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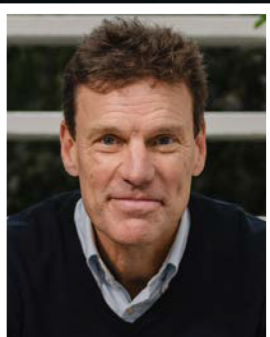
BIPARTISAN EDITORIAL

AN URGENT BIPARTISAN
STEP TO SECURE AMERICA'S
NATIONAL SECURITY

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POLICY IN INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION

NATURE
CONSERVATION
STRENGTHENS
U.S. SECURITY



PARTNER EDITORIAL

Nature Conservation in Africa Strengthens U.S. Security

By Jamie McCallum, UK and EU Director, and Lilian Spijkerman, Chief Development Officer, Peace Parks Foundation

Widespread research shows that transnational crime syndicates conducting natural resource crime in Africa are often linked to the narcotics trade, human trafficking, and arms smuggling.

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ABOVE: Limpopo National Park. Photo credit: Peace Parks Foundation.

These activities pose national security risks to the United States and its interests globally. Investigations and prosecutions over the past decade, carried out by the Department of Justice, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, reinforce this “product” convergence and global reach.

From wildlife poaching to terrorism

These criminal activities also feed money laundering, corruption, and even terrorism. In 2024, Simon E.V., or “Navara,” was sentenced to 27 years in prison for his role in leading a rhino crime syndicate.

The Mozambican court found him guilty of crimes including money laundering and financing terrorism. Just as blood diamonds once fueled conflict, illegal timber trafficking, often controlled by Asian organized crime groups, is now generating millions of dollars a month for extremist groups.

Undermining the global financial system

Nearly US\$150 billion flows annually through illicit money-laundering channels, including the “flying money” system from East Asia. These networks facilitate the illegal wildlife and timber trade alongside other forms of organized crime. Their reach spans supply, transit, and demand countries,

undermining financial systems, enabling corruption and espionage, reducing the efficacy of sanctions, and increasing institutional risk across borders.

Two paths: fragility or resilience

These threats flourish where the rule of law is weak, security vacuums exist, and poverty is entrenched, deepening a cycle in which constrained livelihoods increase pressure on natural resources, eroding ecosystems and economic opportunity. This perpetuates conflict over access to resources and benefit sharing, leading to human-wildlife conflict and person-to-person conflict. When resource governance is

“ Nearly US\$150 billion flows annually through illicit money-laundering channels (....) These networks facilitate the illegal wildlife and timber trade alongside other forms of organized crime.

Jamie McCallum is Director for UK and EU at Peace Parks Foundation. He is a transboundary conservation professional and nature risk/security expert with over 25 years of experience in the field. With Peace Parks, Jamie raised funds from the Postcode Lottery for a Wide Area Surveillance System (WASS) in Kruger National Park and is Chair of the Universal Ranger Support Alliance (URSA). He previously worked at International Management Group (IMG) and ran a management consultancy in the events/media sector for international clients.

Lilian Spijkerman is Peace Parks Chief Development Officer with over 25 years of experience in institution building, fundraising and strategy development bridging the worlds of people and nature. Since joining Peace Parks Foundation in 2022, Lilian has focused on scaling the organisation's impact by connecting tangible conservation outcomes achieved at the frontlines of conservation with global impact funders and strategic partners.



based on exclusion and coercion, conflict risks rise and can become embedded, reinforcing wider patterns of poverty, insecurity, and instability. In this environment organized criminal networks or malign state actors can take hold.

It is possible to reverse this cycle by enabling transparent and prudent management of natural resources. By investing in healthy ecosystems and diversified livelihoods, we can create the foundation for resilience, prosperity, nutrition, and long-term wellbeing. The resulting environmental stability supports broader income opportunities, including tourism. When rooted

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in a shared vision with local communities, this approach can and has transformed former poachers into rhino guardians, or advocates for conservation, inspiring future generations to protect their natural resources.

