The Statute

of

Conservation Stewards

Connect People and Nature

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Introduction

Human activities have greatly contributed to the degradation of our planet. Irreversible exploitation of natural resources, deforestation for timber businesses, habitat fragmentation, and infrastructure development are just a few examples of the destructive practices that have led to the loss of species and habitats, resource depletion, and impoverished human livelihoods. To counteract these detrimental effects, collaboration and active human participation are crucial in healing the wounds inflicted on nature and restoring its capacity to sustain life in the universe.

Nature Rwanda was funded with the aim to contribute to the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems in a way that fosters a sustainable future and leads to social and economic transformations in the communities, while addressing issues that threaten the coexistence of human and nature. This is accomplished in line of vision to building the communities where human live in the harmony with nature without compromising the wellbeing of future generations.

Achieving these goals requires collective effort and the involvement of various stakeholders. Nature Rwanda actively engages individuals, institutions, and conservation partners in its conservation initiatives. By mobilizing and collaborating with these diverse groups, Nature Rwanda strives to maximize the effectiveness of its conservation efforts and ensure that the outcomes are truly impactful.

Through inclusive and collaborative approaches, Nature Rwanda aims to create a collective responsibility by engaging active volunteers in the work of supporting the preservation of biodiversity and the restoration of ecosystems. By working together, we can address the challenges we face and forge a path towards a sustainable future, where both humans and nature can thrive in harmony.

Purpose of the statute

The purpose of the statute of Nature Conservation Stewards is to provide a comprehensive framework that outlines the roles, responsibilities, ethics and guidelines for individuals engaged by Nature Rwanda in supporting the conservation and protection of nature and its biodiversity. It clarifies the categories of supporting actors according to the intervention areas of Nature

Rwanda. The statute serves as a foundational document that ensures consistency, accountability, and effective stewardship practices.

Categories of Conservation Stewards (NCSs)

Nature Rwanda's Conservation Stewards are divided into three categories which are Community Tree Stewards, Species Conservation Champions, and Site Protection Stewards.

Community Tree Stewards (CTS)

The Community Tree Stewards are community members selected from the specific project locations, who actively participate in the care, maintenance, and management of trees within a project area. Nature Rwanda's Community Tree Stewards act as ambassadors for trees, working to enhance their survival, health, and overall benefits within the community, whilst encouraging community engagement and participation in restoration and climate change actions and their sustainability.

The Community Tree Stewards are in charge of:

- ***Supporting the Tree Planting and Reforestation initiatives***: They participate in tree planting, ensuring the right species are selected for specific locations, and supervising and following proper planting techniques to promote successful tree planting and growth.
- ***Tree Care and Maintenance***:

Conservation Tree Stewards are responsible for monitoring the health and well-being of trees, including mobilizing communities on tree caring best practices including watering, pruning, and applying appropriate treatments to mitigate diseases or pests.

- ***Tree Monitoring and Reporting***:

Conservation Tree Stewards regularly assess the condition of trees, identify potential risks or problems, and report as requested any issues to Nature Rwanda for appropriate action.

- ***Community Education and Outreach***:

Conservation Tree Stewards play an essential role in educating and raising awareness among community members about the importance of trees and their benefits, community actions to address climate change

crises. They work closely with Nature Rwanda to organize workshops, conduct training sessions, and provide guidance on tree care practices among communities.

- ***Influencing good attitudes and holding community accountable:***

Conservation Tree Stewards influence their fellow community members in actions of environmental conservation and preservation of trees planted within their farms and community, working with Nature Rwanda and local authorities to report the adverse action that may affect the growth of planted trees, while engaging residents in implementing tree-friendly policies and initiatives.

- ***Enhancing Collaboration and Networking***:

Conservation Tree Stewards must foster collaborations with other stakeholders, such as farmers, community groups, local government agencies, environmental organizations and or other positive individuals, while sharing knowledge, lesson learnt and resources to maximize the impact of tree conservation efforts.

