

Zoological Society: Commercial road would disrupt world's greatest migration

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The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) are requesting that the Government of Tanzania reconsider the proposed construction of a commercial road through the world's best known wildlife sanctuary—Serengeti National Park—and recommend that alternative routes be used that can meet the transportation needs of the region without disrupting the greatest remaining migration of large land animals in the world.

At issue is the proposed Arusha-Musoma highway, slated for construction in 2012. According to the proposed route, the highway would bisect the northern portion of the park and jeopardize the annual migration of wildebeest and zebra, a spectacle comprising nearly two million animals. The Serengeti is a [World Heritage Site](#) and is universally regarded as one of world's great natural wonders.

"The Serengeti is the site of one of the last great ungulate migrations left on Earth, the pre-eminent symbol of wild nature for millions of visitors and TV viewers, and a hugely important source of income for the people of Tanzania through ecotourism," said Dr. James Deutsch, Executive Director of the WCS's Africa Program. "To threaten this natural marvel with a road would be a tragedy. We implore the Tanzanian government—known around the world for its commitment to conservation—to reconsider this proposal and explore other options."

"A commercial road would not only result in wildlife collisions and human injuries, but would serve to fragment the landscape and

undermine the ecosystem in a variety of ways," said Prof. Jonathan Baillie, Director of Conservation Programmes for ZSL, which partners with WCS in the long-term monitoring and conservation of Serengeti's cheetahs. "To diminish this natural wonder would be a terrible loss for Tanzania and all future generations."

WCS and ZSL are two of numerous organizations—including the Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS)—in growing opposition to the proposed road.

Supporters of the proposed road point to the need for linkage between the districts of Serengeti and Loliondo and the national road system, as well as a need for increased transport infrastructure between the coast and the hinterland. However it is possible to achieve these objectives without bisecting the Serengeti.

Conservationists predict that building the road through Serengeti National Park would not only result in a catastrophic decrease in numbers of wildebeest, zebra, and other species as a result of the interruption of the migration. It could also potentially cut Kenya's Masai Mara National Reserve off from the migration, jeopardizing that country's most important tourism destination.

WCS, ZSL, and other conservation groups acknowledge and support Tanzania's need for infrastructure development, specifically to benefit the country's industries and agricultural markets. An alternative southern route, they assert, would better meet these objectives, and provide more benefits for more people while maintaining the integrity of Tanzania's foremost wildlife attraction and the tourism dollars it generates.

"We recognize that there is an obvious need for infrastructure development in Tanzania," said Markus Borner, Africa Program Director for FZS which has worked in the Serengeti since the 1950s. "A

far better option than the current proposal is placing a road to the south of the park. Such a road would be both cheaper to construct and would serve a much larger number of people without interrupting the migration and jeopardizing the iconic status of the Serengeti National Park."

Provided by Zoological Society of London

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