

MINING IN THE ZAMBEZI VALLEY: A BAN IN PARK AREAS, BUT 'DESILTATION' IN THE ANGWA RIVER IS WORRYING

THE ZAMBEZI SOCIETY – March 2021

The economic challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 have resulted in a proliferation of mining activity (legal and illegal) throughout Zimbabwe. There has been a significant increase in informal-sector gold panning along the rivers flowing into the Zambezi Valley, bringing with it associated impacts on vegetation, wildlife and the environment in general, including downstream siltation of the major rivers.

In mid 2020, tourism operators and environmentalists became aware of significant digging taking place in the sands of the Angwa River on the eastern boundary of the Chewore Safari Area, which is part of the Middle Zambezi World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserve, as well as heavy machinery being transported into the area (see the images below).



The Zambezi Society sought assistance from the newly-formed [Zambezi Valley Conservation Network \(ZVCN\)](#), which collectively represents many stakeholders in the Zambezi Valley, to investigate on their behalf and build a legal case against mining activity in this important National Heritage area, if required.

Investigations revealed that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was underway for a project being undertaken by Falvect Mining Company. The prospectus described this as a “**Mining**” project and provided the map below to show the operational area. The consultancy undertaking the EIA invited stakeholders (including the Zambezi Society) to make inputs to a preliminary questionnaire.

More overleaf.....

The proposed project area is about 240km North East of Harare and is situated along Angwa River – at the confluence of Angwa and Maura River, Figure 1.

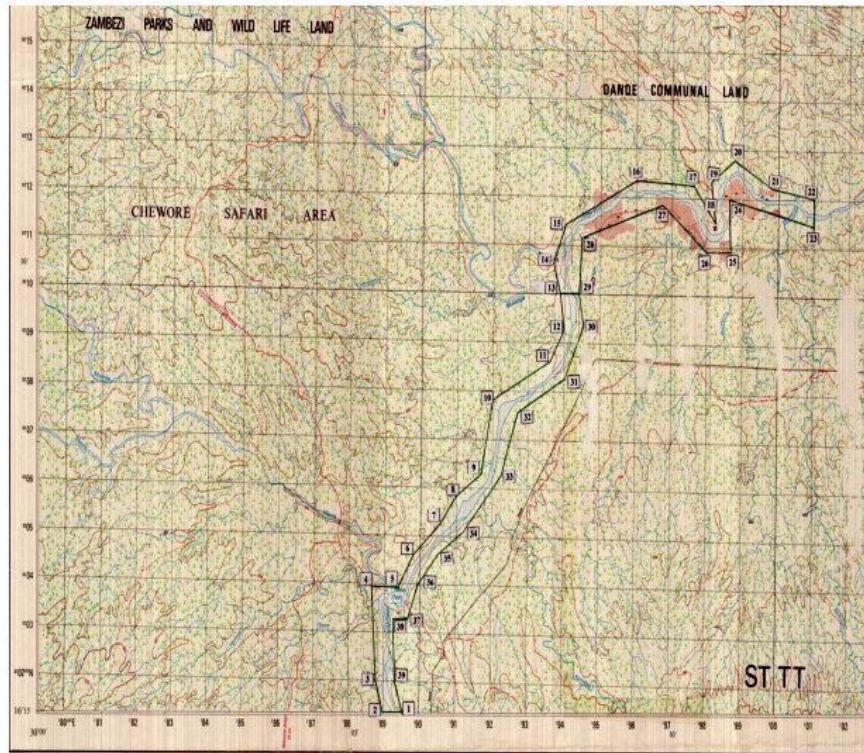
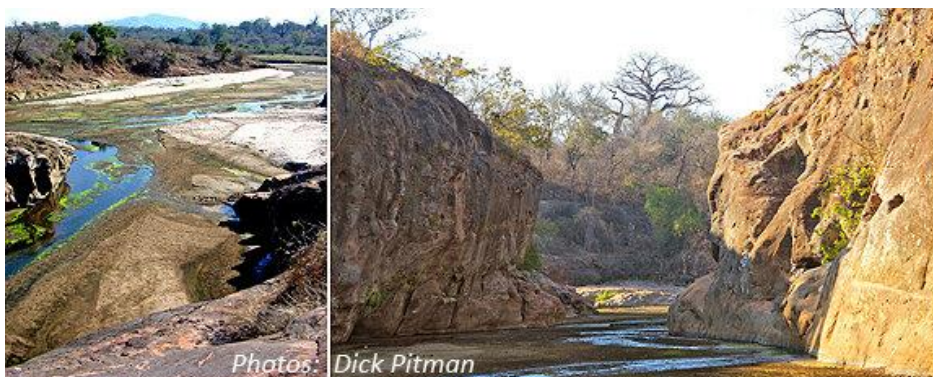


Figure 1 : Proposed project location

The ZVCN collectively compiled a [Dossier of information](#) summarising the situation and outlining the main concerns of stakeholders, including those of the Zambezi Society.

