



Prospecting / Mining bid in sensitive grassland area to be challenged in High Court

As some readers will recall, we ended our last newsletter with a parting thought about mining in inappropriate & sensitive areas. Since then, a mining company - Delta Mining Consolidated (DMC) - has obtained prospecting rights in the highly unique and sensitive grasslands around Wakkerstroom / Luneburg with the eventual aim to mine for coal and torbanite. In addition, DMC obtained prospecting rights for two nature reserves (Pongola bush in KZN and Paardeplaats in Mpumalanga!).

The manner in which DMC obtained such rights is being challenged through an application which was recently lodged with the high court. Affected landowners, NGO's, KZNWildlife and many interested /affected parties are united in their opposition to DMC's proposed operations as it is their contention (amongst others) that:

- A) There was no consultation process by DMC (as is required by law)
- B) DMC's operations will destroy the sensitive ecology and water production capabilities of the area
- C) Mining will impact on the agricultural and ecotourism industry in the area and effectively destroy *sustainable jobs* and livelihoods
- D) Mining will pollute vital water resources and thus negatively impact on water security for the area.



Would you want this to be turned into a coal mine?

The Wakkerstroom / Luneburg continuum is part of the range of mountains that supplies water for the entire country via four major rivers (Vaal, Orange, Senqunyane and Pongola). It seems madness to even consider mining such an area when our very existence is dependant on a clean, viable supply of water.

As such, DMC left us no option but to oppose their prospecting (and future mining) bid through the relevant legal process which is now well underway.

Special mention must go to Bird Life South Africa, WWF-SA and The Botanical Society of SA for their continued support as well the as overwhelming response from the public and landowners themselves. Your efforts are all noted and acknowledged for the wonderful contribution they have made to this worthy cause.

It must be stated that we are not opposed to responsible mining practices in appropriate parts of the country but it must be made clear that there are “no-go” areas where mining (with its attendant long term impacts) would be an entirely inappropriate land-use activity.



Acid mine drainage caused by inappropriate mining (Photo: Jannie Coetzee)

On a positive note...

The Mabaso Community Stewardship Project is moving forwards with great success in that the community have committed themselves to the conservation of an important wetland located on their property.

The community, Ezemvelo KZNWildlife and Enkangala Grassland Project have together identified a key wetland area with surrounding grasslands to be included as part of the provincial stewardship programme.

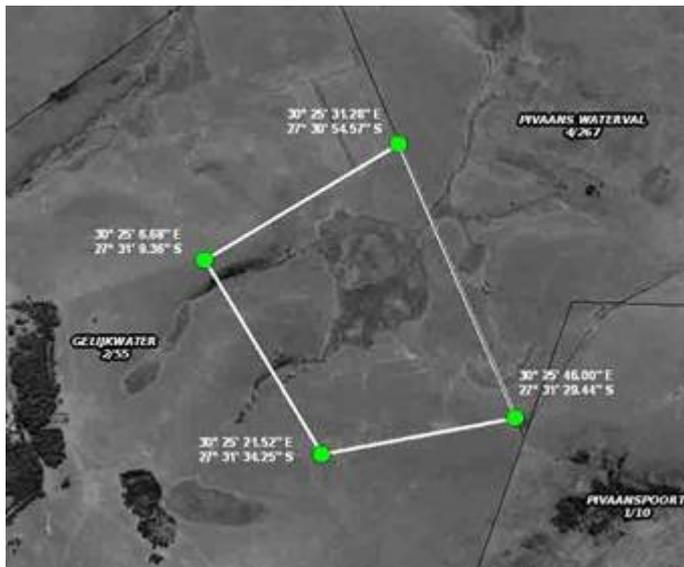
This heralds the development of relevant nature-based resource-use business plans with a clear agricultural link.

Well done to Ntando Mhkize, Nkosi Mabaso, Pumi Msibi, Wilfred Mhlango and Zak Maseko for all their hard work and commitment to this process. May the project grow from strength to strength!





The dedicated KZN Wildlife team: Wilfred, Zac and Ntando



Location of Mabaso stewardship focal area showing wetland in the centre

Grasslands Programme

The Grasslands Programme has made much progress with its efforts in the Luneburg / Wakkerstroom area.

Meetings with landowners have resulted in a strong commitment to the proclamation of numerous key properties as private nature reserves which will effectively ensure the protection of these important grassland areas into the future. In addition it will demonstrate the contribution agriculture makes towards biodiversity conservation.

This follows on from the excellent work done by Brian Morris in conducting assessments with dedicated MTPA staff and landowners. Well done Brian and we look forward to further progress later in the year.

And finally...

Catch us at the upcoming Grassland Society of South Africa congress from 21st – 25th July 2008 for an informative presentation on the Enkangala Grassland Project and its key interventions. Visit: www.grassland.org.za/annual-congress/2008 for more information.

What is the project doing?

As a reminder of the key foci for the project, here is a list of our 4 key interventions that have wider application throughout the project domain:

1



The securing of biologically important grassland areas for conservation in the southern parts of Mpumalanga Province (around Wakkerstroom and Luneburg). Support from the National Grasslands Programme will assist with successful implementation of a land stewardship programme for the province. The 5 year implementation plan is now complete and the coordinators position has been filled. The project is now being implemented.

2



This exciting intervention has been made possible through the generous support of Sonae Novobord & Pfizer. This pilot project is a partnership with Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, members of the Mabaso Community Trust and other interested and affected parties. The primary focus is around the development of incentives for conservation on communally owned land and will hinge on a stewardship approach. The community conservation officer (Ntando Mkhize) is presently engaging with the community and making steady progress.

3



The Ncandu dam development is a partnered approach between provincial conservation authorities, private business concerns and the NGO sector. The result is that from the construction of a much needed dam (for potable water), a substantial land purchase (as an offset in mitigation of the dam construction) has been secured for conservation. The land purchased will be included in a stewardship approach for the province and will augment the size of an already existing provincial reserve by close to 1000Ha. In addition, the Enkangala Grassland project is in the process of developing a stewardship approach for the surrounding private landowners. Eventually, the protected area expansion around the reserve will be large enough to incorporate the entire upper catchment and its headwaters.

4



The Ingula (formally Braamhoek) Pump-Storage Scheme development (near Van Reenen) is at an advanced stage and the advisory committee has met on several occasions. The Enkangala Project serves on this committee and is focusing on the development of a stewardship initiative for the Ingula Resource Reserve. Presently, a draft stewardship approach has been formulated and a meeting with the surrounding landowners will take place shortly to determine levels of interest and future commitment.

Should you wish to know more about the project or anything referred to in this newsletter, then please contact the project coordinator.

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