2.5 The Greater Cederberg Biodiversity Corridor

(i) Conservation Corridors

One of the recommendations of the C.A.P.E strategy was the establishment of mega-reserves or conservation corridors that are large enough to sustain biodiversity patterns and processes in the CFR, even in the face of global climate change. Due to the extent of land transformation in the region, there are limited opportunities to create these corridors; possible sites identified included the Cederberg, Baviaanskloof and Gouritz areas. With the support of the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), Cape-Nature investigated the establishment of mega-reserves in the Cederberg and Gouritz regions, undertaking extensive stakeholder participation and planning processes.

In June 2004, CapeNature launched the Greater Cederberg Biodiversity Corridor (GCBC), marking the culmination of a ground-breaking planning process. The planning phase generated a number of comprehensive specialist reports, as well as strategic management and business plans for the GCBC. Encouraged by the success of the planning phase, the C.A.P.E. Programme has committed $1.1 million to support a variety of implementation projects in the biodiversity corridor.

Rock Art in the Greater Cederberg Biodiversity corridor.

Crossing the boundaries

The GCBC covers a staggering 1.8 million ha in both the Northern and Western Cape Provinces and includes both state and privately owned land. It stretches from the Nieuwoudtville plateau in the north to the Groot Winterhoek Wilderness Area in the south, and from the Sandveld of the West Coast to the Tankwa National Park in the east, and incorporates the Cederberg Wilderness Area. It spans an ecological gradient from moist mountain fynbos to semi-desert and represents two globally significant biodiversity hotspots: the CFR and the Succulent Karoo.

CapeNature does not intend consolidating this biodiversity corridor by acquiring or directly managing extensive new landholdings. Instead, the conservation agency is trying to implement a stewardship approach. Jaco Venter, project co-ordinator for the initiative, describes this approach as recognising and working with the “lived in, worked in” nature of an extended landscape.

New name—new identity

What’s in a name? Quite a lot, actually. Names are loaded with meaning, and the legacy they reflect may not always be a positive one. During the early stages of the public participation process when community groups, landowners and
government departments were first introduced to the idea of a Cederberg mega-reserve, it became clear that the term "reserve" had negative connotations for many people. It reminded them of earlier processes of nature reserve establishment and raised fears that CapeNature might want to buy or expropriate their land, put a fence around it and deny them access to traditional livelihoods. A task team was given the challenge to come up with a more appropriate name and settled on the Greater Cederberg Biodiversity Corridor. The name is significant, not only because it more accurately reflects the nature of the area, but also because the name was given by the people of the region.

**Planning together for action**

The planning phase of the GCBC initiative was a positive process that was characterised by partnerships and the close alignment of planning and implementation. A steering committee was established, made up of important role-players from the region who actively championed the process. Various action groups gave practical support to the steering committee.

People travelled long distances to attend meetings and workshops, but they were happy to do so because these were productive events that promoted implementation. For instance, stakeholders who participated in the Action Planning Workshop were able to contribute to the development of a draft strategy that guided the planning phase. In turn, the strategy development process provided a context for stakeholders to develop their own business plans for biodiversity-friendly enterprises. Experienced project staff members were on hand to provide support, with the result that the planning phase generated both an overall strategy for the GCBC and more specific business and action plans. This co-operative approach resulted in good working relationships between stakeholders.

The Greater Cederberg Biodiversity Corridor crosses provincial boundaries, spans ecological gradients and represents two biodiversity hotspots.
Chipping away at the Sandveld
Stretching from the West Coast across the coastal plain to the Olifants River mountains in the east, the western section of the Greater Cederberg Biodiversity Corridor is known as the Sandveld. The process of mapping the biodiversity corridor drew attention to the rapid loss of natural habitats in this region. In stark contrast to the well-conserved mountainous parts of the corridor, in the Sandveld only the wetlands of Elandsbaai and Rocherpan are formally protected; most habitats are now classified as vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered.

Improved Communication and implementation
The GCBC initiative has improved communication and strengthened co-operation between natural resource management agencies in the region; for example, in working with local landowners, the Department of Agriculture and CapeNature have integrated two complementary projects: Area-wide Planning (AWP) and Stewardship (Chapter 5.2 (i)). Through the AWP process, the Department of Agriculture is probing the conservation willingness of landowners and encouraging them to enter into Stewardship agreements with CapeNature in order to conserve natural corridors in the landscape.

