

Scientists urge halt to road through Serengeti

September 17 2010, by Lin Edwards



Image credit: Nature, doi:10.1038/467272a

(PhysOrg.com) -- Scientists have appealed for a halt to plans to build a road through the Serengeti National Park in Tanzania in 2012, saying it will be an environmental disaster.

A group of 27 scientists, reporting in the journal *Nature* yesterday, say the proposed two-lane 50 km [road](#) through the northern end of the [park](#) would curtail the migration of wildebeest, and according to their computer simulation, this would cause a collapse in what is the largest

migratory system on Earth, and could lead to a drop in the wildebeest population from 1.3 million to under 300,000. It would also affect the annual migration of 1.5 million zebras in the park, and have knock-on effects on the [grasslands](#) ecosystems.

The road would be used by vehicles carrying goods, including herbicides, pesticides, and seeds of potentially [invasive species](#). The scientists say it would be a source of chemical pollutants such as lead and other [heavy metals](#) that would flow into waterways in high concentrations in the rainy season. They say a road dividing the park would also make life easier for poachers, and would increase human conflicts with the animals in the park.

The planned road is to form part of links between the coast of Tanzania and Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Lake Victoria, and the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#), and there has been growing pressure to build a road to facilitate commerce and trade in the region.

The scientists, led by Andrew Dobson of Princeton University, propose an alternative route running to the south of the park, which they say will bring greater benefits to the environment and development without threatening the wildebeest population or the tourist industry, which supports thousands of people. If built in the south the road would need to be longer, but would be less expensive, and would also serve almost five times as many people as the planned route through the north.

Nature cautioned in an editorial that the current proposal is for a gravel road and the predictions are based on a fenced tarmac road, which the scientists say would probably follow. The journal also cautioned that criticisms from foreigners could have a negative backlash or cause entrenchment of attitudes.

More information: Road will ruin Serengeti, *Nature* 467, 272-273 (16

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