



## Report on the World Wildlife Fund/Natural Habitat Adventures Tourism Partnership and Violations of the Human Rights of the Maasai Indigenous Peoples in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area

Prepared by the University of Arizona Indigenous Peoples Law and Policy Program  
Indigenous Rights & Protected Areas Initiative

### Introduction

The [World Wildlife Fund](#) (WWF—World Wide Fund for Nature outside the United States and Canada) is the world's leading environmental conservation organization, with over one million supporters and involvement in thousands of conservation-related projects in more than 100 countries around the globe. Since 2003, WWF has [partnered](#) with a for-profit corporation, Natural Habitat Adventures ([“NatHab”](#) as it calls itself), to offer its customers [“the opportunity](#) to explore the world's wild places.” One of those “wild places” is Tanzania's Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA), where as many as 100,000 Maasai Indigenous peoples are being [evicted](#) by the government and forced to leave their homes and the lands they've lived on for centuries.

This Report, prepared by the University of Arizona [Indigenous Peoples Law and Policy Program](#) (IPLP),<sup>1</sup> examines WWF's [tourism partnership](#) with NatHab in the NCA. “Tanzania's Great Migration & Ngorongoro Crater” Safari Tour, offered by the partnership, is one example, but not the only [example](#), of WWF lending its name to NatHab to promote what it calls [“conservation tourism”](#) in protected areas like the NCA where Indigenous peoples have faced on-going [eviction efforts by governments](#) in the name of conservation. This Report, however, only focuses attention on “Tanzania's Great Migration & Ngorongoro Crater” Tour promoted by the WWF/NatHab partnership, and calls upon WWF to stop accepting any profits or benefits from this tour until the government of Tanzania ceases its efforts to coerce and forcibly evict the Maasai from their homes and traditional homelands in the NCA.

### Tanzania's Reasons for Evicting the Maasai from the NCA

The WWF/NatHab NCA [tour](#) features one of the world's great natural wonders, the Ngorongoro Crater, the largest unbroken caldera on Earth, along with the “Great Migration;” the unparalleled trek of more than one million wildebeests and thousands of zebras, gazelles and other animals crossing over the Mara River. Tanzania's government heavily promotes tourism in the NCA. [For 2025](#), it anticipates more than \$100 million dollars (US) will be spent by the estimated 1.2 million tourists who will visit the protected area. Meanwhile, the government has [announced](#) it is evicting up to 100,000 Maasai, mostly semi-nomadic pastoralists, from the NCA. [Steps](#) and coercive action taken by the government so far to enforce its eviction orders include cutting off

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water supplies and essential healthcare, education and other government services in the NCA and offering to relocate any Maasai who “voluntarily” wish to leave the NCA and relocate in an area hundreds of miles away.

According to the Tanzanian government, the [reason](#) for evicting the Maasai who have [used](#) Ngorongoro’s vast grasslands and resources to sustain their cattle-herding way of life for generations is to conserve and protect the land and biodiversity of the NCA. The government asserts this justification even though [numerous studies](#) have concluded that Indigenous peoples like the [Maasai](#) do at least as well, and often better, than their governments at conserving the biodiversity and environmental values of their traditional lands.

### Tanzania’s Safari Tourism Industry and the WWF/NatHab Partnership

NatHab [advertises](#) its tourism partner, WWF, as “the world’s leading environmental organization.” Together, they offer “nearly [100 conservation-focused and wildlife expeditions](#) around the globe” on every continent of the globe, from Polar Bear tours in the Arctic Circle to Womens’ Adventure tours and special Photo Expeditions. NatHab reports its partnership has provided more than [\\$6 million](#) to support WWF’s global conservation efforts, “and will continue to give 1% of gross sales plus \$174,000 annually through 2028 in support of WWF.” In addition, NatHab states its business customers “have donated an additional [\\$40 million](#) in support of WWF priorities in some of the most precious yet imperiled places on the planet.”

One of the featured opportunities the NatHab/WWF [partnership offers](#) its customers is “Tanzania’s Great Migration & Ngorongoro Crater” Safari Tour, starting at \$13,395 (not including airfare). The tour includes a 10-day guided trek into the Ngorongoro Crater and the adjacent Serengeti National Park plus a [two-year subscription](#) to WWF’s quarterly magazine, World Wildlife, and subscriptions to WWF’s monthly and conservation E-newsletters.