The AWP process involves drawing up a database and detailed maps of current and future land uses on farms. This area-wide inventory enables the Department to co-ordinate agricultural land use planning to ensure sustainability in the long term. The database includes a “conservation willingness” score, which is based on questions answered by the land owner. This helps the GCBC Management Team to decide which landowners to approach first to discuss Stewardship arrangements. Thanks to good co-operation between the Management Unit and landowners, conservation planning has been progressing rapidly in the GCBC. Already, plans are underway to establish contract conservation areas that will provide a corridor for leopard movement between two mountain ranges.

In the Sandveld, AWP gives landowners an opportunity to inform the departments represented on the Sandveld Task Team of any issues and project proposals they consider to be important in the area. These recommendations are presented to the relevant departments at quarterly Sandveld Task Team meetings.

Good stewards of the Corridor
The GCBC Management Unit is helping Sandveld landowners to identify and implement sustainable land management options. The Unit is working closely with DEA&DP to provide advice on sustainable land use and to streamline the development application process. The Unit is also helping landowners to set up a Water Association in order to start addressing the urgent issue of water conservation in the Sandveld. Progress has been made with best practice guidelines for biodiversity management by the rooibos tea industry. One of the key objectives of the GCBC Management Unit is to adapt these guidelines for the potato industry.

The GCBC Management Unit is also actively bringing the plight of the Sandveld to the attention of a wide range of people. In addition to generating considerable media coverage, members have given presentations at farmers’ association and women’s group meetings, as well as at the Annual General Meeting of...
State of emergency!
Nine of the 12 vegetation types in the Sandveld are threatened by habitat loss—mostly due to potato farming.

Historically this arid lowland area was mainly used for grazing cattle. When it was discovered that the soils were suitable for potato farming, vast tracts of virgin veld were ploughed up and centre-pivot irrigation installed. The economic imperative was strong: a farmer can earn about R1.2 million per year from a 20 ha potato circle, compared with only R110 000 per year from about 2 000 ha of grazing land. It's therefore no surprise that about 975 ha of natural habitat is being transformed every year, or about 2.7 ha per day! Compared to other parts of the province, this area has been experiencing the greatest pressure from agricultural development: departmental records show that 80% of all virgin land cleared for agriculture in the province between 1989 and 2004 was along the West Coast.

Potato circles are having a devastating impact on biodiversity, but this isn't the only problem. Groundwater levels are dropping fast, threatening all livelihoods in the region—including potato farming. The level of Verlorenvlei, a wetland of international importance, is also falling, making us question just how well protected our so-called protected areas really are. Climate change predictions suggest strongly that the western parts of South Africa will become progressively drier. If Sandveld farmers want to stay in business, they will need to start looking for sustainable alternatives to intensive potato farming.

To address these issues of unsustainable farming, destruction of natural vegetation and falling groundwater levels, a Sandveld Task Team was formed, comprising representatives of CapeNature, DEA&DP, DoA, DWAF and municipalities. The Task Team has been meeting with landowners and communities throughout the Sandveld to investigate local needs and seek more sustainable alternatives. People have discovered that they have much in common and are working together to share examples of good practice and decide on regional priorities.
Northern Cederberg Donkey Trails

In the northern Cederberg, an exciting community tourism opportunity has been launched that will introduce you to traditional Cederberg hospitality and transport, while you marvel at the magnificence of the Wilderness Area. Drive or get a lift to the top of Pakhuis Pass, where you will be met by Abraham Ockhuis, resident of Heuningvlei, who will give you a lift in a traditional donkey cart along the jeep track that winds its way down the northern flank of the Cederberg to the village. There you can stay the night in a guest house, enjoying traditional food and swapping stories under the stars. Spend a day or two hiking and enjoying Heuningvlei hospitality, and then return to the Pass by donkey cart. Soon you may be able to continue your ride down the valley, as plans are under way to extend the donkey cart trail to Wupperthal, the Moravian mission town famous for its veldskoen factory. This innovative tourism venture is an opportunity for the villages of the northern Cederberg to benefit directly from a growing interest in the natural beauty and cultural history of the place that has been their home for centuries.

To book a Cederberg Donkey Trail, please contact the Porterville office of CapeNature, the booking agent for the Heuningvlei community, on (022) 9312900 / cederberg@cnc.org.za.

Donkey cart trails are an exciting tourism innovation in the Cederberg.

Potato SA. They have even taken provincial government ministers and representatives of Conservation International and the GEF on flights over the area to see the impact of the potato circles and experience first hand just how little natural Sandveld vegetation survives.

