

REPORT BACK ON SOUTHERN CAPE LANDOWNERS INITIATIVE (SCLI) 2017 BIODIVERSITY AND RISK MANAGEMENT SEMINAR – 25 & 26 MAY

This brief report back is for members of the Constantia Kloof Conservancy (CKC) and Touw River Conservancy (TRC).

The seminar was held over two days at Far Hills Hotel, George and organised by SCLI, Eden District Municipality (Eden DM) & Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU). Both days were full of interesting talks, presentations, workshops and equipment demonstrations. The agenda followed that issued and distributed to members on 11 May, with a few additions to and changes of presenters.

The proceedings and outcome of the seminar will be compiled by SCLI and published on their website in due course. CKC & TRC Members will be notified once this available.

Day One – 25 May

The seminar commenced with Bianca Currie of NMMU informing delegates of the methodology to be used throughout – presentations followed by two dialogue sessions on invasive alien plants (IAPs) and then four separate working groups to cover, in respect of IAPs: Land Management; Water Security; Fire and Risk Management and Biodiversity Corridors.

A busy morning, with presentations on development of the SCLI Strategy, of which this seminar was a key part to obtain input and direction and others on the biodiversity of the Southern Cape and the effect of invasive alien plants (IAPs). The use of GIS mapping by SANParks, Cape Nature and the Southern Cape Fire Protection Association (SCFPA) was displayed and shown to be extensive for the region. In addition, the Management Plans for SANParks, Cape Nature and MTO Group, as major landowners and operators in the region were also briefly covered.

Some interesting points noted were:

- ESKOM outsource their vegetation management under power lines to nine companies in the Western Cape, two of which operate in the Southern Cape.
- Clearance widths under the power line servitudes are 22m for 11 – 66kV lines and 32m for 132kV lines.
- Inspections are carried out monthly, six monthly and annually using drones, helicopters, 4x4's and on foot, depending on accessibility.
- We were introduced to “Wicked Problems” (Google it for definitions and descriptions) by Nicholas Cole of SANParks and shown how IAPs fall into this category along the Garden Route.
- The Western Cape Biodiversity Handbook 2017 is due for publication shortly (probably in June), so monitor the Cape Nature website for notification and access online.
- SANBI have an extensive Biodiversity GIS (BGIS) map of South Africa accessible via their web site and that can, apparently, be used with “CapeFarmMapper” software.
- Timber plantations in the region were being reduced in area by 45 000ha, following Government decisions in 2001. However, this has been partially reversed by about 50% following a review. These reversed exit areas are being replanted under lease / contract by MTO Group at present. It was noted that the exit and reversal programmes could be significant problems in future if the appropriate funds and resources are not available to maintain the cleared / re-planted areas properly.

- Properly maintained plantations are not invasive.
- There are currently only two Catchment Management Areas (CMA) in South Africa, one being the Breede-Gouritz CMA (BGCMA) and the other is the Inkomati-Usuthu CMA.
- The BGCMA has funds (limited) that can be used for IAP management, but they do not do the work, it has to be via an implementing agency, such as a municipality and has to meet various criteria, such as job creation, etc.
- SCFPA is a Section 21 Company and is under-pinned by an Act of Parliament.
- SCFPA have an extensive GIS system of veld ages and are extending this back to 2002. This provides them with data on potential fire hazard areas and monitoring capabilities.
- SCFPA carried out, in association with SANParks, Cape Nature, municipalities and landowners and other organisations, a very successful controlled burn in the Brenton area near Knysna this month. This alleviated possible wildfires and also helped to regenerate the fynbos of the area.
- The development of biodiversity corridors through transformed areas is on SANParks agenda for now and the future.
- The cost and resource requirements for compliance with the various Acts that cover IAPs and the conflicts that arise between legislation (Acts and Regulations) was acknowledged, but requires compliance. Specialists and consultants maybe needed to provide advice and navigate the legislative minefields.

