

## Evaluation of National Park Laws: A case study of Gashaka Gumti National Park, Taraba State, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Laws become obsolete over time, and fail to serve the purpose for which they were enacted. Recognizing that strong legal frameworks are vital for sustainable conservation, the study explores how enforcement capacity, institutional support, and resource availability shape law effectiveness. Using a mixed-methods survey design, data were collected from 72 staff members, including management and rangers, through questionnaires and interviews. Findings show widespread dissatisfaction with the current legal system—83.3% of respondents considered existing laws ineffective in deterring trespassers, while 76.6% believed they fail to achieve conservation goals. A chi-square test ( $\chi^2 = 93.692$ ,  $df = 5$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) revealed statistically significant variations in perceptions, underscoring consensus on the need for legal reform. Key enforcement barriers include inadequate manpower (36.1%), enclave communities (34.7%), poor infrastructure (12.5%), insufficient arms (8.3%), low staff morale (5.6%), and minimal incentives (2.8%). Additionally, penalties under the Nigeria Wildlife Laws Act (1999) were found to have lost deterrent power due to currency depreciation. Overall, the study concludes that outdated legal frameworks, weak institutional structures, and resource shortages undermine conservation success. It advocates for comprehensive legislative updates, improved enforcement capacity, increased funding, community-inclusive conservation, and enhanced welfare and infrastructure to strengthen Nigeria's biodiversity protection system.

**Keywords:** Wildlife law, Gashaka-Gumti National Park, Legal reform, Conservation enforcement, National Park.

### INTRODUCTION

Currie *et al.* (2001) defined law as concerned with advancing the welfare of the public, with resolving disputes, maintaining social control, planning and development, conferring and controlling power, the protection of rights, and the regulation of politics and the economy; and sometimes law is also concerned with justice. Park laws are instrumental to sustainable wildlife management as they set the parameters for wild animal protection and use (Morgera, 2011). Law creates justiciable rights and

corresponding obligations that can be enforced through the courts as opposed to being chosen by the executive. It establishes rights that can be litigated or enforced, whose infringement can be litigated in courts of law, rather than leaving them to the executive and political classes' mercy. Litigating or enforcing such rights through the judicial system is advantageous because the judiciary is the vanguard of justice, and no one with a genuine grievance will be turned away from the seat of justice. These rights can be litigated in courts of law, for instance, by constitutional petitions, or through the ordinary adjudication of disputes, such as civil suits. It is encouraging that apart from creating justiciable rights, the law also sets up Institutions and processes for settling disputes that arise from the denial or infringement of these rights (Sifuna, 2021).

Unlike a policy, law creates legal sanctions for breach of its edicts and noncompliance with it. A law that criminalises or characterises particular actions and conduct as offences will also usually prescribe penalties and sanctions for breach and non-compliance. By so doing, the law insulates itself from indifference and disregard and enhances compliance with its edicts. As already stated, law is usually backed by penalties and sanctions to ensure and secure compliance, in that it spells them out to punish those who willfully or negligently break or disobey it, or fail to comply with it. Under Nigerian law, these penalties and sanctions include: imprisonment, fines, surcharge, restitution, restoration, and payment of compensatory damages. These are intended as punishment rather than a reward. Admittedly, the legal duty to obey the law not only discourages non-compliance, but also ensures and even increases compliance with laws. While some people will comply with a law without knowing about its existence or edict, or for reason of its edict (content) being acceptable to them and agreeing with the same, many others (if not more) comply with laws or refrain from violating them, for fear of the penalties and sanctions prescribed for infraction or non-compliance, or disobedience; i.e. for fear of the legal consequences for breach. The fear of these penalties and sanctions being visited upon one is one of the major drivers of people obeying the law, as without them, the law will be like the proverbial toothless dog that barks but cannot bite. In other words, penalties and sanctions give the law “the teeth” to bite, making it a reality and securing the compliance and obedience it contemplates (Sifuna, 2021).

