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## WORLD WETLANDS DAY 2013 CELEBRATION HOSTED BY EASTERN CAPE



The annual commemoration of the signing of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands 42 years ago has, in South Africa, moved from formal presentations to an engaging and interactive event. The importance of wetlands is no longer preached over and over to the same circles of the already converted wetland specialists. Nowadays the event, which moves from province to province depending on the theme, brings together the diverse communities of the country to celebrate these powerful examples of 'ecological infrastructure', which provide a range of benefits and livelihoods for South Africans from all walks of life. The event also provides an opportunity to challenge, discuss and share ideas in an open and safe platform with leaders and politicians to ensure that these ecosystem-based services are sustainable.

This year's event was held in Kareedouw, two hours away from Port Elizabeth, within the Koukamma Municipality on 1 February 2013. Hundreds of delegates attending the 2013 World Wetlands Day (WWD) event descended on the Kagiso Hall, led by the Deputy Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs, Ms Rejoice Mabudafhasi. Wetland experts,

scientists, politicians, public servants from all sectors of government, teachers, schoolchildren, Working for Wetlands and Working for Water workers and the communities of Kareedouw and Joubertina all gathered at the Kagiso Hall, which was packed to capacity.

The national Departments of Environmental Affairs (DEA), Water Affairs (DWA), Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), the Water Research Commission (WRC), Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and Working for Wetlands, in partnership with the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro (NMBM), Koukamma and Cacadu Municipalities, Gamtoos Irrigation Board and the Eastern Cape Department of Economic Affairs, Environment and Tourism (DEAET) put their efforts together to ensure this event was a success.

The theme for this year's WWD was 'Wetlands and Water Management' and the focus of the event was on highlighting the interdependence between water and wetlands. This provided an opportunity to emphasise the role that wetlands, as natural equivalents of built infrastructure, can play in supporting the management of our limited water resources.

### CHURCHILL DAM AND KROM RIVER

The event began with a visit to the Churchill Dam and Krom River, which supply 40% of the water used by the NMBM. The NMBM officials gave background to the building of the dam and a presentation on the water infrastructure. The dam has a water purification plant that still relies on the technology which was installed in 1949 to effectively remove silt, undesirable chemicals and biological contami-



nants to ensure that treated water is safe for human consumption.

This plant receives water from the Krom River catchment which previously contained some of the largest wetlands of their type (palmiet dominated wetlands on deep peat basin) in South Africa. However, as a result of infestation by alien vegetation such as black wattle, poorly designed roads through the river, and farming activities in the floodplain, this wetland system has undergone severe degradation over the last 70 years.

Continuous illegal interference with the catchment by livestock farmers and the disturbance of the floodplains has further caused major degradation of this system. During recent years, a couple of riparian landowners also channelised the river using bulldozers, causing the river to incise further. This has resulted in water flowing down the river with unnaturally large amounts of sediment, which has caused difficulties for the purifying plant downstream.

As a result of these impacts, it is estimated that about 60% of the system's valley floor peat basins



were lost over the last century. Despite the loss of many of its wetlands, the Krom River still contains several extensive peat deposits, which continue to contribute to the improvement of water quality, attenuation of floods and maintenance of flow in the river.

Fortunately, the Krom River catchment has been the subject of extensive wetland rehabilitation by Working for Wetlands and invasive alien plant control by Working for Water since 2001. Working for Wetlands rehabilitation structures are designed to trap some of the massive amounts of sediment that move in pulses down the system every time there is a flood. These activities have improved the quantity and quality of water flowing into the dam, while helping to protect the dam's infrastructure from floods and further sedimentation. Currently the savings for chemicals between the dirty and clean (raw water) is estimated at R300 000 per month, depending on the raw water quality.

There is still a long way to go before the system fully recovers. Once good wetland vegetation is established behind these structures, they will also function as filters for the finer sediments that are transported by the river. There is no doubt that the effect of Working for Wetlands rehabilitation structures when measured over a long period of time will display a high return on investment, in the process demonstrating the value of our ecological infrastructure.

## KAGISO HALL—FORMAL EVENT

The New Growth Path Framework, which sets a target of 5 million new jobs to be created by 2020, remains an active reality that will leave thousands of people empowered. Proper management of our ecosystems is a competitive edge in growing our economy. Natural Resource Management Programmes like Working for Wetlands and Working for Water, through wetland rehabilitation and the reduction of invasive alien plants, have not only en-

sured that water is conserved and better managed, but have also created thousands of green jobs in natural resource management.

In her speech, Ms Mabudafhasi reminded everyone of our responsibility in ensuring that wetlands do not perish. She made specific reference to the success of the Working for Wetlands Programme's rehabilitation interventions in the Krom River, which she had witnessed during the morning site visit. She mentioned how the dramatic and most serious floods since 1938 took place in 2006 in the southern Cape and resulted in heavy loss of life, property and severe degradation to the system. Palmiet lived up to its reputation as the 'superglue of wetlands in the Cape', slowing the velocity and destructive potential of the floodwaters and trapping sediment. The Working for Wetlands structures accomplished their purpose and the two main wetland basins emerged from the floods largely unscathed.