In our preliminary response to the EIA, submitted in August 2020, we pointed out that:-

- The proposed mining area lies on the eastern boundary of the Chewore Safari Area which is part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site and within the larger Mid-Zambezi UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. The position of mining in World Heritage sites makes it clear that proceeding with this endeavor would be a clear violation of International law, which would have serious ramifications for Zimbabwe.
- The area concerned is of outstanding natural beauty, especially at – but not confined to – the Mana-Angwa area at the confluence of the Angwa and Maura Rivers (pictured below), which currently has potential as a local tourism destination.



- The associated aesthetic and disruptive impacts are likely to affect sport hunting operations across significant portions of their concessions.
- Similar considerations are likely to affect wildlife densities in the area, and to impact on the earning capacity both of safari operators and of rural communities benefitting from wildlife utilisation schemes.
- Potentially adverse impacts on river flow and flood regimes
- Potentially adverse impacts on the habitat of the African Pitta (pictured below left) – a bird species found in this area and is a major attraction for special interest tourism during the rainy season.



Photo: Celeste von Charmier



Photo: Dick Pitsoh

- Potentially adverse impacts on Jurassic fossil sites in riverbeds and their surroundings (pictured above right). These are of archaeological importance significant to Zimbabwe's National Heritage (National Museums & Monuments), but also have potential importance for special interest tourism
- Potential for illegal hunting by mining company staff

The Zambezi Society further insisted that a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) should be structured and implemented with appropriate stakeholder consultation, and that the Zimbabwe Environmental Management Agency (EMA) should immediately prohibit any further mining activity (preliminary or otherwise) until a full EIA was carried out.

Mining ban in areas held by National Parks announced

In early Sept 2020, reacting to public outrage and a legal challenge against proposed coal mining within the Hwange National Park, the Zimbabwe government announced that "*mining on all areas held by National Parks is banned*". While this was welcomed, we still, in early 2021, await the formal enactment of the legislation

