



WILDLIFE TOURISM COLLEGE OF MAASAI MARA

REIMAGINING THE LINK BETWEEN EDUCATION, SUSTAINABLE TOURISM,
AND JOB CREATION FOR COMMUNITY MANAGED WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Project Overview

The Mara-Serengeti Ecosystem is one of the last major wildlife refuges on earth, containing 40% of Africa's remaining larger mammals. It is also home to the Maasai people – traditional pastoralists who proudly preserve their strong culture and identity. Over the last decade, progressive community-based models of conservation, ones that safeguard wildlife habitat while offering a financial lifeline for thousands of marginalized people, have been adopted in the unprotected area surrounding Kenya's Maasai Mara National Reserve (MMNR).

Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association (MMWCA) is a membership organization for these 15 such conservancies. Since its founding in 2013, land under conservation has doubled to 1,420 Km², an area almost equal to that of MMNR. But as wildlife populations begin to recover, human population growth in the Mara - among the highest on the planet – presents a challenge to which dual-use conservancies, where both exist together in harmony, are the only solution.

MMWCA is currently working to secure and strengthen one such dual-use conservancy, Pardamat Conservation Area (PCA), which is centrally located in the region and a key migratory route for animals. Due to the effects of decades of land separation, fencing, and human-wildlife conflict, PCA has reached a tipping point for the stability of the entire greater Mara. The success of PCA hinges on sustainable socioeconomic growth through education, employment, and for-profit tourism, all which the area lacks significantly. Without tackling job creation alongside wildlife conservation efforts, traditional forms of support will be unsustainable in the long term.

In 2018, the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation and Education (SIU) and Basecamp Explorer Foundation, with MMWCA as implementing partner, launched the Mara Vocational Training Program. It is a four-year certification program that brings together 7 existing learning centers, including the Koyaiki Guide School, to provide critical skill gap training to 1,800 students. The first-of-its-kind initiative is meant as a catalyst for the development of a centralized tourism, vocational education, research, and community capacity building hub within the region: The Wildlife Tourism College of Maasai Mara (WTC) (*name to be approved*).

The WTC campus, by building on and expanding the success of the Koyaiki Guide School, merges a dynamic teaching College – targeting the 80% of unemployed and underemployed Maasai youth ages 18-35 – with an educational tourism (EduTourism) camp for international students and volunteers. It also includes facilities for both environmental and social research, as well as community capacity building projects, with a focus on women's empowerment. These efforts currently occur only in small scale, decentralized stakeholder engagements which lack global partnerships, oversight, and information sharing, all which impede scalable outcomes. The WTC, however, embodies a cohesive strategy that is required at this critical moment in the Mara.

The entire campus is designed to be programatically interrelated. The College provides high-quality equipment, working facilities, and on-site institutional support for visiting school groups and professionals. The EduTourism camp offers hospitality internships, cultural immersion, and high-level exposure for local students that is essential to their success in securing quality employment. Social researchers gain unique access to the local community, and environmental researchers sit in the center of the ecosystem, among some of the most threatened animal populations in the world. Community members and stakeholder organizations are able to

utilize the hub as a launchpad for entrepreneurial projects, international networking, and further training exercises.

It is also designed to be financially self-sustaining, benefiting both enrolled students and members of PCA. The EduTourism camp will split all profits between the College for operating expenses and PCA landowners to lease their land. Increasing land under lease in Pardamat opens up additional wildlife corridors and improves wildlife densities on which successful tourism relies. Increasing the number and success of high-end tourism camps in PCA gives graduates of the College – who have been trained in safari guiding, hospitality management, and wildlife and environmental technologies – additional employment opportunities while further supporting land lease payments. This mutually reinforcing model removes long-term reliance on grant funding for the future of PCA while strengthening support for conservation.

“The most rewarding thing is seeing my people, local people, getting benefits from wildlife and tourism. People are starting to realize that animals are good and can be economic drivers for the community.”