From the start, the GCBC initiative has encouraged a partnership approach to biodiversity conservation that involves landowners, local communities, municipalities, non-governmental organisations and government conservation agencies. The broad conservation strategy for the biodiversity corridor must go hand in hand with plans to promote social and economic development through wise use of the region’s natural and cultural resources. As the implementation phase unfolds, partners are working together to develop models of best environmental management practice, particularly in areas of high conservation priority like the Sandveld.

(ii) The Cederberg Rare Project

The cedar is an icon for another innovative project—the Cederberg Wilderness Awareness Campaign, co-ordinated by Kobie Hanekom of CapeNature. Kobie is the local representative of Rare, an international NGO that develops conservation education programmes in biodiversity hotspots around the world.

An important aspect of the Rare strategy is the assessment of their awareness campaigns. According to the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires Kobie distributed, the community is far more aware of the value of biodiversity than they were before the campaign. And has all this awareness-raising actually made a difference to the Clanwilliam cedar and the broader Cederberg environment? Working in partnership with other conservation initiatives, Rare has broadened participation and strengthened efforts to bring the cedar back to the Cederberg.

What have we learned?

- When building awareness about environmental issues, don’t underestimate the influence children can have on their families.
The Rare Programme www.rareconservation.org

Based at the University of Kent in England, the Rare Programme is supported by Conservation International (CI) and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF). Rare identifies biodiversity hotspots needing conservation education programmes and offers scholarships to build the capacity of project co-ordinators. Successful applicants from all over the world attend a 10-week training course in Kent. Their contracts last for 30 months, during which the co-ordinators implement biodiversity awareness programmes guided by a comprehensive manual. Return visits to Kent give participants opportunities to share and reflect on their programmes and to learn from the experiences of others. Rare’s conservation education approach is based on turning a charismatic flagship species into a symbol of local pride, and using this as a focus for developing understanding of the value of biodiversity and the need to conserve it.

Kobie Hanekom
Kobie, a qualified teacher, had just started working for CapeNature as a field ranger when the opportunity came up to apply for Rare scholarship. “I joined CapeNature in April; by June I was on my way to England. It was an incredible experience going abroad, making friends with colleagues from China, Indonesia, the Philippines and Sierra Leone and learning so many things,” he recalls.

When he returned, Kobie started working with schools and community groups, raising awareness of the biodiversity of the Cederberg and threats facing the wilderness area. It has been a busy couple of years, with talks at farm open days and community forums, a regular slot on Radio Namaqualand, and distribution of posters, fact sheets and bumper stickers. Kobie also developed a user-friendly booklet on environmental legislation and ran a training programme for the police service, which was very well received.

If working with adults is the serious side of Kobie’s job, visiting the 11 schools around the Cederberg Wilderness Area is the fun part. Their cedar tree mascot and puppet show introduce children to the uniqueness of their environment and build a sense of pride in their heritage. Teaching a captivated audience of Grade Ones The Cederberg Song, Kobie is in his element. “These children aren’t just the future,” he declares. “When they go home to their families this afternoon, they will tell them what they learned at school today. I believe that children are ‘message multipliers’ who can help to spread awareness of biodiversity in their communities today.” As Kobie waves goodbye to another delighted class, he leaves them with their “A to Z” colouring-in books to remind them of what they have learned about the Cederberg: A is for Astronomy; B is for Buchu; C is for the Clanwilliam cedar …

In order to establish the effectiveness of an awareness-raising project, it is essential to put a monitoring and evaluation programme in place from the beginning.

Before developing an awareness programme, consult a wide range of local stakeholders to ensure that you understand the issue and the local context.

Conservation information doesn’t have to be presented in a serious way: fun activities and materials are effective means of introducing environmental topics.

The media is a vital partner in spreading the conservation message.

Sound partnerships enhance the effectiveness and reach of conservation education projects.

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Sound partnerships enhance the effectiveness and reach of conservation education projects.
Isn’t it ironic that the very tree that gave its name to the magnificent Cederberg mountains is today so rare that it has been listed as a Red Data species? The population of endemic Clanwilliam cedar trees (Widdringtonia cedarbergensis), which as recently as the early nineteenth century grew in stands that stretched for many kilometres, is now limited to isolated gnarled survivors standing defiantly amongst rocky outcrops at high altitudes. People have put pressure on the Clanwilliam cedar since the earliest times. Fires set by the San and Khoi to flush out game and to stimulate new growth for grazing destroyed saplings and giants alike. But it was the hunger of the European settlers for its strong and fragrant wood—for floors, ceilings, furniture and miles upon miles of telephone poles—that sealed its fate. Today frequent devastating veld fires leave this species with a slim chance of survival.