Ms Mabudafhasi, then challenged the Kareedouw people to take advantage of this competitive edge by emulating the Makuleke community in Limpopo, which is actively involved in wetlands preservation and protection. "The Makuleke wetlands were declared a Ramsar site in 2007, and this is the only Ramsar site owned and co-managed by the community in South Africa," she said.

Ms Mabudafhasi made sure that the public understands the importance of indigenous knowledge in

educating children about environmental issues. She cautioned against the notion that children must only be educated at school about environmental issues and stressed that the indigenous knowledge of our parents is very important. "We must acknowledge this indigenous knowledge which conserved our wetlands even in the olden days. Let's not keep the knowledge to ourselves. Let's educate others. Let's not do it to earn money but to ensure that we take care of the wetlands and the environment."

In conclusion Ms Mabudafhasi said, "We are also in a process of establishing the Kromme River Catchment Forum that will be composed of all stakeholders and contribute towards responsible management of this catchment. Let's work together to secure our wetlands for the sake of biodiversity and water management. Failure to do so will retard our development as our people will not have access to water, will result in food insecurity, as farmers will not be able to produce food, our ecosystems will not survive, and our tourism will also be affected."

Quoting the late Professor Wangari Mathai, an environmental activist and 2004 Nobel Prize Laureate, she said, "I have seen rivers that were brown with silt become clean-flowing again. The job is hardly over, but it no longer seems impossible.' We are also going to follow suit, make sure we clean our rivers and wetlands so that healthy water flows again with fish."

## ECO POETRY



Those that had missed some of Ms Mabudafhasi's speech were brought up to speed when three Dumani Primary School learners, Asthandile Bonakele, Asemahle Ntabeni and Xoliswa Olifant from Show Village in Motherwell, Port Elizabeth, enthusiastically recited their eco-poem with a strong message against the degradation of the environment, especially our water sources. No one in the audience

was spared. They challenged our individual carbon footprint, unhealthy habits of dumping in wetlands, polluting the same water that we drink causing diseases. This is a good indication that Mrs Xoliswa Mambalu and Mrs Phumeza Ngcongca, who are the environmental teachers of these learners and writers of this poem, are on the right track of successfully fulfilling DWA's 2020 Vision Programme which uses education as a critical response to achieving behavioural change to issues of water literacy and careers. This programme exposes learners from Grade R to 12 to various ways to address water problems in their communities.

### A SNIPPET FROM THE ECO-POEM

*Wash your hands!  
Is it a plea or a force?  
Is it a right or a responsibility?  
Yes, it's a RESPONSIBILITY!  
Your hands, yes your hands must be WASHED.*

*Talking about hands to be washed. What do you use?*

Oh yes, WATER, Yes soapy WATER,  
Amanzi, angqonge ngqonge, ndini kaqubule gqitha  
Wena ujikeleza umhlaba wonke nqu nesibhakabhaka  
(globe-trotting)

Wena ubengezela ubukekayo (looking all bright)  
Wena ukucoceka de ingathi uyiglas (looking bright  
and shiny like a glass)

Utsho ngesandi esimnandla udlula (your car making  
a lovely sound as you drive by)

Umntu azibuke nge usisipili (you are a ...to look at)  
Umdali wawo uwenzele ukuphila kwam' nawe

(God created water for you and I)  
Nqu nezilwanyana ade abe likhaya kuzo (and  
animals too)

I am worried! Oh, so concerned about you!  
Messing in the river, You forgot that we said WATER IS LIFE.

Ucoceko x3, (be clean)

Uqoqosho x3, (be economical)

## PROVINCIAL WWD 2013 EVENTS IN PICTURES

Those that could not make it to the national event were able to share in the month's excitement by celebrating this eventful date in their provinces. The following pictures tell a story of an educational and fun-filled day.

### NORTHERN CAPE

World Wetlands Day 2013 was pleasantly celebrated on 1 February at the Witsand wetland in Kamiesberg. The event was organised by DEA, Working for Water, the Department of Nature Conservation and

the Namaqua National Park. A treasure hunt was held and the teams played a game with the similar principles as 'snakes and ladders' where a dice is thrown and the number that the team lands on is the card number that they need to 'hunt'. The cards were hidden all over the 'wetlands area' and teams had to retrieve the cards numerically. The cards had questions on wetlands. The treasure hunt was won by the Kamieskroon contractor Andrew Brandt's team. Each team member received a branded book bag.



Priscilla Magerman, P&C Namaqua demonstrating the treasure hunt game to the teams



Ayandanda Mtshizana from DEA congratulates the treasure hunt winners' team

This was followed by an entertaining poem competition. The teams had to each write a poem consisting of 2 paragraphs (8 lines) and had to incorporate the theme of the day. They were allowed to use various props (rocks, water bottles, branches, etc.) and they were scored on the following: theme, wetlands

as a topic, paragraphs and lines, rhymes, amount of presenters/participants, body language, facial expressions, props, speech and clarity. Working for Wetlands contractor Michael Smit's team wrote the winning poem and received DEA branded cricket hats and book bags.



