



MPUMALANGA MEC APPROVES INTENTION TO DECLARE THE GREATER LAKENVLEI AREA A PROTECTED ENVIRONMENT

28th May 2014

Start

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) is celebrating the Mpumalanga's MEC for Economic Development, Environment and Tourism signing the Intent to Declare the Greater Lakenvlei Protected Environment (GLPE). The intent will be gazetted and advertised and will start a public participation period in which support and/or objections to the declaration can be sent in by interested parties. This declaration is a significant conservation milestone, especially in the light of the development pressures the area faces. The EWT has been working on crane and habitat conservation in the area since 1994 and has recently, in partnership with Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA) and BirdLife South Africa, facilitated landowner engagements around the Biodiversity Stewardship process for the proposed GLPE declaration.

The Greater Lakenvlei Area lies between Dullstroom and Belfast and is important as it harbours all three of South Africa's threatened crane species—the Grey Crowned Crane, the Wattled Crane and the Blue Crane—as well as other threatened species such as White-winged Flufftail. Lakenvlei is also a peatland, which is a wetland with a particularly high organic matter content that is good at storing and purifying water, as well as sequestering and storing carbon in a pristine state, critical to preventing additional impacts on climate change. In fact, peatlands host a third of the earth's terrestrial

carbon. Furthermore, the Lakenvlei wetlands provide crucial ecosystem services, including the ability to trap nitrates, regulate stream flow, maintain biodiversity, flood attenuation, carbon storage, and to prevent erosion due to good vegetation cover.

Said Ursula Franke, Senior Field Officer in the EWT's African Crane Conservation Programme, "The National Protected Area Expansion Strategy identifies the proposed GLPE as part of a larger area identified for protected environment expansion within the grassland biome. The region is also a critically important water catchment area and strategic water source area for both the Olifants and Komati systems. The vision for the GLPE is to further develop it for eco-tourism in line with the objectives contained within the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) of the Emakhazeni Local Municipality and the Environmental Management Framework (EMF). The envisaged benefits of a broader expansion of protected areas within this region are a well-managed natural environment and livestock farming sector and economic development and job creation through tourism, wildlife enterprises and rural recreational developments."

Mining and related infrastructure poses the most severe threat to the Lakenvlei system, with physical destruction, groundwater flow disruption and pollution being the impacts of main concern. Agriculture and forestry, which also pose a threat to the region, may adversely change the runoff characteristics of the catchment, with erosion, sedimentation and pollution being potential hazards.

"The objectives of the proposed GLPE are to demonstrate the mainstreaming of biodiversity conservation into the agriculture and tourism sector by securing the conservation of the area and by promoting agricultural and other land use practices that are compatible with biodiversity conservation. The ultimate objective is to ensure that grassland conservation is ensured whilst livelihoods from livestock farming and tourism are maintained," concluded Franke.

The EWT-ACCP's work is supported by the WWF Nedbank Green Trust and Millstream. For further information please contact Ursula Franke on ursulaf@ewt.org.za

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The Endangered Wildlife Trust is a non-profit, public benefit organisation dedicated to conserving species and ecosystems in southern Africa to the benefit of all people.

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