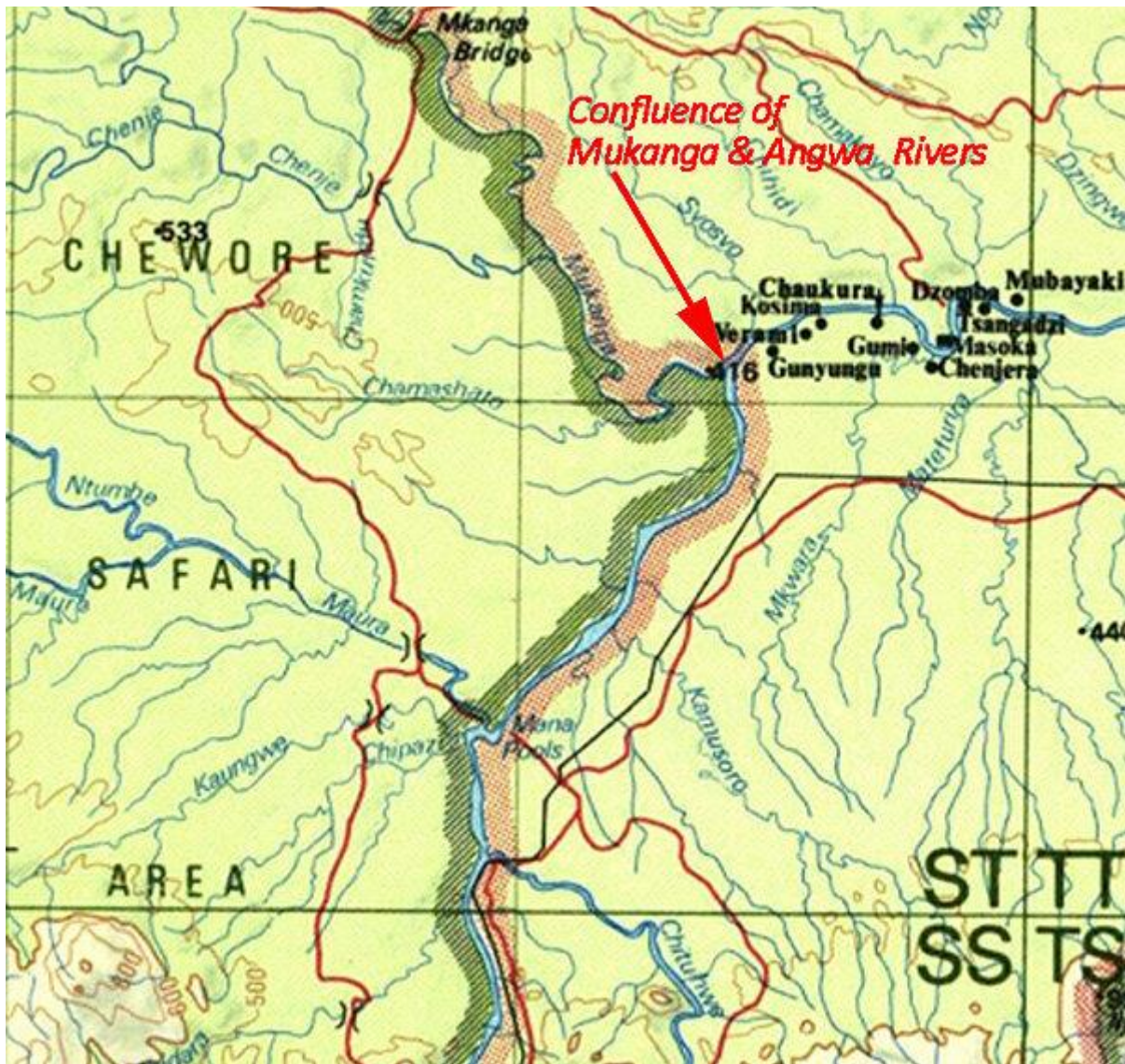
The announcement of the ban included all riverbed and alluvial mining, but specifically excluded the Save and Angwa rivers where "*desiltation will be allowed under very strict conditions*".

As a result of this new development, The Zambezi Valley Conservation Network (ZVCN) drew the attention of lawyers from the [Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association \(ZELA\)](#), to the situation occurring along the Angwa River on the boundary of the Chewore Safari Area., and, in March 2021, hosted a meeting between the mining company, stakeholders and the ZELA legal team.

The meeting revealed two significant changes to the "Mining" project as described in the original Falvect prospectus.

1. The project was now being described as a "**De-Siltation**" exercise (combined with its original mining objectives).
2. The area of operation of this desiltation and mining project was now described as only taking place from the junction of the Mukanga (Mkanga) and Angwa Rivers downstream to

the main Angwa Bridge (see map below) i.e. excluding the section of the Angwa River that forms the eastern boundary of the Chewore Safari Area.



The meeting also revealed that the legislative changes regarding the banning of mining in areas held by National Parks had not yet been gazetted by the Zimbabwe government, nor had the issue of “de-siltation being allowed under very strict conditions” been clarified. Since the EIA for this project was not yet complete, stakeholders were invited to provide further, more detailed inputs which would be incorporated into the final document.

On 15 March 2021, The Zambezi Society submitted additional comments for the EIA, (coping the document to EMA - Zimbabwe’s Environmental Management Authority), seeking clarification about the anomalies of de-siltation versus mining as well as the change in area of operation. We also outlined a further 10 detailed concerns regarding the proposed activities of the Angwa De-siltation/Mining exercise, as described during the stakeholder meeting.

Read our submission as a PDF here: [Angwa River De-siltation-Mining - Zambezi Society submission for the EIA, March 2021](#)

We now await official confirmation of the mining ban, and the completion of the EIA process.

Please help us to strengthen law-enforcement in the Angwa area

The Zambezi Society, with the help of ZVCN is now seeking funding for relevant stakeholders to collaborate in strengthening law-enforcement activities in the area of the Angwa River to ensure that impacts of any de-siltation or mining activities are kept to a minimum, and that the section of the river which borders on the Chewore Safari Area remains untouched.

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