A cause for optimism

By supporting trusted nature conservation partners in origin countries, the United States is already contributing to peace, stability, and its own national interests. Peace Parks Foundation is one such partner. It works across ten countries in southern Africa, partnering with governments to manage and restore large, cross-border landscapes. For nearly 30

years, this work has helped rebuild wildlife populations, support local livelihoods, and reduce pressure on land and resources – contributing to greater stability in border areas and remote regions where economic opportunity and security are closely linked. By 2050, Peace Parks aims to secure just under 380,000 square miles of functional transboundary landscapes – about the size of Texas and California combined.

Across these landscapes, hundreds of thousands of people live in and around protected areas, often relying directly on land and natural resources for their livelihoods. Where opportunities are limited and pressures on land are high, the risk of conflict, resource depletion, and instability increases. By

ABOVE: Ranger Patrol, Limpopo National Park. Photo credit: Peace Parks Foundation.



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In it for the long haul

Working at landscape scale demands long-term commitment and an approach grounded in a deep understanding of what motivates and moves people. Both people and nature possess remarkable adaptive capacity that can be mobilized, but reaching true tipping points takes time. Peace Parks' long-term park agreements of over 20 years enable it to withstand political instability, drought, unrest, and other external shocks that might arise on that journey.

Long-term governance

Long-term success depends on stable, inclusive governance.

Peace Parks' co-management model implemented in Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe brings governments, communities, and the private sector together to manage protected areas through independent structures. These provide continuity, financial oversight, and shared decision-making – reducing reliance on short-term projects and strengthening local capacity over time.

Reaching people

Peace Parks supports more than 2,000 jobs across southern Africa and reaches hundreds of thousands of people through its community programs. This creates a direct stake in the long-term success of these landscapes. Where communities benefit from conservation-linked livelihoods and services, pressure on land decreases, and the space for criminal activity narrows. This in turn means that peace and stability – both local and regional – can be maintained at a fraction of the cost of more resource-intensive interventions.

Strengthening the rule of law and capacity across landscapes

Peace Parks' Combatting Wildlife Crime Program operates not as a short-term poaching response, but as an institution-building, rule-of-law program embedded in conservation landscapes. It is helping shift enforcement from isolated, reactive interventions towards a coordinated, intelligence-led system capable of disrupting organized crime at multiple points along the illegal supply chain, in line with the mandate of U.S. Executive Order 13773.

By professionalizing ranger and environmental-police forces, deploying advanced surveillance and detection technologies, and supporting forensics, investigations, and prosecutions, Peace Parks has materially reduced poaching pressure and constrained the operating space of syndicated criminal networks who target hardwood timber, rhino, elephant, and lion.

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LEFT: Conservation Agriculture, Limpopo National Park. Photo credit: Peace Parks Foundation.

Intelligence sharing fusion centers enable cross-sectoral collaboration, financial investigations, and targeted enforcement, effectively reducing South Africa's role as a wildlife crime transit hub. With U.S. government support, including through the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, Peace Parks contributes to disrupting transnational syndicates and strengthening the capacity of law enforcement and judicial institutions.

Cross-border efforts to combat rhino poaching cannot succeed without parity in capacity on both sides of a border. Collaboration emerges naturally when all parties can act and respond equally effectively. Where capacity is absent on one side, cooperation

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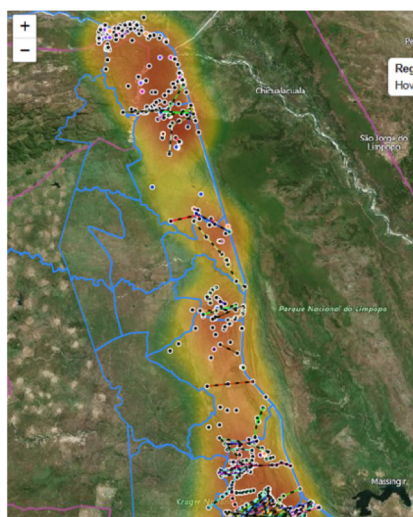
is simply not feasible. For this reason, prioritizing support for less well-resourced partners is essential in enabling meaningful cross-border action. Peace Parks has invested over US\$75 million on both sides of the South Africa-Mozambique border in law enforcement capability, alongside a comprehensive community

development approach. As a result, these transboundary conservation borders are amongst the most secure in Africa, while still allowing for the natural movement of wildlife - essential for ecosystem functioning.

