

King of the Delta



Photograph by Roy Toft, National Geographic

A male [African lion](#) wanders [Botswana's](#) Okavango Delta, part of a new international conservation area that will be the world's largest, organizers announced earlier this month.

Spanning an area of Africa almost the size of [Italy](#), the [Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area](#), or KAZA, will encompass 36 national parks, game reserves, wildlife-management areas, and tourism areas, according to WWF, a conservation organization offering both technical and financial support to the initiative.

In 2011 presidents of five African nations—[Angola](#), Botswana, [Namibia](#), [Zambia](#), and [Zimbabwe](#)—signed a treaty establishing the huge protected region, which has been in the works for several years. (See "[Five-Country Conservation Area Would Aid Africa's Largest Elephant Herd.](#)")

"It's quite unique, in that you have five countries coming together with a shared vision, and it's a vision based on conservation," said Lisa Steel, director of [WWF's Namibia Program](#).

"The intent is to make it a leading conservation area and tourist destination in the region ... where communities are the main beneficiaries."

Conservationist Brian John Huntley, of the University of Cape Town in South Africa, has worked in Angola for three decades. He said KAZA has "noble intentions."

However, such transfrontier conservation areas have previously "been launched with great fanfare [and] political posturing at the level of presidents and prime ministers, and even though they've attracted a considerable amount of donor funding, very few—if any—have actually succeeded in their goals, simply because of lack of capacity in various countries," Huntley said.

"Like many other grandiose schemes foisted upon Africa, KAZA is an invention of the imagination of a few conservationists who believe that big is beautiful, have little experience of institutional realities or responsibilities, but enjoy the fun of grand design."

—*Christine Dell'Amore*

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