Species Conservation Champions (SCCs)

Species Conservation Champions are individuals who actively support and engage in the conservation of globally threaten species. In the face of various threats many species are encountering, the role of Species Conservation Champions is very critical in protecting and raising community awareness about species conservation and the challenges they face, while promoting their ecological significance, and ensuring their long-term survival in the face of the threatening world.

The key roles of Species Champions include, but not limited to:

Raising community awareness on species Conservation:

Species Conservation Stewards advocate for the conservation of species by raising awareness about their ecological importance, threats they face and the need for their protection. They work closely with Nature Rwanda towards influencing policies and promoting measures to safeguard species and their habitats.

Conducting Species Monitoring:

Species Conservation Stewards contribute to monitoring efforts by conducting surveys, recording species sightings, and collecting data on species populations and behaviors, and report any species conservation emergency. This data helps in assessing population trends, understanding habitat requirements, and identifying emerging issues and conservation priorities to bring back threatened species populations to a good conservation status.

Strengthening Collaboration and Networking:

Species Conservation Stewards flourish the good collaborate with other conservation organizations, research institutions, and other stakeholders to gather and share knowledge and lesson learnt, and contribute to developing coordinated conservation strategies of vulnerable species and their habitats. They participate in conferences, workshops, and meetings to exchange ideas and promote collaboration.

Conducting threat Monitoring:

Species Conservation Stewards actively engage in efforts to mitigate threats to species, such as illegal activities, poaching for bushmeat, poisoning, and habitat degradation. This may involve working with local leaders and law enforcement agencies, raising awareness about the impacts of illegal activities such as poisoning, poaching on species populations and their significance.

Assisting in Habitat protection:

Species Conservation Stewards support habitat conservation work by identifying key species locations and protecting their habitats and breeding sites, and promoting sustainable coexistence of human with nature by educating local communities to implement conservation-friendly measures in their day-to-day life.

Site Protection Stewards (SPS)

Site Protection Stewards play an integral role in the regular site protection for the wellbeing of nature and species. Their role assists in the sustainability of conservation projects through their active involvement, dedication, and contributions. Their efforts not only directly impact project outcomes but also inspire others to engage in conservation, ensuring the maintenance of achievements and the long-term success and continuation of the initiative.

The roles of Site Protection Stewards include:

Conducting Fieldwork and Data Collection

Site Protection Stewards assist in fieldwork activities, including data collection, patrolling, monitoring, and research. They contribute to gathering valuable information about biodiversity, ecosystems, and threatened species. This data helps in developing informed conservation strategies and measuring the effectiveness of ongoing efforts.

Hands-on Conservation Work:

Site Protection Stewards actively participate in various hands-on conservation activities, such as habitat restoration and protection, invasive species control, wildlife monitoring, and maintenance of conservation infrastructures. Their efforts directly contribute to improving the condition and resilience of ecosystems.

Raising community awareness

Site Protection Stewards engage with the public through educational programs, guided tours, and awareness campaigns. They help raise awareness about conservation issues, promote sustainable practices, and encourage public participation in conservation efforts. By educating and inspiring others, they contribute to the long-term conservation mindset within the community.

Enhancing Collaboration and Networking:

Site Protection Stewards often strive for a good collaborate with local communities, site visitors, conservation organizations, and government agencies. They help establish and maintain partnerships, facilitating knowledge sharing, resource mobilization, and collaboration between different stakeholders. These networks strengthen the project's sustainability by fostering long-term relationships and shared efforts.

Collecting M&E Data:

Site Protection Stewards provide valuable feedbacks and insights based on their experiences and observations. Their input helps in evaluating the effectiveness of project strategies, identifying areas for improvement, and implementing adaptive management approaches. This continuous evaluation and feedback loop contribute to the project's ongoing refinement and sustainability.

Requirements for Conservation Stewards

To ensure the successful preservation of nature, it is important to consider various factors such as academic and social standards, and ethical obligations.

Academic requirements

***Passion*:**

A good steward should have a genuine passion for nature and environmental conservation. This passion is the driving agent for the commitment and motivation to contribute effectively while determining and valuing the coexistence of human and nature.