In 1987, CapeNature conservation officer S V van der Merwe established a nursery in an attempt to bring the cedar back to the Cederberg. Thousands of saplings were planted out each year. After 1995 considerable help came from volunteers involved in the Botanical Society’s Cederberg Conservation Group, who assisted with plantings. When the nursery closed in 2000 due to budgetary constraints, the Botanical Society, with funding from Fauna and Flora International (FFI), established a new nursery at Matjiesrivier on the eastern side of the Cederberg Wilderness Area. Committed members of the Cederberg Conservancy assist CapeNature in managing the nursery.

Bushmans Kloof Wilderness Reserve and Retreat, an exclusive guest lodge in the northern Cederberg, also recognises the iconic nature of the cedar. They have established a satellite nursery and host an annual Cedar Tree Weekend in May, when guests join people from the community to plant out cedar saplings in a woodlot at Heuningvlei village and in the surrounding mountains.

Additional cedar nurseries are planned for the Clanwilliam area to provide training and employment opportunities, as well as a chance for local communities to help to conserve the cedar.

World renowned: The IUCN recognises the Clanwilliam cedar as one of 43 conifers in the world requiring special conservation attention. The tree has been protected in South Africa for more than 100 years.

Civil society stakeholders govern the Greater Cederberg Corridor Initiative under the guidance of Janie Bekker, Chairman of the Steering Committee and Acting Chief Executive Officer of CapeNature. Janie is the recipient of a C.A.P.E. Gold Conservation Award for his extensive contributions to the conservation of the Cape Floristic Region over the past two decades.

Penny Mustart, co-ordinator of the Botanical Society’s current initiatives in the Cederberg, sees the cedar as an icon for conservation efforts in the Cederberg. “Our focus on the cedar is not just about conserving the species,” she says. “The cedar is a charismatic tree. People hear about its plight and want to do something to help. So the cedar has been used as a focus in broader environmental education and community development programmes.”

Sharing learning

Within the broader C.A.P.E. network, there are growing opportunities for people from the different regions to share ideas. Recently stakeholders involved in the Baviaanskloof Mega-Reserve invited representatives from the Greater Cederberg Biodiversity Corridor to share ideas about setting up cedar nurseries to help with the conservation of the endemic Willowmore cedar, Widdringtonia schwarzii.
2.6 The Baviaanskloof Mega-Reserve

(i) An Eastern Cape treasure

In the Eastern Cape, a flagship mega-reserve is in the making. With its core in Port Elizabeth’s vital water catchment area of the Baviaanskloof and Kouga mountain ranges, much of the area has been conserved since the 1920s, when the Baviaanskloof Forest Reserve was declared and managed as a mountain catchment area. In 1987 the forestry land was given nature reserve status and today the Baviaanskloof Nature Reserve plus six smaller nature reserves make up the protected core of the mega-reserve. Now, one of C.A.P.E.’s most progressive conservation partnerships has been forged under the leadership of the Eastern Cape Parks Board and the Wilderness Foundation. The Baviaanskloof is remarkable in terms of the diversity of its natural ecosystems. In 2004 this richness was acknowledged internationally when the Baviaanskloof was listed as one of eight areas making up the new CFR World Heritage Site. Seven of South Africa’s eight major natural regions or biomes are represented here, and you will find plants and animals typical of fynbos, forest, grassland, succulent karoo, Nama-Karoo, subtropical thicket and savanna. Two of these biomes—the fynbos and succulent karoo—are globally recognised “biodiversity hotspots”. Being declared a “hotspot” is a dubious honour, however; it means that your region is home to a spectacular variety of unique plants and animals, but also that much of this diversity is under threat. In the Baviaanskloof mega-reserve planning region, the most threatened habitats are lowland areas along rivers, which have been extensively farmed for generations.

Hotspot statistics

A remarkable number of plants and animals call the Baviaanskloof home—but many of these are threatened with extinction:

- About 1 200 different types of plants have been recorded in the Baviaanskloof Nature Reserve (BNR).
- Scientists estimate that about 2 500 species grow in the whole mega-reserve area; this is about 10% of all the plants in South Africa.
- More than 50 species of plants in the BNR are threatened with extinction.
- 20 species are endemic to the Baviaanskloof—in other words, you won’t find them growing naturally anywhere else on earth.
- Other than the leopard, all the large carnivores that once lived in this area are locally extinct.
- The Baviaanskloof is recognised as a Globally Important Bird Area; more than a third of all South African bird species are found there.
- 24 of the 57 reptile species, and eight of the 17 amphibians found in the BNR are endemic to South Africa.

