

# **Sate of Conservation Report of the World Natural Heritage Site, Simien Mountains National Park (Ethiopia)**



**Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA)**

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**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

## *Executive summary*

*This report presents the state of conservation of World Heritage property, the Simien Mountains National Park, in Ethiopia. It is briefly described the record of achievement in the context of decisions made during the 39th Session of the World Heritage Committee.*

*The Simien Mountains National Park, which is currently on the list of World Heritage in Danger, has made significant progress in addressing the major identified corrective measures related to increasing human populations and livestock numbers, road construction and declining the populations of Walia ibex, Ethiopian wolf and other key mammal species.*

*The state party, once addressing the boundary re-demarcation and legalization of the property, has given strong attention to reduce the grazing pressure of domestic stock through zoning scheme and voluntary relocation of the park inhabitant. The state party with the support of conservation partners has taken actions to systematically alleviate the various conservational challenges of the national park. Some of the corrective measures undertaken include revising the general management plan, development of tourism master plan, development of grazing reduction and alternative livelihood improvement strategies and its implementation, and addressing the relocation process of the Gich Communities from the park.*

*Efforts are under way to attract conservation partners to secure financial support for the implementation of alternative livelihoods (ALS) and the Grazing Pressure Reduction Strategies(GPRS) of the park. So far, African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) has entered in agreement to support these strategies. Besides, the German Government owned bank (KfW) has shown its commitment to allocate significant financial support to livelihood development interventions through its biodiversity conservation program. With the financial support of development partners like Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) and AWF the GPRS implementation has been started. Accordingly, workshops and public awareness raising activities regarding the GPRS document have been given for all relevant bodies. Implementation of the same has shown promising result in terms of improving the no grazing and limited grazing zones through effective patrolling and law enforcement activities by the park wardens.*

*The relocation process of 418 households of the park inhabitant has been finalized successfully with full participation and involvement of all relevant stakeholders. Government has taken great care to minimize the predictable negative impacts and attitudes associated with the relocation process. For the process, more than \$7.8 million have been allocated for cash compensation and prepared plots of land for each settler. Besides, the state party in collaboration with different conservation partners has been working on the required alternative livelihoods development interventions, social and infrastructural services development for the resellers.*

*Despite various financial and technical challenges, the state party has registered noticeable progress in reversing the deterioration of the important endemic species like Walia ibex and Ethiopian wolf through strengthening patrolling and strict law enforcement activities. The condition of the realignment of road and solving the associated trafficking problems on promising progress and integrated into this report.*

# **Report on the State of Conservation of the Simien Mountains National Park and Progress in the Implementation of Corrective Measures**

## **Part I- Identification of the Property**

**Name of World Heritage Property:** Simien Mountains National Park (SMNP)

**State Party:** Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority)

**Identification Number:** N 9

## **Part II- State of Conservation**

### **1. Introduction**

As to be recalled, the World Heritage Committee appreciated the progressive measures reported during the 32<sup>nd</sup>, 33<sup>rd</sup>, 34<sup>th</sup>, 35<sup>th</sup>, 36<sup>th</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup>, 38<sup>th</sup> and 39<sup>th</sup> sessions. Moreover, the committee in its Decisions **33 Com 7A.9** and **39 COM 7A.10** has also welcomed and congratulated the progressive measures achieved so far towards addressing the corrective measures identified earlier which encouraged the state party to work hard to attain the remaining bench marks.

Therefore, this report gives an emphasis to issues related to Decision 39 Com 7A.10 of the World Heritage Committee that requested the state party to work on various states of conservation aspects in the heritage property in question and to report on the implementation of the 38<sup>th</sup> and 39<sup>th</sup> session's recommendations, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 40<sup>th</sup> session in 2016.