***Environmental Knowledge and Skills*:**

Quality stewards should possess relevant knowledge and skills related to conservation practices, such as biodiversity, ecological restoration, wildlife monitoring, conflict resolution and management, and sustainable land management. They should be willing to continuously learn and adapt to new techniques and approaches.

Communication and Advocacy:

Volunteers can play a crucial role in raising awareness about conservation issues and advocating for sustainable practices. Good communication skills, both verbal and written, are essential for engaging with the public, conveying information, and inspiring action. The limitations to effective communication could lead to failure of the work implementation.

Social requirements

Teamwork and Collaboration:

Conservation efforts often require teamwork and collaboration with others such as volunteers, local communities, and organizations. Competent stewards should demonstrate the ability to work well in a team, communicate effectively, and build positive relationships for collaborative impacts.

Problem-solving and Initiative:

Volunteers should possess problem-solving skills and the ability to take initiative. They should be proactive in identifying issues, proposing solutions, and assisting in their effective implementation.

Physical and Mental fitness:

Some conservation activities may require physical exertion, endurance, and long working hours in challenging conditions. Volunteers should be physically fit and mentally prepared to handle demanding tasks on due time.

Ethical requirements

Adaptability:

Conservation work can involve challenging environments, unpredictable situations, and changing circumstances and communities. Our conservation stewards should be adaptable and resilient, willing to embrace new challenges and changes, and adjust their approaches as needed.

Respect for Nature and Local Communities:

Competent stewards should have a deep respect for nature and local communities. They should prioritize the well-being of both, engage in ethical practices, and be sensitive to the cultural and social dynamics of the areas they work in.

Flexibility and Open-Mindedness:

Conservation projects may involve diverse stakeholders, cultural contexts, and perspectives. Volunteers should be open-minded, respectful of different viewpoints, and willing to adapt their approaches based on local knowledge and customs.

Does and Don'ts

Picture a scenario where a dedicated group of individuals puts in significant effort to improve the conservation status of highly endangered species, successfully accomplished their objectives. Now, envision the polar opposite situation, where the same group becomes corrupted and loses sight of the importance of species preservation, ultimately leading to the species extinction, and living the history they aimed to prevent. When people lose focus and fail to uphold their commitment to work, their actions turn towards the wrong path, hindering the progress of the purpose. In order to achieve the desired outcomes in nature conservation, it is very crucial for those involved to maintain a steadfast focus and remain dedicated to the envisioned success. Nature Rwanda is there to connect people and nature, and build, strengthen the strong coexistence of human and nature.

A good steward **Does**:

- determine and prioritize the well-being of nature and local communities.
- concentrate efforts in maintaining the safety of nature and its resources.
- respect and collaborate with fellow stewards, researchers, and local communities.
- maintain an open mind, and willing to learn from experts and local knowledge.
- practice sustainable and responsible behaviors, such as reducing waste and minimizing ecological footprints.
- communicate and share experiences with others to raise awareness about environmental issues and conservation efforts.

A good steward **Doesn't**:

- engage in any activities that harm or disrupt the local ecosystems or wildlife.
- collect or remove any plants, animals from the ecosystems without permission.
- disregard safety protocols or guidelines related to personal well-being and environmental protection.
- impose own ideas or solutions without considering local perspectives and expertise.
- engage in disrespectful or harmful behavior towards fellow stewards and or local communities.
- leave behind any waste in the natural environment (instead always dispose of it properly).
- share or disclose any confidential or sensitive information without authorization.

Team Composition and Operations

Selection process

The process of forming a team begins by involving local leaders and communities in the selection of candidates. This approach promotes a sense of ownership and awareness of the project among the locals. Each candidate who is chosen provides comprehensive identification details, including personal information, relevant experience, skills, and reasons for supporting the project. Nature Rwanda conducts a screening process to identify suitable candidates based on their qualifications, availability, and alignment with the project's objectives. The selection of qualified candidates is carried out through interviews, which can be conducted in person, over the phone, or via video conferencing, depending on the most convenient and accessible mode of communication. The purpose of the interview is to evaluate the candidate's dedication, knowledge, skills, and compatibility with the project team and goals.