*Ayanda Mtshizana from DEA with the poem winners' team*

## WESTERN CAPE

The Western Cape Wetlands Forum, Table Mountain National Park and Working for Wetlands organised their provincial celebration at Silvermine Dam on 2 February. The day's proceedings involved a 6 km walk around the Silvermine River Catchment.

## FREE STATE

The Free State and Northern Cape Wetland Forum, SANBI, DETEA FS, Map Water, SANParks, CWR, DAFF and DWA hosted the provincial event at Vulindlela Primary School in Harrismith on 18 February.

## GAUTENG

The Gauteng Provincial event took place on 21 February at the O.R. Tambo Memorial Precinct in Wattville, Ekurhuleni, on the East Rand. The event was hosted by the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality.

## KWAZULU-NATAL

Umgeni Water organised the celebration which was held in KwaNyuswa (Bothas Hill) on 20 February. The day began with a wetland clean-up that took place in the morning and the main event, which was attended by Ethekewini Municipality, the Department of Agriculture & Environmental Affairs, Department of Water Affairs, SANBI, KZN Wildlife, Local Government (Local Ward Councillor), educators from surrounding schools and learners.

The KwaZulu-Natal Midlands Project celebrated WWD on 1 March at Entabeni Education Centre in Hlatikulu.

The Maputaland Project celebrated WWD on 4 February at kwaGiba Community Hall, in Mngobokazi, Mkhuze.



*Teams sitting at Witsand wetland rehab site*



## NORTH-WEST

The North-West provincial celebration took place at Mathopestad, near the town of Boons. Another event was held at the Tlokwe Local Council in Potchefstroom.

## MPUMALANGA

Working for Wetlands teamed up with the Endangered Wildlife Trust and the Highveld project and organised an event at Chrissiesmeer.

## LIMPOPO

The provincial event took place at Modimolle.

## EASTERN CAPE

The Eastern Cape Provincial WWD celebrations took place at Mount Fletcher on 14 February.



## WORKING FOR WETLANDS LOSES A CONTRACTOR

The Working for Wetlands Programme is sad to announce yet another passing of a dedicated wetland rehabilitation worker, Mantsho Johanna Mojolwane (40). Mojolwane, who grew up in the Brakkuil Village, joined the programme as a general worker with one of the programme's implementers in the North-West Province, Rainbow Moon Trading, in May 2003. She was involved in the rehabilitation work that was done at Boitekong Sewerage, Kedar Lodge, Kgaswane Nature Reserve, Kanana Village and at the time of her passing she was working at Maanhaarrand Paul Kruger Farm. She passed away while she was busy arranging her brother's funeral and was buried on the same day as him.

Emily Chabedi, director of Rainbow Moon Trading, described her as a very quiet but attentive person at work. "I realised her potential and in 2005 I appointed her to a supervisor position as she fitted the

profile of a leader based on her firmness and hard-working abilities. In 2006 when one of our contractors could not continue to work with us, the Project Advisory Committee and the company interviewed those who were interested in the position and Mantsho became the favourite of the panel."

Mojolwane started as a contractor in September 2006 and 'her stride to succeed in her job abilities escalated'. "She became part of this programme family and fitted in so well to a point that it's so difficult to say she is gone. She will be sorely missed by the North-West teams," said Chabedi. This was displayed by the support of her former colleagues and employees who came to bid their last farewell over the weekend. May her soul rest in peace. Her contribution to the rehabilitation of wetlands will not be forgotten.

## EARTH HOUR 2013

Date: Saturday, 23 March 2013  
Time: 20:30  
Venue: Global

Let us join in the symbolic act of global unity and switch off our lights for an hour for the seventh annual Earth Hour. This initiative, by the World Wildlife Fund, is an opportunity for all of us to come together to celebrate, reflect on our actions and our impact on the environment, and make a renewed commitment to preserving our planet. As a global community we are currently using the equivalent of 1.5 times the planet's natural resources to support our consumption patterns and this has to change.

When you switch off your lights, heater, plugs, stove, etc. you are supporting a plight to save the planet, conserve the environment and ensure sustainable

energy supply into the future. Let's embrace the power of nature, let's switch off and switch over to healthy and sustainable habits.

Let's spread the word, mobilise as many people as we can and get creative. WWF-SA encourages everyone to celebrate Earth Hour, whether out and about or at home: maybe a braai with friends, a candlelit dinner with a loved one or hosting a neighbourhood stargazing picnic? Check the WWF website for 'Things to do in the dark':  
[http://www.wwf.org.za/what\\_we\\_do/earth\\_hour/](http://www.wwf.org.za/what_we_do/earth_hour/)

This website also has plenty of ideas for how business, schools, universities, accommodation, restaurants and clubs, among others, can get involved in Earth Hour.

**Working for Wetlands champions the protection, rehabilitation and sustainable use of South Africa's wetlands through co-operative governance and partnership. The programme is managed by the South African National Biodiversity Institute on behalf of the departments of Environmental Affairs, Water Affairs and Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, and forms part of government's Expanded Public Works programme.**



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Design and layout by SANBI Publishing. March 2013.