### **2. Response to the World Heritage Committee's Decision 39 COM 7A.10**

Generally, the state party together with its conservation partners has achieved the following progressive measures:

## **2.1 Implementation of Grazing Pressure Reduction Strategy and Alternative Livelihoods**

### **2.1.1 Revising and Updating the Draft Grazing Pressure Reduction Strategy (GPRS)**

Overgrazing has been resulting in a deterioration of the quality of the grazing lands with an increase of unpalatable grasses. It has negative consequences on the vegetation cover and composition. Livestock has been in direct competition with *Walia ibex* and *Gelada* monkey for grazing areas, confining the Ibex to the steeper and less accessible areas, and has also negative impact on small mammal populations, which are the major food source for the Ethiopian wolf. Contact between wildlife and livestock also increases the risk of diseases transmission. Thus, the most pervasive activity and the greatest threat to the ecological integrity of the property was overgrazing as plenty of cattle, sheep, goats, donkeys and horses were herded throughout the Park. It is therefore strongly believed that livestock production practices in and around the Simien Mountains require urgent strategic interventions.

To this end, a draft 'Grazing Pressure Reduction Strategy Document' was developed in July 2007 by a consultant hired from Bahir Dar University under the contract by the then Amhara Regional State Parks Development and Protection Authority. The draft strategy document identified areas of interventions aimed at zonation of the park for different levels of grazing, limiting grazing rights, reducing animal numbers, improving animal health and engaging local communities. Unfortunately, the aforementioned document had a number of shortcomings. The strategic objectives set were too vague and did not take into account real and achievable solutions. The objectives also lacked verifiable and realistic targets for the grazing pressure reduction. The proposed resource uses were neither clearly explained nor spatially supported by maps. Furthermore, the draft grazing

reduction strategy document was not developed through close consultation with the local community, relevant stakeholders and partners, which made its implementation difficult.

The WHC, at its 37<sup>th</sup> session in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, encouraged the State Party to request international assistance from the World Heritage Fund to review the draft GPRS to identify priorities for immediate implementation as recommended by the 2009 monitoring mission. Following this, the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA) prepared a project proposal in collaboration with UNESCO World Heritage Centre and in response received financial support from the UNESCO Netherlands Funds-In-Trust.

Revision and updating of the draft GPRS was undertaken in collaboration with AWF and other stakeholders. Due to the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) close engagement with EWCA by implementing considerable conservation projects in and in the surrounding areas of SMNP, it was chosen as the implementing partner to carry out reviewing and updating of the strategy.

The process led to the identification of priority activities, the identification and mapping of various land use zones, delineation of specific activities allowed and not allowed in each zone, and an action plan for immediate implementation. The revised and updated grazing plan addresses the shortcomings of the previous draft document. The revised strategy provides specific information on: existing socio-economic and ecological condition of the community, SMNP and its surroundings; land use/cover change of the park and its surroundings; zoning of the park for different grazing areas; a listing of activities allowed in each zone; and approaches for effective implementation.

The development of the strategy was undertaken in a participatory way through the involvement and consultation of the representatives of the local community and relevant stakeholders. Core to the development of the strategy was the involvement of the local



communities. Their participation in natural resources management decision-making processes has created sense of ownership and increased the community's willingness to participate while implementing the grazing pressure reduction strategy. The process of developing the grazing pressure strategy enabled local communities and a diversity of stakeholders to contribute to its implementation and thereby take ownership of this strategy. The designated and agreed resource use zones are in line with the Wildlife Development, Conservation and Utilization Regulations No. 163/2008. The GPRS aims to reduce grazing pressure on the Park and its surroundings through measures that harmonize grazing and conservation needs. Its implementation will help the state party achieve the benchmarks set by the World Heritage Committee for sustainable conservation of the park's Outstanding Universal Values.

The strategy is believed to serve as a guideline to significantly reduce livestock grazing to the ecological integrity of the property and contribute towards effective conservation of its unique fauna and flora and thereby ensure the maintenance of the ecosystem and its ecological services. Additionally, the strategy helps safeguard the outstanding universal value for which the site was inscribed on the World Heritage List.