The Dialogues produced some good feedback chief amongst which, from all groups, was the need for a co-ordinating body for all the diverse groups aiming at similar objectives in the area. The two preferred candidates were SCFPA and SCLI, with the former already having substantial administrative and technical capacity in place. SCFPA expressed a willingness to do so in conjunction with SCLI, but would require additional resources and funding to achieve it.

The outcome of the afternoon workshops will be published separately by SCLI, but built on the Dialogue outcomes for the specific groups.

Day Two – 26 May

A number of presentations were given by various entities from along the Garden Route. The session ended with a short talk on and followed by a demonstration of the drone technology used to assist SCFPA with the controlled burn at Brenton.

Some points noted during the presentations were:

- The major cost and resource problems faced by landowners and farmers due to NEMBA¹ and other Acts. Not being able to properly clear firebreaks rated highly amongst these. Only being able to cut resulted in the presence of stumps that made firebreaks useless for vehicle and even foot access in the event of a fire.
- With the loss of forestry skills there has been a reluctance to pre-burn firebreaks throughout the region. Riversdal Fire Department understands the predicament of farmers in that area and has issued pre-burn permits. These have been successfully handled.
- Tourist guides in the area need to be educated and informed of the fynbos, its loss, the geology that affects it and the types and the effects of IAPs. This needs to be extended to Grade 11 & 12 pupils, as they will have to carry this forward in future.

¹ “National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act [No. 10 of 2004]” - NEMBA

- The Garden Route Biosphere Reserve (GRBR) is a few weeks away from, hopefully, receiving UNESCO recognition. This represents significant opportunities for tourism.
- The demand for funding from The Table Mountain Fund (TMF) was R80 million for 2017 with only about R1.2 million being available for projects. Choosing those to benefit is not an easy task.
- We were introduced to MAGIC (Multiscale Adaptive Global change In Coastal Areas), which compares Eden (Wilderness, Sedgefield, etc.), Cornwall (UK) and Languedoc (France) in terms of exposure to sea surges and associated hazards and the mindfulness of the inhabitants. A “board game” has been developed by NMMU and will be piloted on 1 June with workshops from 8 to 15 June. Further details are to be made available to delegates.
- Preservation of the catchment areas of the Western Cape are seen as important, with the example of one pine tree consuming about 40l per day of water. This yields a very large water loss per day in catchment areas.
- MTO Group currently manage 92 000ha of Government land from the Boland to Port Elizabeth, 63% of which is commercially planted. The changes in this were provided in detail.
- MTO treat IAPs as weeds as well, as these affect the plantations. Costs associated with the operations were provided as percentage of budgets.
- With George being the fastest growing town in the country, further fragmentation of the forests and areas between Wilderness and Sedgefield can be expected.
- The issue of IAPs along this section of coast is considerable. The example of a recently purchased, but Rooikrans-infested, farm by someone from Gauteng was given in terms of the effects of the various environmental Acts. This has been compounded by the apparent lack of accountability of the seller and estate agent. [On discussion, several people pointed out that there are remedies.]
- Drones can be pre-programmed for flying to various co-ordinates and flight paths for fire-fighting. A regime of pre-planning, operations and post fire planning is used.
- Drones are also being used for Disaster Management.

After the morning session, the drone demonstration was given. A large drone was flown and carried thermal imaging and high resolution cameras, the displays of which were very detailed on the large monitor positioned for us to see. This was also the type of view seen by the SCFPA Co-ordinator during the Brenton controlled burn. This allowed him to send fire fighters to flare ups or hot spots during the burn. Our conclusion was that it is exceptional technology being used to very good effect.

Conclusion

A very useful two days in terms of biodiversity and the issues of IAPs and fire along the Garden Route.

Excellent organisation by the SCLI Team and to the Seminar Sponsors for allowing this seminar to happen with no cost to the delegates. Thank you to you all!

Dave Hill, CKC Secretary
Lynn Keith, Touw River Conservancy

30 May 2017