our 2009-2010 consultation, along with our own views in an official letter to ZimParks in March 2010, which included the following:-

“The Zambezi Society takes the view that the experimental introduction of motorboating in Mana Pools did not work, that it should not be repeated, and that Parks should continue to keep motorboating out of the Park in order to retain its unique wilderness qualities upon which tourism to Mana Pools is based. We believe that current circumstances do not allow such an activity to be properly managed and policed. Parks staff are already hugely challenged in terms of their capacity to undertake basic protection and management duties (let alone newly introduced responsibilities).”

However, despite our March 2010 submission (and other responses from other stakeholders, including the sport fishing community), the proposed “trial” was never concluded.



THE MOTORBOATING SITUATION IN 2020

The “thin end of the wedge” prediction highlighted above has advanced as a slow tide over the past decade and in recent years, a proliferation of new boating activities has slowly encroached on the Mana Pools shoreline. These include:-

- One tour operator runs river-based multi-day boat-trips from Chirundu to Kanyemba , with several 2-8 sleeper vessels. These stop off on islands (or mainland) along the way, including in Mana Pools, where a permit has been obtained to conduct short walking safaris for guests in addition to the down-river boating experience. Once guests disembark in Kanyemba, the boats then return upstream to Chirundu at full power into the current of the Zambezi. These trips are popular, and so far, fortunately only one licence has been granted.
- Several new boat transfer operations now deliver clients and goods downriver from Chirundu into Mana Pools and beyond. These are supposed to be restricted to drop-off ONLY at Nyamepi, but they have been dropping off directly at Mana shoreline camps along the way.
- Motorboats are being operated for leisure and fishing at all times of the year out of the Nyamatusi Wilderness Area which is part of Mana Pools National Park (despite the no boating rules).

THE ZAMBEZI SOCIETY'S CONCERNS IN 2020

We are in danger of neglecting the CONSERVATION of this precious National Park, World Heritage Site, Core Area of the Mid-Zambezi Biosphere Reserve, Important Bird Area and RAMSAR wetland site in favour of short-term tourism gains. This is irresponsible to future generations.

All the issues raised above by Zambezi Society supporters in 2009 remain as relevant in 2020 as they did 11 years ago (even more so in some cases).

- **Riverbank erosion has increased** considerably in the past decade and is becoming extremely bad along the southern (Zimbabwean) bank of the Zambezi River. Increased motorboating activity will only accelerate the demise of this shoreline ecology and its fragile riverine habitat.
- **Bee-eater nesting colonies are being destroyed** as riverbanks collapse and giant trees (often the nesting sites of other species) are collapsing into the river, pulling shoreline with them. Increased motorboating activity will only make this worse.
- **African Skimmers are now rarely sighted** along the Zambezi River in Mana Pools (they used to be more prolific). Their nesting sites are located on shallow sandbanks in the river and disturbance by wave action from boats and human activity may be a contributing factor. If so, this will be made worse by increased motorboating activity.
- **Hippos and crocodiles are increasingly intolerant of humans** due to increased harassment from existing boating activity. This will only get worse if there is increased motorboating.
- **The wilderness value of Mana Pools will be destroyed** if long-term conservation of the area's biodiversity is ignored in favour of short-term tourism gains. Motorboating activity destroys the wild environment and also increases human presence and noise pollution thus undermining the unique wilderness value which is the major attraction of the place for most visitors. There are plenty of other places along the Zambezi River that cater for motorboating and fishing tourism. Mana Pools must not lose its unique global “wilderness experience” brand and join the generic ranks of a recreational park.



THE ZAMBEZI SOCIETY'S RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. No more licensing of multi-day boat operations (restrict this to one licenced operator only)**
- 2. Ban completely the use of any motorboats for leisure or fishing activities within the Mana Pools National Park at all times of the year.** There are plenty of other stretches of the river (Chirundu, Mongwe, Sapi, Chewore, Kanyemba) where fishing and motorboating are allowed. **DO NOT DESTROY** the one part of the river (Mana Pools) where biodiversity is relatively undisturbed and a unique wilderness quality still prevails without the intrusion of motorised boats. If we destroy this, we will destroy all safari tourism in the long-term.
- 3. Restrict the use of transfer boats to ONLY 2 or 3 LICENCED operators.**
- 4. Restrict the disembarking/embarking of transfer operators to designated landing sites (e.g. Nyamepi Camp, Vundu Point or Chikwenya).** Their lease agreements should stipulate that they are ONLY allowed to use these sites (not the individual camps).
- 5. All boat transfers to use the main Zambezi River channels ONLY.** No use of minor channels on the Zimbabwe side allowed except when arriving at/leaving designated landing sites.
- 6. Insist that mainland tour operators collect/deliver all camp guests at the designated transfer disembarking/embarking sites only.** This applies to the use of the airstrip, so there is no reason why it should not apply to boat transfers.

Thank you for your patience in reading this detailed briefing. Please now feel free to complete the **ZIMPARKS SURVEY ON BOATING IN MANA POOLS WITH YOUR CONSIDERED AND DETAILED COMMENTS ADDED, WHERE APPROPRIATE.**

Click on the link below:-

MOTORISED BOATING IN MANA POOLS - STAKHOLDER SURVEY 2020