– Simon, recent graduate of Koyaiki Guide School

Background & Program

Pardamat Conservation Area (PCA)

Pardamat Conservation Area (PCA) is premised on a dual-use conservation model, where the community’s 850 landowners have legally registered their 64,220 acres of land as a wildlife conservation area while remaining to live and work on it. It is adjacent to Naboisho, Olkinyei, Lemek and Mara North Conservancies, and serves as a migration route from the Loita plains to the Mara Triangle and on to the Maasai Mara National Reserve. ***This critical, central location makes its success integral to the survival of the entire Greater Mara ecosystem.***

PCA’s lush, hilly, and forested terrain is ripe for both wildlife and tourism, but unlike other Mara Conservancies and due to its heavily fenced settlements and overgrazed land, the area lacks a critical mass of wildlife and has no tourist camps. This hinders PCA’s ability to be financially sustainable through bed night fees, the model seen elsewhere in the Conservancies.

By opening up corridors, MMWCA can ensure that wildlife – which was once plentiful – can thrive in PCA. The location and natural resources can support elephants, lions, leopards, buffalos, cheetahs, giraffes, and many others. The hills are also home to a small population of wild dogs, one that has been recently reestablished after 30 years in virtual extinction.

Due to its critical importance, MMWCA has been and is continuing to secure short-term grant funding to pay landowners to lease their land, impose cattle herd limits, and provide predator proof bomas - removing fences, restoring grass health, and guarding against human-wildlife conflict in the process. This amounts to 15,000 acres, with Phase 3 and 4 designated but yet to be secured.

Now, a holistic approach is needed to support the opening of PCA, which will allow wildlife to return and increase, while engaging with for-profit sustainable tourist investors to build in PCA (Appendix A). This is the only way to ensure PCA is financially sustainable in the long-term.

Koyaiki Guide School (KGS)

In 2005, the Koyaiki Guide School (KGS) was established in Naibosho Conservancy as a community empowerment facility to improve the standards of safari guiding and offer economic opportunity to local Maasai. Since then, 331 youth have received the Kenya Professional Safari Guide Bronze certificate. At its highest, 80% of the guides found employment upon graduation, though the rate is currently 63% due to market saturation of this limited certification.

Despite KGS's successes, the hiring needs of tourist operators in the 15 Conservancies and Maasai Mara National Reserve are evolving, with more citing the need for comprehensive hospitality training as well as additional language and cultural training. It is critical for local Maasai to continue to meet the demands of this industry, as it represents as much as 80% of total revenue for the county. This includes being able to adapt quickly to changing demographics and tastes of international guests. For example, Chinese tourism in the Maasai Mara has increased by 11% in 2017 alone.

Relocating and expanding KGS as the Wildlife Tourism College of Maasai Mara (WTC) anchors the broader hub. In consultation with Tourism Partners and Conservancy leaders on employment skill gaps, KGS has designed three new degree programs in addition to Safari guiding, including Hospitality Management, Wildlife Technician, and Environmental Technologies. KGS and MMWCA have partnered with the Maasai Mara University to ensure proper accreditation through the Kenyan Government Authority. A strategic partnership has also been formed with the South African Wildlife College, a leading University in Africa located within the Kruger National Park, to support an innovative international training opportunity for gifted students and teachers.

The original Board of Trustees for KGS, which remained unchanged for over a decade, is currently being restructured with a focus on bringing additional women and representatives from the tourism industry and local government.

A new Principle has been hired, who brings 15+ years of working experience in the Mara across areas of community development, species ecology, and sustainable tourism. In his last role as Assistant Lecturer at Massai Mara University, he taught undergraduate students in subjects spanning wildlife tourism and natural resource management.

EduTourism

Education Tourism is one of the fastest growing markets in Global Tourism and one that has been largely unexplored on a coordinated, large-scale venture in the Maasai Mara. The market includes high-school and university student travel, young adult and mid-career volunteers, academic researchers, and corporate retreats. As these groups vary in budget and length of stay, while all requiring access to large meeting rooms, computer facilities, and other workspaces, a versatile program is needed to adequately accommodate them outside of existing Mara infrastructure.

