

# SANParks declares war on rhino poachers

YOLANDI GROENEWALD | JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA - Jul 23 2009 15:36

South African National Parks (SANParks) announced on Thursday that it had opened its war chest to fight poachers in the Kruger National Park.

David Mabunda, chief executive officer of SANParks, said his organisation would be using R2-million from the Parks Development Fund to increase the number of rangers in the Kruger in an effort to stamp out the problem.

Mabunda also welcomed back the military to the park, which will start patrolling alongside the 450km national border on the eastern boundary of the Kruger shortly. The military stopped patrolling the park three years ago and poaching rapidly increased in its absence.

Authorities say most of the poaching problems originate from Mozambique.

But Mabunda believes more manpower will enable the organisation to patrol problem spots more effectively.

"The funds will be used to employ 57 more rangers and will also contribute to increasing the number of motorbikes for the rangers, purchasing a state-of-the-art Crime Information Management System -- all of which will increase visibility on the ground and improve our anti-poaching efforts," he said.

"Poachers must beware because we will seek them out, we will find them and they will be dealt with. This is a war that we plan on winning," Mabunda said.

Since the beginning of the year the Kruger National Park has lost 26 white rhino and one black rhino to poaching. Last year it lost 36 rhinos to poachers.

At least 80 rhinos were killed in South Africa last year and some say the figure might be much higher.

Conservation groups, including WWF, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Traffic, presented research at a meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites) at the beginning of the month which estimated that the number of rhinos being killed in Southern Africa had risen four-fold in recent years. Environmentalists say the research shows that poaching is at 15-year high.

In December last year the police, together with SANParks, arrested suspected poachers and claimed to have broken the back of a huge poaching ring in South Africa. But the high figure quoted by Mabunda on Thursday showed that the carnage was continuing.

Mozambicans are seen as the main culprits by the authorities. They pop over the border or lure animals back to Mozambique.

SANParks believes that if law enforcement and better community projects were put in place in Mozambique it would reduce poaching.

SANParks declared its war on rhino poachers on Thursday against the backdrop of a controversy that erupted last week, in which animal rights groups accused the organisation of running a "supermarket" that indirectly contributed to the poaching crisis.

Reacting to the storm, Mabunda said SANParks was selling rhinos for population and meta-population management. Because rhinos are "state assets", they cannot be given for free to private individuals and it is good that such funds will be used to assist with anti-poaching measures, he explained.

**Source: Mail & Guardian Online**

**Web Address: <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2009-07-23-sanparks-declares-war-on-rhino-poachers>**

