

**Tourism for Tomorrow Awards
Environment Finalist 2014**



Great Plains Conservation, USA/Botswana/Kenya

The National Parks of Kenya and Botswana are well known for their conservation achievements, but it is the unprotected landscapes bordering these that are often in need of urgent protection. And this protection often comes in the form of conservancies, of which Great Plains Conservation is both a proud creator and protector.

Great Plains Conservation is clear about its remit: The natural resources of Botswana and Kenya belong to their people. And in order to keep it this way, Great Plains Conservation strives to secure African landscapes of a scale large enough to also protect its resident and seasonal wildlife populations. It selects key areas under threat, for example where migratory routes must be kept open, and acquires the rights to convert that land to protected areas with economic benefits. It now leases and operates low impact safari camps and conservation activities on half a million acres and hopes to expand to five million in the next ten years.

This form of stewardship revolves around a transparent core at Great Plains Conservation, with environmental audits, operating manuals, methods and revenues streams available for all to see and, if necessary, replicate. Because, in their own words, "If we get it right, we want to enable people to follow in our footsteps". And their environmental model is certainly worthy of emulation. For example, they perform an environmental audit for every new development, assessing fuel and noise pollution, damage or stress to wildlife, waste, resource usage and so on. The proof is in the product, and recent assessments showed those particular camps to have zero impact on the environment.

For a company so in touch with nature and wilderness, its commitment to sustainable design and technology may not be obvious to guests. However, technology plays a big part in what they do, such as the above ground grey/black water filtration systems, UV water purification to eliminate plastic water bottles, worm farms, solar farms and bio-gas plants.

This zero impact extends to transport too, as they offer guests walking, horseback and canoe safaris. And of course, all these low impact activities are interlinked with the local communities because, these Great Plains belong to the people. The company supports many local education programmes, including one in anthropology and video, environmental days and the marketing and sales of artisan crafts. They also contributed to the Maasai Mara Predator Compensation Scheme to ameliorate conflict between Maasai and lions.

The name Great Plains Conservation was well chosen, because this is an organisation that sees the big picture. Not just the big five, or the ensuing big dollars. But of what Botswana and Kenya will be in years to come. For example, they instigated 'big' donations to Big Cat conservation through their joint non-profit with National Geographic, called The Big Cats Initiative. And they played a significant role in the decision to ban all hunting in Botswana. A pioneering change wasn't just big. It was, quite simply, great conservation.

GREAT PLAINS
CONSERVING AND EXPANDING NATURAL HABITATS