EduTourism is rooted in cross-cultural exchange, with an emphasis on applied learning, language immersion, and practical experience. Placing the camp within the larger WTC Hub allows for genuine and meaningful interaction with Maasai students, faculty, researchers, and the local community. Within the first three years of operation, guests of the EduTourism camp will also have access to certain parts of Naboisho Conservancy.

A leader in the EduTourism industry with both local and international experience has been selected to manage the camp.

“Guiding is a science-oriented career. And how to handle different races of people from the west or Asia, so that gave me a background on how people view different things. The School introduced me to the world.”

Research

The Maasai Mara has long been a source of vital environmental research relating to wildlife movement, endangered populations, and climate change. With the growth of the community conservancy model, there is also a need to expand social research and impact assessments from Anthropologists.

Currently, research in the Mara is centrally uncoordinated, leaving it difficult for all stakeholders to benefit from this important data. Managing research is within MMWCA’s mandate but they currently lack the capacity to do so at their headquarters, making the Hub an important launchpad for such activities. Species specific initiatives currently underway in the Mara, including the Mara Predator Hub and the Mara Elephant Project, will have dedicated access to the facilities.

A Mara Research Council has been created to facilitate this. They have established partnerships with two leading U.S. Institutions to date, the Smithsonian Institution and Colorado State University, and are actively pursuing additional partnership in Europe.

Community Capacity Building

Phase 4 of securing Pardamat includes the area's most populated areas – settlements including Aitong, Olemoncho, Endoinyo Erinka, Mbitin, and Olesere (Appendix B). Improving infrastructure to meet the basic needs of residents in these areas – including access to clean drinking water, solar electricity, proper sewage, improvements in health, and basic education – is a key challenge facing PCA.

Many organizations are currently coordinating livelihood improvement projects, including Maa Trust and the Mara Training Center. This includes beadwork, honey, cattle management, and others, as in order for PCA to thrive, a market for livestock products must be established as well as successful income-generating cultural manyattas.

The WTC Hub will provide a functional workspace for these organizations to plan & execute projects while serving as a resource for these community members to gain regular access to ongoing activities.

Hub Location & Design

The selected site for the WTC Hub sits on an 150 acre plot already designated by PCA for community projects. It is in an easily accessible location with plans to build a new access road and airstrip. The total area of the hub is approximately 1,000m², which includes close to 100 beds for students, visiting professors, and researchers.

A leading pro-bono architect has designed the WTC Hub's facilities to mimic its interdependent program, while also focusing on the highest standards of sustainability (Appendix C). This includes recycling existing KGS equipment, using bricks from a local social enterprise, a solar power system, water tanks for rainwater harvesting, and a garden. The hub will have a 150m panorama view of PCA and the neighboring conservancies.

High quality technology and connectivity will also be a priority to ensure students and visitors have the IT facilities, reliable internet, and equipment needed.

A trusted professional with extensive experience in the region has completed a construction assessment based on the architect's plans.

Key Milestones

- ❖ Fundraising Activities: Spring/Summer 2019
- ❖ Construction: Fall 2019-2020
- ❖ Land-Lease payments for PCA Phase 3: 2020
- ❖ Opening WTC Hub, College & EduTourism Camp: January 2021 student intake
- ❖ Inaugural International Exchange: 2021
- ❖ Additional short-course offerings: 2022
- ❖ Development of high-end sustainable tourism camps: to be decided within the coming months