**Fig.1:** Some of the participatory workshops held as part of the development of the GPRS. Source: AWF & SMNP (2015).

### **2.1.2 Current Efforts to Implement the Grazing Pressure Reduction Strategy**

The anthropogenic disturbances have impact on ecological processes of SMNP ecosystem. The recent land use/cover change assessment undertaken while developing the grazing

pressure reduction strategy found more than 40% of SMNP was highly disturbed by anthropogenic activities. About 63% of the grassland area was intensively grazed by livestock and the cultivated land for crop production inside the park covers 3,587 ha or (8.7%) of the total area of the Park. Only 19,167 ha (37%) of the Park area was free from livestock grazing. This assessment also showed that with the total livestock number of the 38 park neighboring Kebeles estimated at 129, 270 Tropical Livestock Units (TLUs), the average stocking rate is more than 7 TLUs per ha. For highland areas, a maximum stocking density of only 0.5 TLU is recommended. Therefore, the stocking rate is by far greater than the recommended level.

Therefore, overgrazing has been resulting in a deterioration of the quality of the grazing lands with an increase of unpalatable grasses and herbs. In the sub afro-alpine areas, overgrazing is preventing regeneration of shrubs and trees. Ultimately, soil productivity has declined and erosion intensified when vegetation cover is lost. As human population is increasing these factors are expected to intensify. Thus, immediate implementation of the grazing pressure reduction strategy is required in order to reverse the existing situation.



**Fig. 2:** SMNP Afro-alpine under low (left) and high (right) grazing pressure

Consequently, several efforts are being made to implement the already developed grazing pressure reduction strategy in collaboration with the local community and other stakeholders to reduce grazing pressure in the property through the formation of no

grazing zones, sustainable resource use zones, intensive awareness raising village conferences with the park neighboring community, restricting significant amount of land from free grazing, improving resource protection and law enforcement and provision of different livelihood options.

The awareness of different stakeholders and Park neighboring community is being raised continuously as one major intervention area for the implementation of GPRS. Recent assessments and field visits conducted to evaluate and monitor the implementation of the grazing pressure reduction strategy showed progressive measures have been achieved so far but more remains to be done in the near future as funding allows. As part of this effort, communication with rangers and park officers on site showed resource protection and law enforcement is improving. Major portions of land inside the park have been set aside as no grazing zones in major parts of Limalimo, Buyit Ras, Michibign, Sankaber, Set Derek, Chenneck, Siliki, Mesarerya, Kidus Yared, and Ras-Dashen. The vegetation recovery in the aforementioned areas is promising and wildlife species like Walia ibex, Ethiopian wolf and other antelopes have started expanding their habitat.

While developing the grazing plan, consensus was reached among the different stakeholders and park neighboring community to designate 92% (37, 843 ha) of the park area as no grazing or protected zone and the remaining 8% (4,257 ha) was allocated as sustainable resource use zone (cut and carry system and controlled grazing zone) in order to give long-term protection of the different flora and fauna, landscape and ecosystem as shown in the figure below.





**Fig.3:** Recent vegetation and wildlife recovery observed inside the park after protection from livestock grazing. Source: AWF &SMNP (2015).

As managing authority, EWCA/SMNP needs to be capable enough in implementing and monitoring the grazing plan and training had been given for 56 wildlife scouts (rangers) of the park concerning the concept of the grazing reduction strategy and patrolling schemes. As rangers are at the front-line for resource protection activities, they have been properly trained and equipped in collaboration with AWF to ensure that they are motivated and effective in carrying out their day to day duties and responsibilities.



**Fig. 4:** Ranger items under distribution by AWF.

Source: AWF (2015).