All Countries have employed a legal framework in the Conservation of wildlife, their habitats, parks, reserves and sanctuaries. Thus, most human activities, such as grazing, hunting, bush burning, farming, etc., are restricted or prohibited. The enabling Laws only allow recreational activities such as nature walks and bird watching. Towards compliance with these regulations, institutional bodies were set up to manage parks and reserves. In Nigeria, we have seven National Parks which serve as the habitats for many threatened and endangered animals that live, breed and build up their numbers

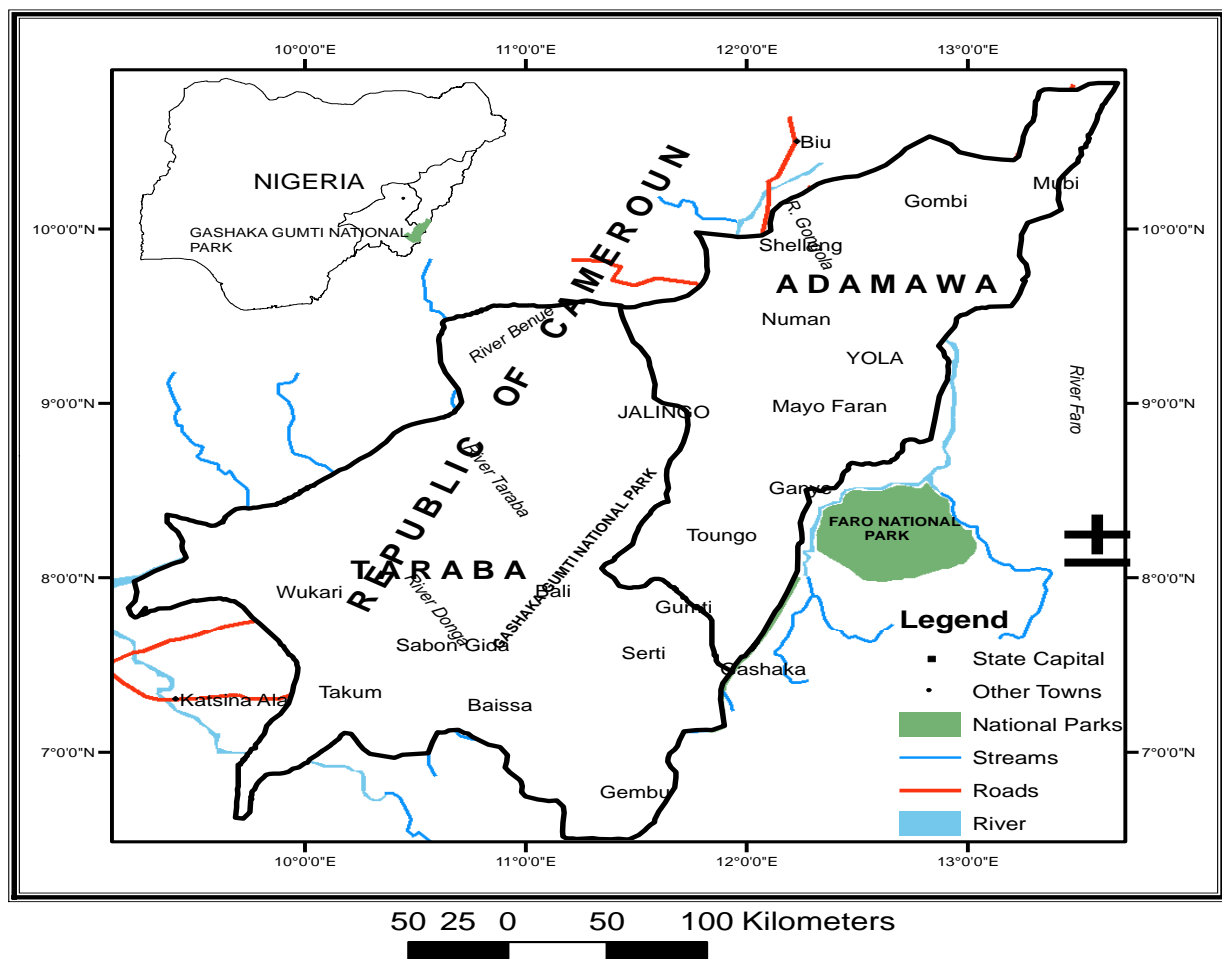
(Sarojini, 2008, NPS, 2024). In Nigeria, Wildlife Laws Act enacted in 1999 is operational in protecting the national parks.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study Area