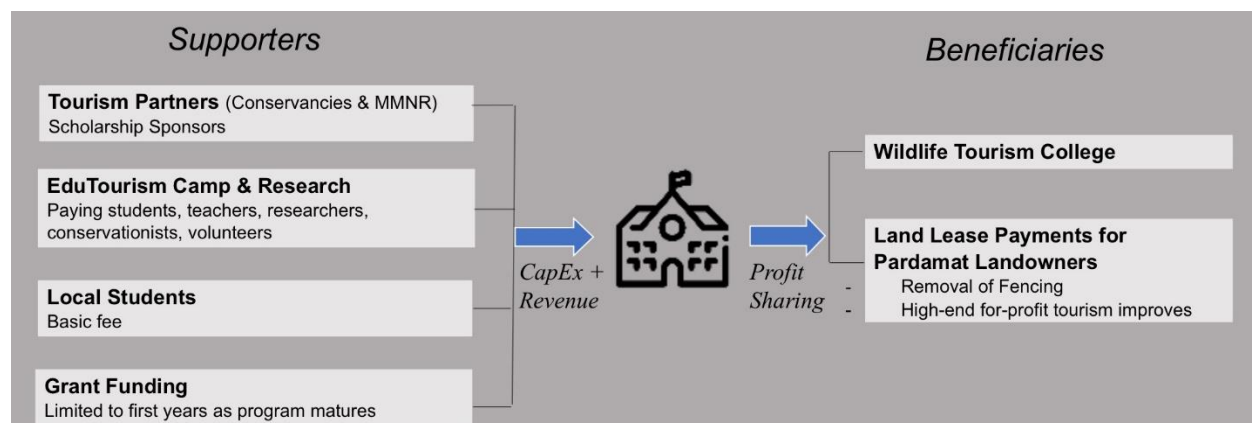
Budget

CapEx: USD \$1.3 Million, of which \$300,000 has been secured. This is based on the first estimate by trusted and experienced local contractor David Sabora, and includes construction of the 12km access road from Aitong.

OpEx: Average \$200,000 annually, which will be secured by MMWCA and Basecamp Explorer Foundation (BCEF).

Financial Sustainability and Scalability

The project's concept is centered on a sustainable finance model. As the success of the EduTourism component increases, the benefits to students and the community increase. Operating expenses for the College are expected to be covered by profits and support from Tourism Partners following an initial 3-year scholarship grant period.



There are currently 12 regional wildlife conservancies associations within Kenya, which protect the interests of communities and commercial operations for over 700,000 people. There is extreme potential for this project to be seen as a key programmatic solution to community conservation throughout Kenya. **This includes the promotion of PCA as a successful dual-use conservancy model, one that can be replicated throughout East Africa as population growth and climate change continue to threaten conservation efforts.**

Due to international partnerships and growing trends in eco-tourism, the College and EduTourism partnership could also be recreated outside Kenya, particularly in developing regions with flourishing tourism industries like Latin America and Southeast Asia. Its green design, both in architecture and material use, can be utilized in camps and other venues throughout the world.

Stakeholders & Partners

Tourism Industry:

The tourism sector is the largest generator of revenue in the Greater Mara, with approximately 170 tourist facilities containing over 4,000 beds and employing an estimated 2,000 employees. This is a crucial source of

employment and income for local individuals. This program will work closely with these employers to adapt to demand and evaluate success of graduates employed, openings, with a special emphasis on promotion to management and other leadership positions.

International Partnerships:

Strategic partnerships have been built with The South African Wildlife College and the Norwegian Institute of Life Sciences on curriculum development and exchange programs.

Research partnerships have been built with the Smithsonian Institution and Colorado State University, with additional anticipated.