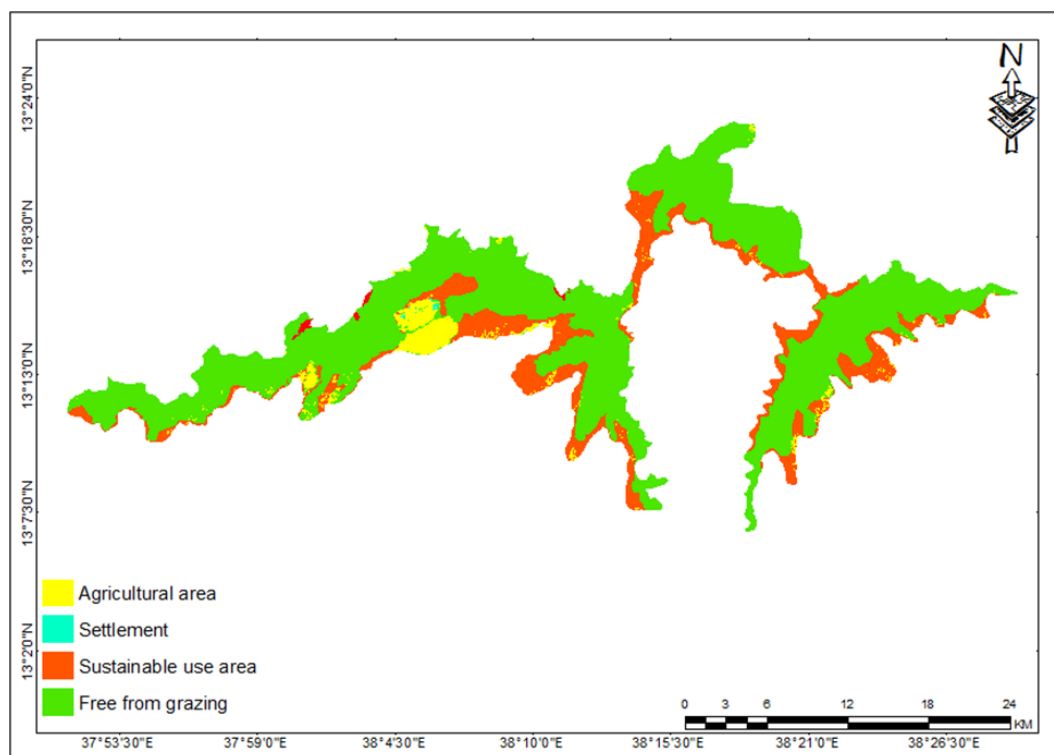


**Fig.5:** Rangers with AWF uniform.

Source: AWF (2015).



To date, the area of the park designated with no grazing or protected zone has been expanded drastically as planned from 19,167 ha (37%) to 70% (28,745.21 ha) as a result of the grazing plan implementation (Fig. 7). This major achievement to reduce the grazing pressure within the property is the result of the introduction of sustainable resource use zones, strengthening natural resource protection and law enforcement, creating livelihood options and income generating activities, community and stakeholders' awareness raising forums and the strong collaboration of all stakeholders and partners.



**Fig.7:** Map showing the implementation of the grazing plan by expanding no grazing zones over time. Source: AWF (2015).

### 2.1.3 Alternative Livelihoods

Partnership in the management of the SMNP had been entered between EWCA and AWF. In line with this, EWCA and AWF share a joint vision in the conservation and development of the park and livelihood improvement of the local communities in the vicinity. Besides, the Austrian Development Cooperation Funded program (ADC) and COMPACT programs



funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have been involved in supporting community's cooperatives and livelihood improvement in and around SMNP.

The Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has also been taking part in community tourism development for the last four year. Based on the agreement signed among Amhara National Regional Sate, Bureau of Culture and Tourism and Parks Development, EWCA and JICA-Ethiopia Office; for the project entitled " SIMCOT" Simien Mountains Community Tourism Development in SMNP and its surrounding on November 2011 and had been implementing various community tourism development activities for the past four years. Upon phase out of the project, for the sustainability of the project accomplishment the SIMCOT-CA- Simien Mountains Community Tourism Charity Association was established on June 2015 and registered as resident Charity in Ethiopia with the main objective of creating and managing a system of community based tourism including nature conservation and poverty reduction in improving livelihood of the local community through creation of alternative livelihood by using tourism in come to promote conservation and community development at Arginjona and Abmbaras villages.



**Fig. 8:** commentity memebr inviloved fattening and bee keeping; Source: SMNP Office

Besides, the German Government owned bank (KfW) has shown its commitment to allocate significant financial support to livelihood development interventions and other management programs of the property.

Apart from these actual interventions, efforts have been underway by EWCA to organize fundraising forum which will bring together all the interested partners so as to secure the required fund to implement the strategies developed for livelihood improvements and grazing pressure reduction in the SMNP. This is so important since integrated and collaborative efforts are needed to secure the required huge financial support for the envisaged livelihood-related programs.