NatHab’s advertises its “Great Migration & Ngorongoro Crater” package and its other [safari tours in Africa](#) as being focused on “authenticity away from crowds. Our small-group safaris feature intimate, top-quality camps and private reserves, with secluded wildlife encounters—not other travelers—front and center.” The nomadic Maasai, with their roaming cattle herds, [huts](#) made of cow dung, mud, sticks, grass and human urine and desolate looking villages lacking basic sanitation and safe drinking water (there was a [cholera outbreak](#) in the Ngorongoro district in 2018 that was fueled by inadequate and unsafe water and poor sanitation facilities) are not the type of “authenticity” NatHab includes in its itineraries prepared for its customers on their visits to the NCA during their ten-day, \$13,500+ safari tours.

Tanzania’s methods for protecting biodiversity in the NCA adopt an approach for establishing, maintaining and policing protected areas that has been called “[fortress conservation](#)” by Indigenous human rights advocates. Fortress conservation is based and practiced on the [belief](#) that biodiversity protection is best achieved by creating protected areas where ecosystems can function in isolation from human disturbance. As [documented](#) by numerous United Nations human rights investigative authorities and bodies, fortress conservation methods employed by governments like Tanzania have led to the forcible and violent evictions of hundreds of



thousands of Indigenous peoples around the world from their homes and homelands, all in the name of conservation.

WWF benefits financially from the “fortress conservation” policies being pursued by the Tanzanian government in the NCA, receiving a percentage of revenues from the tourism dollars spent by NatHab’s customers who pay tens of thousands of dollars to see and experience the biodiversity assertedly being protected by the government’s evictions of the Maasai from the area. At the same time, [WWF asserts](#) it recognizes that Indigenous peoples like the Maasai “are among the Earth’s most important stewards of natural resources,” and that it respects their “human and development rights” and “the importance of conserving their cultures.” Yet despite its stated and repeated commitments to respecting Indigenous peoples’ human rights, WWF partners with NatHab to profit from tourism in the NCA while the government of Tanzania is forcibly evicting the Maasai from their homes and traditional lands.

As [reported](#), six public schools in Ngorongoro were ordered to transfer more \$85,000 (US) in Covid relief funds to a resettlement site in Handeni, 350 miles away from the NCA. Meanwhile, Ngorongoro health officials ordered staff reduced by more than two-thirds at the only hospital providing comprehensive medical services to the Maasai living in the conservation area and downgraded its status from health center to clinic, permitting provision of basic primary care and pharmacy services only. Government funds to build or renovate schools and improve water supply have been halted in the NCA. IPLP has been told by reliable sources on the ground that construction of new school bathrooms has been halted and the continued use of old latrines that should have been replaced are resulting in an increase in urinary tract infections in young children. [One human rights lawyer](#) has called the government’s actions “a war on the Maasai.”

### **The WWF/NatHab Partnership Threatens the Environmental Values and the Human Rights of the Maasai in the NCA**

There are additional reasons besides abiding by its own stated policies and procedures recognizing the human rights of Indigenous peoples in its operations around the world that WWF should re-evaluate its promotion of safari tourism in the NCA with NatHab. WWF’s partnership, rather than promoting conservation and protecting biodiversity in the NCA, in fact, contributes to the environmental threats and habitat destruction created by the hundreds of thousands of tourists the government allows into this UNESCO World Heritage Site. Since [2006](#), the annual number of tourists visiting Ngorongoro Crater has increased from just over 350,000 to more than 700,000 today. During the peak season (June–August), an estimated 250 vehicles enter the crater every day. The [tourist vehicles cause traffic jams, noise pollution, habitat degradation and poor visibility](#) from the dust they generate as they speed off to see an animal sighting reported by company spotters or other tour guides cooperating with each other on their radios and walkie talkies. The traffic congestion in turn encourages guides to illegally drive off-road for better tourist viewing. There have even been reported collisions with animals. From the perspective of the Maasai, conservation and biodiversity in the NCA would be much better protected if left in their hands. It’s too many tourists, not too many Maasai, that are threatening the conservation and biodiversity of the NCA.



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**Conclusion: Calling upon WWF to Stop Accepting Profits from its Tourism Partnership with NatHab in the NCA until Tanzania’s Government Ceases its Evictions of the Maasai**

WWF should suspend its partnership with NatHab and stop accepting any profits or benefits generated from NatHab’s “Tanzania’s Great Migration & Ngorongoro Crater” Safari Tour until the government of Tanzania finds a better way to protect the environmental values of the NCA than forcibly evicting 100,000 Maasai from their homes and traditional lands in violation of their human rights. WWF’s taking of profits and the use of its name in NatHab’s promotion of the tour are inconsistent with WWF’s own stated policies on conservation and protecting the biodiversity of the NCA while respecting and advocating for the human rights of Indigenous peoples in its operations and programs around the world.