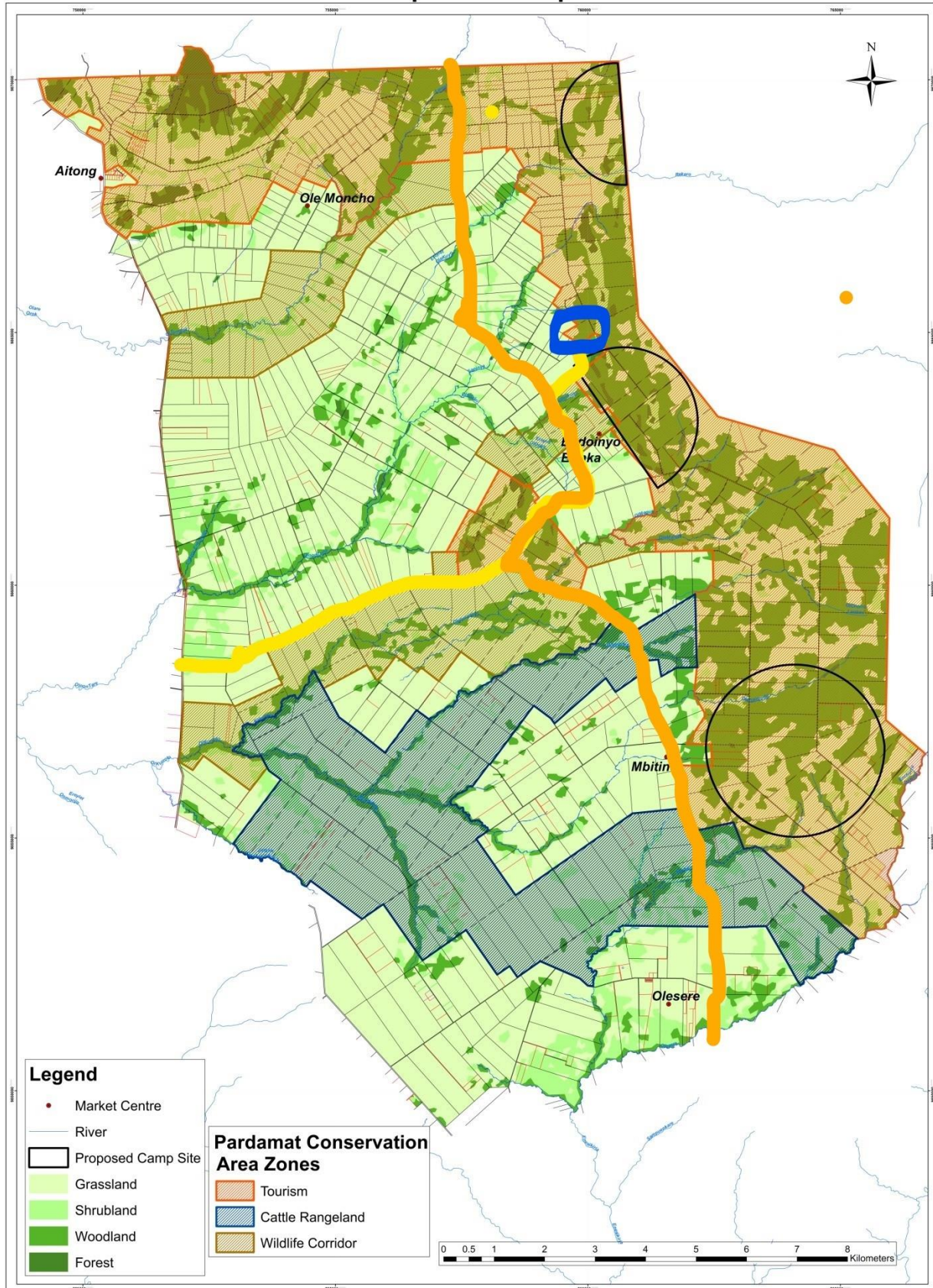
Local Partnerships:

There are also numerous local stakeholder organizations that will be involved in the project including Maasai Mara University, Maa Trust, Mara Training Center, Karen Blixen Cooking School, Narok West Training Institute, Mara Discovery Center, African Impact, the Mara Predator Hub, and the Mara Elephant Project.