## **2.2 Relocation of Gich Village Community on Voluntary Basis**

The issue of settlement within the property dates back to the time of its creation, as several villages land used for agriculture and livestock grazing were included in the park. This problem remained unresolved since the realignment of the park which resulted in the exclusion of numerous villages from the park and thus an important reduction in the number of people residing in the park which have been living under poverty. According to the 2013 assessment carried out by EWCA, 418 households were found living in Gich village amounting about 2,508 people cultivating about 751 ha of land inside the core area of the park.

The guiding principles for Gich Community Voluntary relocation project are: Council of Ministers Regulation No. 135/2007 on the Payment of Compensation for Property Situated on Landholdings Expropriated for Public Purposes, Amhara Regional State Directive No. 5/2003 on Rural Land Expropriation and Compensation Payment, the General Management Plan of the park, the positive experience gained from the voluntary relocation of 157 households from Arkuasiye corridor and international standards. The government has been fully committed to scale up the 2008/09 Arkuasiye village voluntary relocation experience

to other villages situated inside the property. The central concern of the government now is the relocation of Gich Villagers on voluntarily basis in Debark town outside the park in order to make open for wider distribution and free movement of the wild animals. The Gich resettlement project therefore aims at relocating 418 households, including houses, perennial crops and livestock outside the park in an effort to conserve the wildlife and protect the fragile ecosystem.

The Gich Resettlement Project committee was established which comprises of actors from a wide variety of government organization from top to grass root level, including EWCA, Regional, Zonal, Woreda, Kebele, Debark town municipality and Debark town administration, as well as the representatives of Gich community. Consecutively, series of discussions were going on the issue of relocation with the members of the Gich village community and found more than willing to move down to the nearby town called Debark as long as they got enough compensation, plots of land for housing and supported by livelihood restorations. Considerable progressive measures were achieved by the committee, and the ongoing Gich resettlement is clearly the result of many years of planning, coordination and continued effort. The working relationship between the project committee, the Gich community and the efforts of the government to ensure the resettlement resulted in minimal disruption to the community and improves their situation is commendable.

The settlement process was led in a systematic way with the strong collaboration of federal and local governments to minimize the impact on the project affected households. As the first significant step, the project committee provided a report describing the community mutual agreement for voluntary relocation of their residence from Gich village to Debark town and compensation payment was started as per the agreement reached with the villagers.



A study supported by Resettlement Action plan (RAP) and different assessments were prepared for resettling 418 households outside the property. The asset valuation study pointed out more than 7.5 **million USD** was required for compensation of 418 households at Gich village only. This budget doesn't include provision of livelihood restoration and infrastructure. The state party allocated the aforementioned budget and the majority of households got the compensation money and plots of land for housing in Debark town. The Debark town administration has prepared land for all households that are being relocated from the park. EWCA and the Amhara Regional state in collaboration with different partners have been working on the required alternative livelihoods, social and infrastructural services to the relocated local communities. To date, the majority of households who got the compensation money on time, the construction of houses are nearly in completion in Debark town at the resettlement site.

The resettlement site identified in Debark town is in a good location on the outskirts of the town, with access to associated facilities. The site itself is well-drained and attractive. The resettlement site planning undertaken by the Debark town municipality allows for development of an adequate resettlement site and each house hold was provided plots of with an area of 250 m<sup>2</sup>.



**Fig.9:** Houses under construction by project affected households at Debark town resettlement site. Source: AWF (2015).

A study undertaken by an independent body and supported by KfW has confirmed that the relocation process has been handled properly and it is also in line with national and international standards. A major challenge however is the resettlement of the Gich community from a rural to an urban environment and the subsequent change of lifestyle requires supporting in areas of livelihood restorations. The change of rural to urban resettlement means the development of new alternative livelihoods in many instances, which is a bit tough due to financial constraints. Therefore, significant financial support is required from the international community and conservation partners in order to fulfill alternative livelihood options and infrastructure for the voluntary relocated Gich community.

Therefore, once again here we request financial support from international community and development partners to provide project affected households with provision of livelihood restorations and infrastructure.

### **2.3 Updating the Progress of Road Re-alignment**

A growing effort has been embarked, particularly in mitigating or managing negative impacts of the roads, and in promoting efforts that streams for the realignment of the road through other alternative routes. The re-alignment of this road has already been accepted by the Ethiopian Roads Authority upon the expression of our serious concern of this matter. Thereafter, construction of alternative route through Debark Sawrie - Beless - Inchet kab - Mekane-Birhan, which is completely beyond the boundary of the park, was started at the end of 2012.