Training

Typically, individuals who are chosen for a project go through training and orientation sessions to become familiar with the project's goals, procedures, safety precautions, and any particular skills needed to contribute to the project. Trainings are prepared according to the area intervention and roles. The training sessions also involve citizen science principles, data collection tools and methodologies, and reporting. They are then assigned specific roles based on their abilities, interests, and availability. These roles may involve working in the coordination, fieldworks such as supporting research, conducting monitoring and evaluation, assisting with administrative duties, or aiding in outreach and educational initiatives. As for leadership, each team elects one coordinator to ensure effective work.

Placement

Conservation Stewards receive comprehensive support and resources to ensure their effective preparation before starting their project work. This includes providing them with informative materials, recommended reading, and guidelines relevant to their work. They also receive logistical information such as travel and accommodation details, as required. In addition, stewards are equipped with specific tools and equipment based on the tasks they will be undertaking, such as smartphones, professional badges, navigation tools like GPS devices or compasses, binoculars for wildlife observation, cameras, safety gear (like gloves, boots, rain coats, etc.), planting tools, and data collection forms or tools.

On some occasions, an induction week may be organized in the operational areas to enhance stewards' practical knowledge and skills. More productively, the placement process may involve arranging visits to conservation sites or projects where stewards can directly witness the challenges and opportunities specific to their area of focus. This hands-on experience helps stewards understand the context of their work and fosters a stronger connection with the local environment.

Reporting

Conservation Stewards play a vital role as the guardians of ecosystems, acting as both their eyes and ears, and advocating for the welfare of threatened species and or vulnerable ecosystems. Throughout their duty, stewards make numerous observations that hold significant implications for the conservation and management objectives of nature. Therefore, the generation of comprehensive reports becomes crucial, enabling the identification of successes and challenges that demand immediate intervention to ensure the project stays on course. These reports must encompass project indicators, encountered challenges, community suggestions, and other relevant information that could directly or indirectly influence project goals. It is important to use all communication tools as provided and recommended (CyberTracker, Kobo Collect, Toll Free, etc.) to ensure the effective information flow at all levels. Importantly, each observation within the report is required to include geolocation information.

Benefits and incentives

The specific incentives available to conservation stewards may vary depending on the intervention areas and roles played by stewards in the project, funding sources, and geographic location of the work. These categories provide a general overview of the different types of incentives that Nature Rwanda commonly provides to encourage and support the work of conservation stewards.

- **Financial Incentives:**

These include financial compensation provided to conservation stewards for their work. The incentives cover travel costs, or provide a communication for those supporting conservation work. The amount may be fixed based on work basis (for example, on a full-time or part-time basis).

- **Professional Development:**

Nature Rwanda often offers opportunities for professional development to their stewards. This can include training workshops, seminars, and certifications that enhance their skills and knowledge in areas such as ecological research, wildlife management, environmental policy, or sustainable practices.

- **Field and Research Resources:**

Nature Rwanda provide to Conservation stewards with required resources and equipment to carry out their work effectively. Incentives may include field equipment, research facilities, and specialized software that aids in data collection and analysis.

- **Networking and Collaboration Opportunities:**

Incentives in this category involve connecting stewards with professionals and experts in the field. Nature Rwanda provides opportunities for networking, mentorship, and collaboration with established researchers, scientists, and practitioners. This fosters knowledge sharing, expands professional networks, and opens doors to potential career opportunities for its conservation stewards.

- **Recognition and Awards:**

Acknowledging and recognizing the efforts of conservation stewards is a high consideration of Nature Rwanda to develop nurture conservation steward to conservation professionalism. Awards, certificates, or public recognition for exemplary work boost motivation and provide a sense of achievement and validation for their contributions to conservation.

The Statute Amendments

Nature Rwanda has the authority to update this statute if the staff and/or management deem it necessary to enhance the efforts of conservation stewards and align with Nature Rwanda's mission and vision. If there is an amendment proposal from an external party, Nature Rwanda will verify it before taking any further action.