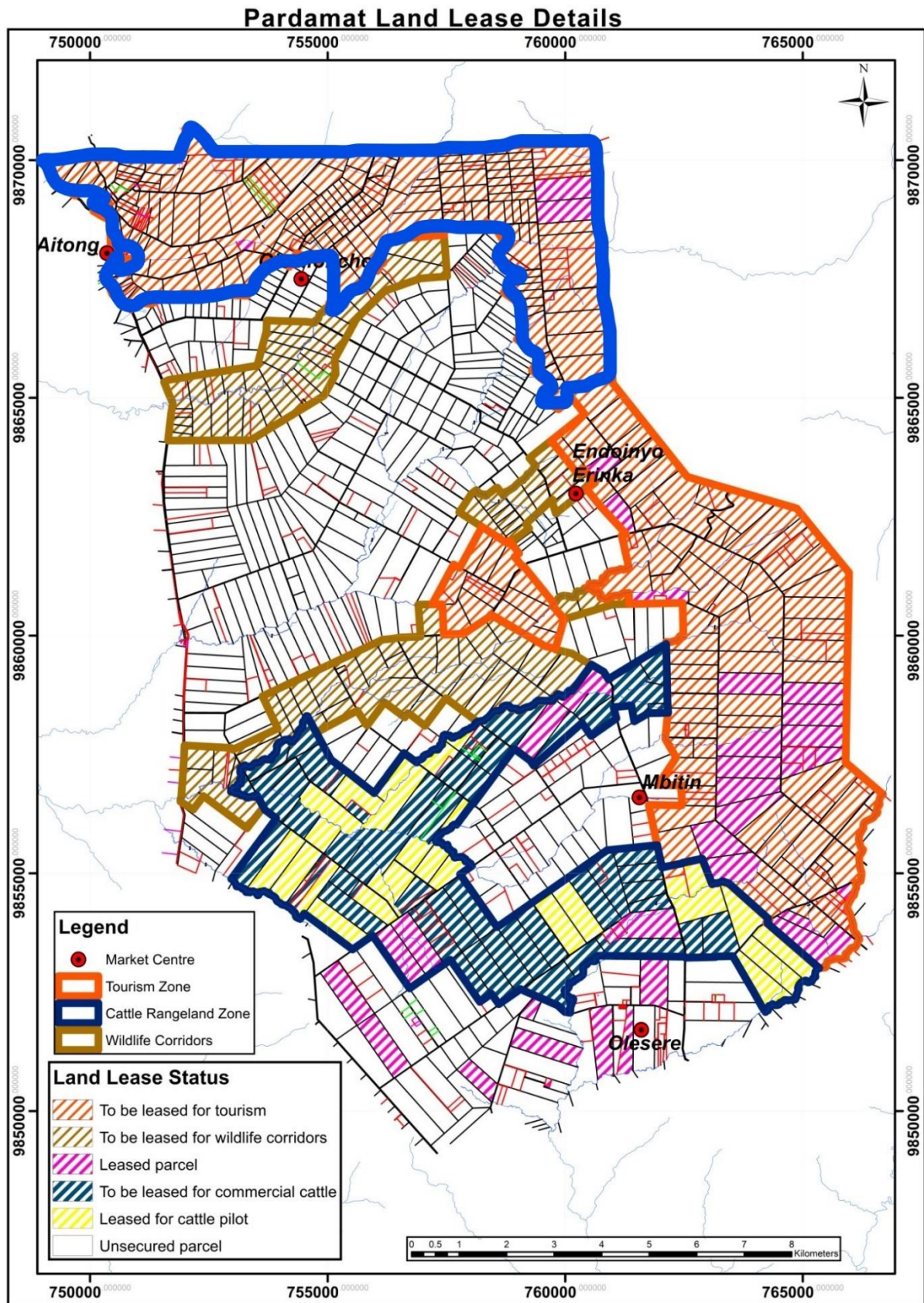
Basecamp Explorer Foundation (BCEF), which has been completing community projects for 20 years, has been mandated by MMWCA and its Partners KGS and PCA to fundraise for the capital investment required for this partnership. MMWCA will be the implementing & reporting partner of the grant to BCEF.

Appendix A: Map of Pardamat Conservation Area (PCA) with proposed camp locations

Pardamat Proposed Camp Sites



Appendix B: Map of Pardamat Conservation Area (PCA) with urban areas



Appendix C: Design sketch of WTC Campus