The core of the Baviaanskloof planning region comprises seven nature reserves (the Baviaanskloof Reserve Cluster). The Kouga, Baviaans and Groot Rivers join to form the Gamtoos River, which provides a linkage to the sea.
Keeping people on the land in living landscapes

A considerable amount of ecological, social and economic research has been conducted in the Baviaanskloof region to determine how best to conserve the diverse ecosystems and natural processes within the mega-reserve area. Ecosystem programmes like C.A.P.E., the Subtropical Thicket Ecosystem Programme (STEP) and the Succulent Karoo Ecosystem Programme (SKEP) agree that the most sustainable way forward for this unique area is to “keep people on the land in living landscapes”.

Many people in the Baviaanskloof live in poverty so it was essential that the mega-reserve should bring economic opportunities to the region. An extensive two-year stakeholder process funded by the CEPF generated a vision and five-year management plan for the Baviaanskloof Mega-Reserve (BMR), which were launched in September 2004. Major project partners are the Eastern Cape Parks Board and the Wilderness Foundation. This initiative has helped to spread the news about the rich natural and cultural heritage of this region, and to stimulate a demand for tourist facilities and services in the area. The initiative has attracted considerable funding for new developments in this part of the Eastern Cape, with international donors, local funders and government investing generously in ecological restoration, infrastructure development, job creation and capacity building. Ecotourism is starting to complement agriculture, conservation and catchment management as an income generator in the area.

Take time to lay a firm foundation

South Africa is a wonderfully innovative society, and visitors to this country often refer to our “can-do” attitude. Mega-reserves or biodiversity corridors are an example of innovative thinking in biodiversity conservation. The vision is inspiring but, because it is a new idea, we have no long-term case studies from which to learn. The people involved in creating these corridors have to be willing to “make the path by walking it”.

Two years were set aside to consult stakeholders and develop a vision and management plan for the BMR, but this proved to be insufficient. Setting up meetings across the region took much longer than expected because of the remoteness of the area. Much of the Baviaanskloof is a
wilderness area, known for its excruciatingly bad roads. Communities are small and isolated, and the diversity of social groups is as rich as the biodiversity for which this area is famous, so a variety of communication forums were required. A complicated land claim involving one of the farms in the kloof has also required considerable time to resolve.

Furthermore, the BMR planning process has been taking place at a time of broader institutional change in the province. The Eastern Cape Parks Board, which is the public entity responsible for managing the core protected areas of the mega-reserve, was only established in 2004 through the amalgamation of the Protected Areas Section of the Eastern Cape Department of Economic Affairs, Environment and Tourism, and the Eastern Cape Tourism Board. The organisation therefore needs time to develop institutional structures and capacity, as well as co-operative governance systems and agreements with the various role-players involved in the mega-reserve.

Donor-funded projects are governed by goals and time frames; however, authentic public participation is neither a predictable nor efficient process. It was therefore necessary to apply for a project extension to complete the stakeholder consultations. The funders wisely granted this, realising that the future of the mega-reserve depended on a firm foundation of understanding, trust and good communication being laid in the preparatory phase.

Opportunities to communicate

Communication approaches have varied depending on the stakeholder groups:

- A popular publication on the Baviaanskloof (Boshoff, Kerley & Cowling 2000) helped to promote and garner support for this project. An updated version was published in 2005.

- The Baviaanskloof Steering Committee oversees the project management unit. It meets once a quarter and enables a range of stakeholders (government, academia, NGOs, civil society, organised agriculture, C.A.P.E., etc) to report on and guide developments in the BMR.

- Specialist working groups are formed on an ad hoc basis to address matters as they arise. Getting these groups to function effectively can be very time consuming, however.

- Community groups in the Baviaanskloof initially requested mass meetings with the PMU representative to ensure that everybody had direct access to information about the BMR. But large meetings have their limitations and communities are starting to develop representative community structures that will allow for smaller meetings with PMU staff.

- A skilled land negotiator, Colyn Scheltema, born and bred in the area, was appointed to introduce landowners to the concept of the BMR; most communication takes place in one-to-one meetings, but also at agricultural co-operative meetings and by means of a newsletter.