The Two local private companies were engaged in the construction of the road project in phase. The construction of the road project was delayed due to capacity limitations of the company that was assigned to carry out the road construction from Debark Town to Mekane-Birhan (a rural town for Janamora Woreda) and the other company took the responsibility of constructing the road from Mekane-Birhan town to Dilyibza town (a rural town for Beyeda Woreda).

All these existing endeavors virtually mirrored the strong interest of the local communities and all key stakeholders and lay the foundation to build up alternative route for the existing Debark-Mekane berhan road which could significantly reduce the adverse impacts of the existing road.

Moreover, other re-alignment option has been under negotiations with the Federal Roads Authority for the road that was constructed from Debark-Adi arkay-Shire through the

property that crosses the recent extension areas of Lima limo completely beyond the boundary of the park.

Similarly, in our attempts to reduce the road traffic and related threats of the park, a park gate was constructed at Sawrie on the main road from Debark town to the national park; providing a permanent presence in the area and thereby checking the Gate traffics and allowing minimum traffic operations. A new gate with outpost has also been functioned since 2007, at Sebat Minche to check the road traffic from Janamora Woreda side, which together with the Sawrie gate now provide for restricted traffic operations between 6:00 AM in the morning up to 6:00 PM.



Fig.10: Picture showing the new road under construction and the old road.

Source: AWF (2015).

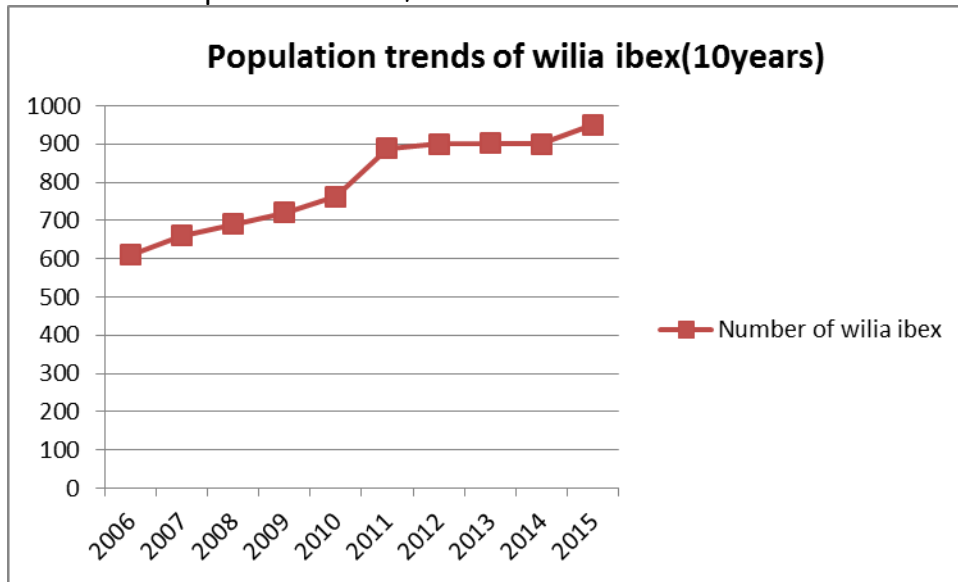
## **2.4 Assessing the status, composition and distribution of important species such as Walia Ibex and Ethiopian wolf**

One of the major protected areas of the country that was set aside five decades ago to conserve the afro-alpine habitats and their unique flora and fauna is the SMNP. It is home to a number of threatened and endemic species of which the Walia ibex (*Capra walie*) and the Ethiopian wolf (*Canis simensis*) are listed as endangered. Taking its outstanding value and the unique features into account, the park was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1978. The inscription was made on the basis of its importance for biodiversity and its exceptional natural beauty.

However, the park has been under serious threat from expansion of settlement and cultivation, overgrazing, deforestation and associated perturbation. These anthropogenic pressures resulted in deterioration of the park habitats in general and decline of populations of flagship species such as Walia ibex and Ethiopian wolf in particular.

