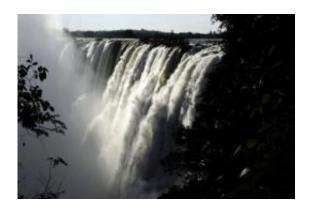


Giant Okavango-Zambezi conservation zone launched in Africa

August 18 2011



A picture taken in April 2011 shows Victoria Falls. Five southern African countries signed an agreement Thursday to create a giant conservation zone in the Okavango and Zambezi river basins that stretches over an area half the size of France.

Five southern African countries signed an agreement Thursday to create a giant conservation zone in the Okavango and Zambezi river basins that stretches over an area half the size of France.

The "conservation and tourism area" will cover parts of Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe, linking 14 national parks and nature reserves, including world-famous Victoria Falls and the Okavango River delta.

Leaders said they hoped the agreement would protect the region's rich



biodiversity and give root to a thriving ecotourism industry.

"It's the largest protected tourism zone in the world," an official from the 15-nation Southern African Development Community said in announcing the deal at the regional bloc's summit in Angola.

The region is known for rare species including <u>cheetahs</u>, African wild dogs, black sable and rhinos. It is also home to some 250,000 elephants.

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