Gashaka Gumti National Park (GGNP) is the largest in Nigeria. It has a land area of 6,200 Km<sup>2</sup>. The park's name is derived from two of the region's oldest and most historic settlements: Gashaka village in Taraba State, and Gumti village in Adamawa State. The Park was created by Federal Decree No. 36 of 1991, by merging of Gashaka Game Reserve with Gumti Game Reserve (Dunn, 1999).

The park is located between latitude 6° 58' -8°13' N and longitude 11°13'-12°11'E, adjacent to Cameroon border. The park is situated in Taraba and Adamawa States and form part of the eastern highlands of Nigeria, contiguous with the Adamawa Massif in Cameroon. The Park has to its northern boundaries, the Gumti sector which is relatively flat and covered with woodlands and grasslands, while it has to its southern boundaries, the Gashaka sector which is more mountainous and contains vast expanses of rainforest as well as woodland areas and montane grassland (Dunn, 1999).



**Figure 1:** The Location of Gashaka Gumti National Park Source: Dunn (1999)

### Study Design

Combination of questionnaire and interview methods was adopted to elicit information from the respondents. From recognizance survey, Gashaka Gumti National Park has staff strength of 259 (Oruonye et al., 2017), out of which the management staff are eight (8) and rangers 66 (Table 2). Seventy-four (74) structured questionnaires were administered to the staff, out of which 72 were successfully retrieved and their responses were carefully analysed.

**Table 2:** Number of Management staff and Rangers in GGNP

S/N	Park Staff	Population Size	Sampled Population	Questionnaires Retrieved
1	Management Staff	8	8	8
2	Rangers	66	66	64
	<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>72</b>

### Data Collection

The questionnaire covered the state of the wildlife laws, park laws enforcement, facilities in the park and their condition. The close-ended questions provided respondents with a range of answers from which they can choose. The open-ended section of the questionnaire and the interview gave respondents freedom to provide answers to questions asked as they deemed fit.

### Results

Majority of the management staff described the nature of wildlife laws as obsolete 5(62.5%) while smaller proportions view them as ineffective 3(37.5%), none consider the laws modern or effective. Likewise, none of the rangers considered the laws being modern or effective. Gumti Range ranked the highest in their perception of the laws status as obsolete (85.7%) and effective (14.3%), and the least, Gamgam Range (62%) and (38%) respectively (Table 3).

Additionally, results on the process of wildlife laws amendment (Table 4), showed that the whole management opined that the process of law amendment is rigid (100%) and none viewed it as flexible. Similarly, nearly all the rangers have the same opinion, the rangers in Mayo Selbe ranked the highest in this opinion (94.4%), while those in Gamgam Range and Central Squad have the same rating of the rigidity (87.5%) of the process of reviewing the law. Overall, 91.4% of the respondents view the process of amending the wildlife laws as rigid.

**Table 3:** Current Status of the Law

<b>Park Staff</b>	<b>Obsolete (%)</b>	<b>Modern (%)</b>	<b>Effective (%)</b>	<b>Ineffective (%)</b>
Management Staff	62.5	0	0	37.5
M. Selbe Range	77.8	0	0	22.2
Gamgam Range	62	0	0	38
Central Squad	81.2	0	0	18.8
Gumti Range	85.7	0	0	14.3

**Table 4:** Process of Wildlife Law Amendment

<b>Park Staff</b>	<b>Rigid (%)</b>	<b>Flexible (%)</b>
Management	8(100)	-
Mayo Selbe Range	17(94.4)	1(5.6)
Gamgam Range	14(87.5)	2(12.5)
Central Squad Range	14(87.5)	2(12.5)
Gumti Range	12(85.7)	2(14.6)
<b>Total</b>	<b>53(91.4)</b>	<b>5(8.6)</b>