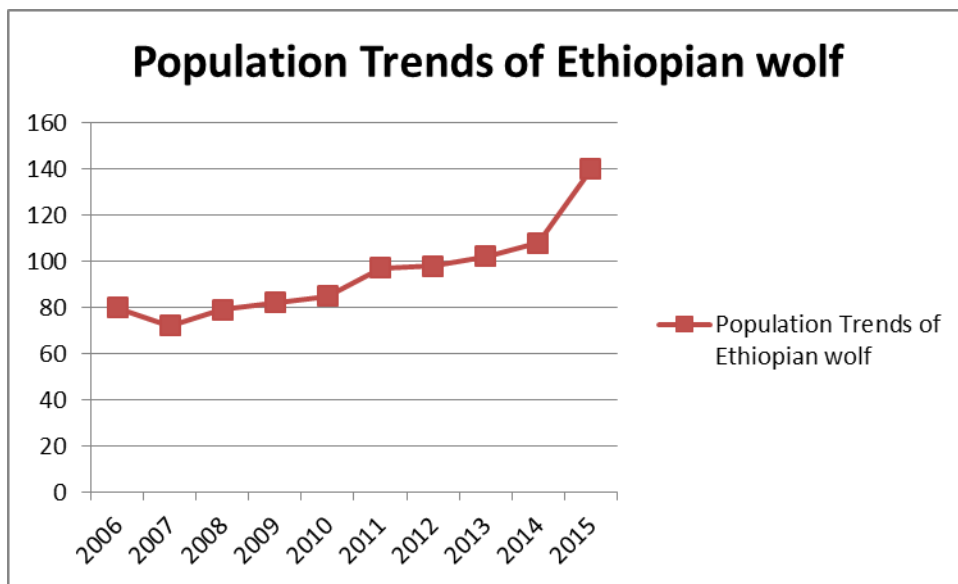
In the past, the park and wildlife therein had been in greater conservational problems and a considerable deterioration had been noted in the number of the aforementioned endemic species. Since the recent past, Government has given strong commitment in ensuring effective management of SMNP and its key wildlife species. Special attention has been rendered with regard to enforcing laws related to poaching and natural habitat destruction and there is increased sense of ownership from the local community side in ensuring sound conservation of the property. Owing to these conditions, the endemic species like the Walia ibex and Ethiopian wolf have shown significant increment in the national park (Fig.11 & 12) and this is one of the indications of the ongoing progress in the effectiveness of SMNP management and commitment of the state party.

Fig. 11: Walia Ibex Population Trend, from 2006 to 2015



**Source:** SMNP office 2006-2015

Fig. 12: Ethiopian wolf Population Trend, from 2006- 2015



**Source:** SMNP office 2006-2015

The increase in population of key species was also supported by researches conducted by students from academic institutions and thus their findings are considered to be independent. However, as per the request of the World Heritage Committee, projects



have already been developed by EWCA to look for financial support to conduct specific research through commissioning to an independent scientific study in order to assess the status, composition and distribution of important species such as Walia Ibex and Ethiopian wolf.

### **3. Implementation of other Conservation measures**

#### **3.1. Tourism**

Ethiopian tourism industry has grown very fast in the past decade due to the prevailing peace and stability and relative development and expansion of tourism products and services in the country. The SMNP is one of the natural tourism destinations in the northern tourist circuit of the country where the famous world historical heritages and attractions are found including the Rock Hewn Churches of Laibella , Obelisks of Axum and Castles of Gonder.

Thus, international tourists travelling to the SMNP are increasing over time. There are also a number of outbound and inbound tour companies who want to sale the products to bring more number of international tourists to the SMNP. However, a number of challenges and constraints face the delivery of a quality tourism product in and around the park, ranging from a lack of accommodation, limitations in skilled manpower, to poor quality and insufficient tourism infrastructures. There is only one standard Lodge owned by private company providing tourist services in the park. There is big gap in demand and supply triggering the development of environmentally friendly standard tourist services infrastructures like Eco-lodge and hotel investments in and around the park.