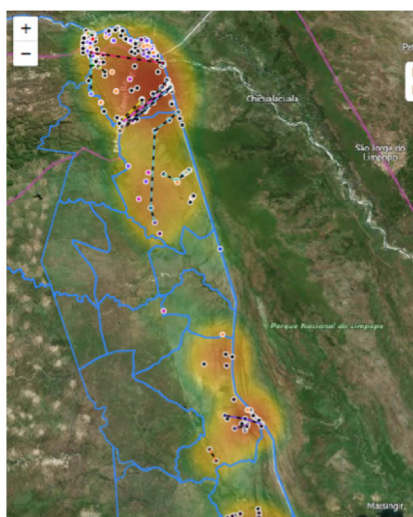
The impact is real

In 2018, rhino poaching was rampant in Kruger National Park. A total of 644 poaching incursions originating from Mozambique were recorded, and the park was losing more than one rhino per day. However, the impact of prudent investment into cross-border collaboration proved remarkable. Improved technology, data sharing, a more strategic approach, and increased capacity on the Mozambican side led to control of the situation as well as the spontaneous formation of ranger WhatsApp groups and

2018



2021



2023

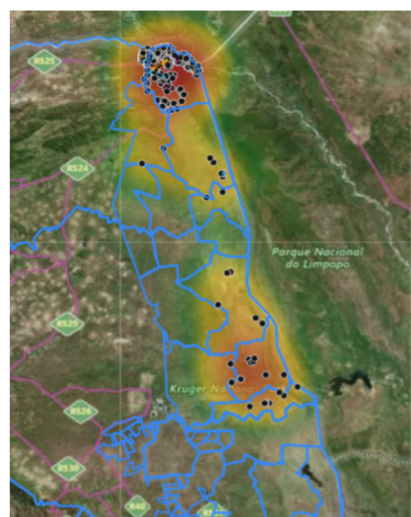


Figure 1: Since 2018, counter-poaching efforts have dramatically reduced illegal incursions along the South Africa-Mozambique border. The incursion rate dropped by 94% - from 644 incursions in 2018 to just 36 in 2023.

monthly cross-border meetings.

Within less than six years, the incursion rate dropped by 94% - from 644 incursions in 2018 to just 36 in 2023 (Fig 1). These results are supported by counter-trafficking work at airports. For example, Maputo International Airport was once a trafficking hotspot, and it is now of "least concern" thanks to provision and support for a K9 unit.

These impacts are tangible and measurable. However, the value of cross-border collaboration – which brings nations together and defuses situations that could easily escalate without deep, trust-based relationships – is far harder to quantify. While it may not be easily expressed in numbers, this outcome is no less real or significant.

These gains reflect not only improved detection and response, but the progressive strengthening of enforcement, investigative, and justice institutions that increase risk and reduce impunity for transnational criminal groups, while systematically unpicking illegal financial flows.

High impact, lower cost

Funded primarily through environmental budgets, these joint security systems now deliver wider public benefits – contributing to stability, safety, and state presence in remote border areas. Conservation investments can simultaneously strengthen ecological resilience, community confidence, and national sovereignty, reinforcing peace

rather than competing with it. And they are cost-effective; for every U.S. public dollar, Peace Parks Foundation brings two dollars in private philanthropy – providing value for both the U.S taxpayer and philanthropists.

Just the start

By reducing wildlife crime, strengthening governance, and supporting stable livelihoods, this approach contributes to regional stability and helps limit the ability of criminal networks to operate in remote border areas. These systems strengthen state presence, improve safety, and support economic opportunity, often at a lower cost than more resource-intensive interventions.

PARTNER HIGHLIGHT

About Peace Parks Foundation

Founded by President Nelson Mandela, Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands and Dr Anton Rupert in 1997, Peace Parks Foundation works at two scales: co-managing individual protected areas with governments and communities, and helping link these into larger, cross-border conservation systems known as transboundary landscapes. The protected areas are the building blocks – the landscapes are the vision.

Through integrated co-management agreements measured in decades rather than years, Peace Parks supports the restoration and professional management of protected areas while helping unlock the ecological functionality of larger landscapes. This approach combines conservation at scale with community development, law enforcement support, land-use planning and governance systems designed to strengthen ecological resilience, economic opportunity and regional stability.

Peace Parks' work is grounded in long-term partnerships, shared governance and adaptive learning across some of southern Africa's most complex and globally significant landscapes.

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