The results in Table 5 indicates that majority, (76.6%) considered the park laws are not effectively serving their intended purpose. Table 6 revealed that 60(83.3%) of the park staff opined that the National Park Laws effectively do not deter trespassers, however, a few park staff still maintained that park laws deter trespassers 12(16.7%) indicating low confidence in deterrence capacity of the wildlife laws. The perception of GGNP staff on whether existing park laws are outdated was tested. Three variables; perceived needs for law review, description of current laws (obsolete or modern), and rigidity of the legal process were analysed. A chi-square goodness-of-fit test yielded a significant result ( $\chi^2 = 93.692$ ,  $df = 5$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that staff responses differ significantly from expected under a random or uniform distribution.

The results in Table 7 showed that low manpower 25(34.7) accounted for the most difficult reason for law implementation in the park, followed by the presence of enclaves in the park (31%), poor access road vehicles 9(12.5), Lack of weapons 6(8.3), poor staff welfare 4(5.6), and the least impediment, lack of social amenities and incentives 2(2.8%).

**Table 5:** Perceived Effectiveness of Park Laws among Park staff

<b>Park Staff</b>	<b>Yes (%)</b>	<b>No (%)</b>
Management	2(25%)	6(75%)
Mayo Selbe Range	6(33.3)	12(67.7)
Gamgam Range	3(18.8)	13(81.2)
Central Squad Range	5(31)	11(69)
Gumti Range	3(21.4%)	11(78.6)
<b>Total</b>	<b>19(26.4)</b>	<b>53(76.6)</b>

**Table 6:** Staff Perception on the Deterrence Capacity of Park Laws

<b>Park Staff</b>	<b>Yes(%)</b>	<b>No(%)</b>
Management	1(12.5)	7(87.5)
Mayo Selbe Range	4(22.5)	14(77.8)
Gamgam Range	2(12.5)	14(87.5)
Central Squad Range	3(18.8)	13(81.2)
Gumti Range	2(14.3)	12(85.7)
<b>Total</b>	<b>12(16.7)</b>	<b>60(83.3)</b>

**Table 7:** Constraints to Park Laws Implementation

<b>Constraints</b>	<b>Freq (%)</b>
Low manpower	26(36.1)
Lack of weapons	6(8.3)
Poor access road and vehicles	9(12.5)
Poor staff welfare	4(5.6)
Presence of enclaves	25(34.7)
Lack of social amenities	2(2.8)

## Discussion

Most of park staff (76.6%) opined that national park laws are not effectively serving their intended purpose has significant consequences for conservation. This view from the front line of conservation highlights a critical disconnect between the legal framework and its on-the-ground implementation, supported by a body of recent academic literature. The laws are ineffective because the worth of the sanctions in monetary form has depreciated.

The low confidence among park staff regarding the effectiveness of park laws points to a systemic issue. While the laws themselves may be well-intentioned, their failure to be

effective can be attributed to several factors. WWF, (2020) and Atim Nchor *et al.*, (2021) outlined lack of resources in national parks, severe lack of funding, manpower, and modern equipment, inadequate rangers and lack the basic tools, such as reliable vehicles, adequate patrol gear, and even proper communication systems effectively monitor vast and often remote areas. This is compounded by low salaries, which can lead to poor morale and, in some cases, corruption, further undermining the integrity of law enforcement as strongly revealed in this study. Some laws may be outdated or contain loopholes that make them difficult to enforce. For instance, penalties for illegal activities might not be a sufficient deterrent, or the legal process for prosecuting offenders may be weak or cumbersome. This is in consonant with the study by Javeed *et al.* (2024) who found that laws related to the preservation of ecological processes are often the least effective because of weak sanctions.