This year (2015) three capable interested investors have submitted application with their respective business plan to EWCA to develop eco-lodges in the park. Hence, EWCA and the park experts have selected possible sites based on the criteria of eco-lodge sites

selection and the tourism master plan of the park and then proposed the sites for environmental impact assessment study. The required EIA studies for the selected sites are in progress. The EIA will be finally approved by the Ethiopia Environment Protection Authority (EPA) after the constructive comments and feedback of EWCA and other stakeholders. The state party will also finally send the EIA documents to the world heritage committee for further verification. Besides, efforts are underway to expand standard hotels and improve the quality of the existing tourists' services provision facilities in the town, Debark.

The state party has also rendered attention to develop quality tourism infrastructures and services in and around the national park with the support of AWF and other development partners. This year training has been given to local guides and various tourist infrastructures such as Eco friendly sign posts, tourist tracks, toilet, camping sites, big litter **containers**, community lodge, have been developed to improve the tourist facilities in the Simen Mountains.

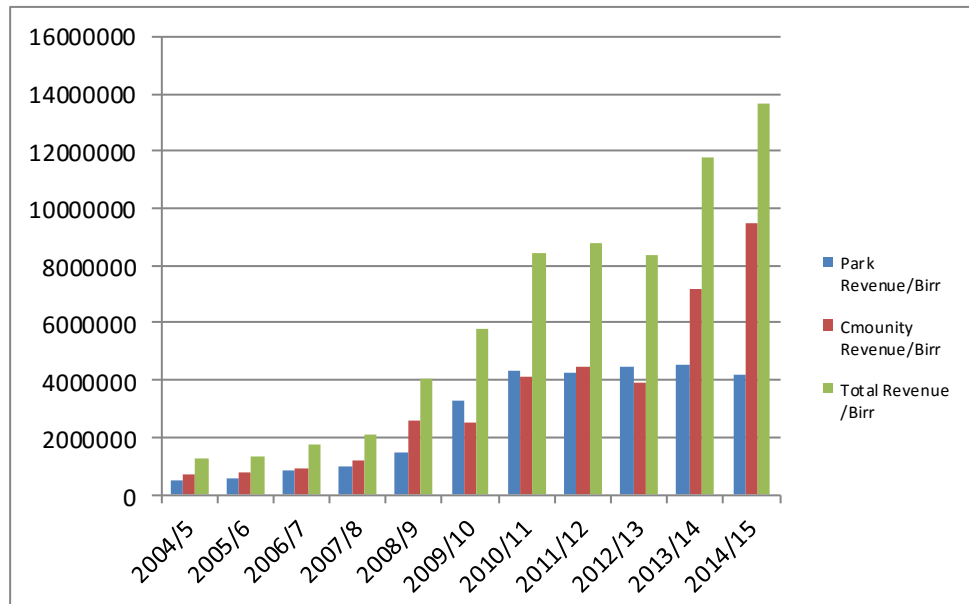
Corresponding with the increment of international tourist flow to the park the revenue generated from the same has shown significant growth. The local community who become dependent on tourism activities has been rising significantly (graph 13 & 14).

**Fig 13. Visitor trend of Simien Mountains National Park, (2004/05-2014/15)**



**Source:** SMNP office 2004-2015

**Fig 14. Trend of Revenue Generated from Simien Mountains National Park for both the government and the local community 2004/05- 2014/15)**



**Source:** SMNP office 2004-2015

### **3.2. Disease Prevention**

Disease prevention is among the tasks that deserve strong attention to ensure the survival of the endangered small population like the Walia ibex and the Ethiopian wolf of the Simien Mountains National Park. These species are vulnerable to the transmission of diseases from livestock stock. Thus, measures are being taken to limit the risk of disease transmission between domestic animals and wildlife in and around the SMNP. Animal health clinics found around the buffer zones staffed with veterinarians undertaking close follow up and offering vaccinations as well as other treatments for livestock grazing in the park and are working closely with other veterinary clinics, including mobile clinics, and community health workers responsible for animal health in the Kebeles and Weredas around the park. . A policy of zero tolerance of domestic dogs universally accepted by the community and as a result rabies Canines Distemper Virus (CDV) has never occurred in the park unlike the case of other Wolf habitats in Ethiopia.