Mongabay, (2016) said this can lead to resentment and a lack of cooperation, making it harder for park staff to enforce laws and gather intelligence on illegal activities. Furthermore, Sifuna (2021) found out that when communities perceive laws are as a threat to their livelihoods rather than a tool for shared benefit, their support for conservation diminishes, leading to increased illegal resource harvesting and conflicts with park authorities.

Most of the staff (76.6%) perceived that the park laws are not serving their intended purpose and 83.3% feel they do not deter trespassers. This is a pointer that there is a serious problem with the existing legal framework. This is further confirmed by the perception that the laws are obsolete (62.5% of management staff) and ineffective (37.5%). To provide a clear context, conversion of the Naira to US dollars in relation to the value of naira in 1991 and 2025. The exchange rate of the Nigerian Naira has fluctuated significantly, it is important to use a recent exchange rate to reflect the current value. In 1991 when the park laws were enacted, \$1 was equivalent to ₦ 160 on the average, it means ₦ 10,000 was equivalent to \$ 62.5. As of mid-2025, the average exchange rate is approximately #1,540 to \$1(Western Union. 2025). Now, the value of \$62.5 dollars is equivalent to # 96,250. So, the crime that attracts the fine of #10,000 in 1991 equals the fine of # 96,250 in 2025. Invariably, fines that deterred trespassers in 1991 cannot deter them in 2025; therefore, ineffectiveness of the Nigeria Park Laws can be attributed to the devaluation of naira.

This sentiment is not unique to this study. Conservation literature frequently cites the inadequacy of outdated legislation as a key challenge. For instance, a study by Atim Nchor *et al.* (2021) found that wildlife laws in many developing countries are often inherited from colonial-era policies and are not suited to modern conservation challenges like international wildlife trafficking and habitat fragmentation. The low

morale and ineffectiveness described by the park staff are a direct consequence of working with legal tools that are not fit for purpose.

In consonant with the findings of this work, Sifuna (2021) observed that, there is an increased illegal activity when laws are not perceived as a strong deterrent, illegal activity such as poaching, logging, and encroachment are likely to increase. The lack of a credible legal threat emboldens offenders, leading to a higher rate of resource exploitation and biodiversity loss.

The findings revealed that management staff and nearly all rangers view the law amendment process as rigid is highly significant. This suggests that even when the need for legal reform is recognised, the institutional and bureaucratic barriers to change are almost insurmountable.

This rigidity prevents the legal framework from adapting to new threats and challenges. For example, the rise of technology in poaching (e.g., GPS tracking, night vision drones) requires a legal response that is swift and flexible. A rigid process means that when a law is changed, the criminals have already developed new ways to exploit the loopholes. This finding is consistent with research of Ostrom (2009) which points to bureaucratic inertia as a major obstacle to effective policy implementation. The inability to easily update laws creates a constant state of being one step behind those who seek to exploit the park's resources.

The results from this research paint a clear picture of a conservation system hampered by an outdated and inflexible legal framework. The consensus among park staff, from rangers to management, that the laws are obsolete and ineffective is a critical warning sign. For conservation to be successful, a major legal overhaul is needed.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study reveals a widespread perception among Gashaka-Gumti National Park (GGNP) staff that existing wildlife laws are obsolete, rigid, and ineffective in addressing modern conservation challenges. An overwhelming 83.3% of respondents believed that the laws do not deter trespassers, while only 16.7% thought they do. This reflects low confidence in the deterrence capacity of the current legal framework. A chi-square test ( $\chi^2 = 93.692$ ,  $df = 5$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) confirmed significant differences among staff perceptions, suggesting strong consensus that the laws are outdated, rigid, and require review. The major constraints identified were Low manpower (36.1%), presence of enclaves within the park (34.7%), poor access roads and vehicles (12.5%), lack of weapons (8.3%), poor staff welfare (5.6%), lack of social amenities/incentives (2.8%). These logistical and institutional constraints exacerbate enforcement weaknesses. This research recommends legal reform, improved funding, capacity building, and

community-inclusive conservation strategies to strengthen enforcement and modernize Nigeria's national park laws.

**CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:** The authors affirms there are no conflicts of interest.

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