Matthew Norval

Communication is the key

Members of the BMR Project Management Unit (PMU) led by Matthew Norval agree that the most significant lesson learned during the BMR planning process has been the importance of good communication. Different approaches have been appropriate in different contexts (see box), but all groups have contributed constructive input into development of the mega-reserve vision and management plan.
Making the mega-reserve work

As in the other biodiversity corridor areas, it has taken landowners time to accept that the Eastern Cape Parks Board does not intend to evict them from their properties in order to forcibly incorporate land into a protected area. Strengthening biodiversity conservation in the Baviaanskloof requires both direct conservation actions and the provision of secondary services to support ecotourism. Participation in the mega-reserve can therefore take many forms: a community member could benefit from having her guest room listed on an accommodation website; a gardening group might develop a farm stall to sell organic produce to visiting tourists; or a small stock farmer could agree not to graze his goats on land where a rare plant grows. A commercial farmer might decide to join a local conservancy or, when the Parks Board creates the necessary contractual frameworks, contract a portion of his farm into the reserve and re-stock it with game.

The vision of “keeping people on the land in living landscapes” is a challenging concept to both the conservationists who manage the nature reserves and people who live and work in the BMR. The core conservation areas will drive ecotourism in the BMR, so to attract visitors the PMU is developing and upgrading infrastructure in the reserves. The people of the kloof are already benefiting from job opportunities created by these developments and are also starting to develop their own tourism-related ventures. The communication structures mentioned above will enable people to share their experiences and inspire others to find ways in which they too can care for and benefit from the rich natural and cultural diversity of the Baviaanskloof.

Eleanor MacGregor

Eleanor MacGregor has used her skill to develop a very positive relationship with community stakeholders in the Baviaanskloof.

In the Baviaanskloof, “communicating conservation” has taken on a new meaning. Traditional one-way communication of conservation messages to communities has been transformed into a conversation with all stakeholders. A number of PMU staff members are newcomers to the Baviaanskloof who recognise that they need to learn from local people whose families have lived in the area for generations. They have been listening to the needs and concerns of local communities and exploring together how biodiversity conservation in the Baviaanskloof can contribute to a better quality of life for all who live there. The Baviaanskloof Steering Committee is helping to ensure that long-term problems, like the poor state of roads, are addressed by the relevant authorities. Poverty relief and lottery funding for alien eradication, thicket rehabilitation and construction projects is helping to address unemployment, and has already generated about 90 temporary jobs for Baviaanskloof residents.
The vision for the Baviaanskloof Mega-Reserve is much bigger than conserving the existing core of protected natural areas; it envisages a place where people can live and work on the land in ways that safeguard biodiversity, respect local cultures and ensure sustainable livelihoods. The people who live in the western Baviaanskloof have been involved in discussions to clarify a vision and practical action plan for their area.

The vision that is emerging is “to create a home in which all its people can live and work in safety and dignity, that has opportunities for all, including the women and youth, and in which the diversity of our people, our cultures and our environment is respected, celebrated and protected.” “It’s a very beautiful place! Many people value the area and we are proud of it; we want to stay and conserve it.”

The people of the western Baviaanskloof feel that it is time to get away from the idea that the only way to conserve an area is to move people off the land; they see people, the natural environment and the economy as interdependent and believe that the kloof can provide work and social development opportunities. They acknowledge that they need to do careful research to find the most sustainable ways to use the natural resources of the kloof, but believe that agriculture, tourism, ecological management and restoration, and improved community services hold the key to a more sustainable future. It’s early days and the action plan is a living document that will evolve, but we hope that one day our children will be able to say: “The plan our parents started has been good for us!”

For the people of the western Baviaanskloof, the dream of a sustainable future is simply to have a place where they can be with their families and have work.

(iii) A sustainable future for the Baviaans Conservancy

How feasible is the idea of developing a biodiversity-based economy within biodiversity corridors and mega-reserves? A group of landowners in the northern part of the Baviaanskloof Mega-Reserve decided to find out. During 2005, members of the Baviaans Conservancy appointed expert consultants in the fields of ecology, economics, tourism and game farming to carry out feasibility studies to enable them to make informed decisions about converting their land from agriculture to more biodiversity-friendly activities like game management and ecotourism.

Project manager Karen Kirkman reports that research results have been very interesting but not necessarily what they had hoped. “Initially we planned to convert the conservancy into a game reserve and stock it with the Big Five. However, both the tourism and financial analyses indicate that this will just not be feasible. It will require a huge investment to convert entirely from small-stock farming to game farming and ecotourism, and these are both new and risky.

Lessons learned

Three major principles or dreams

- In future there are people living and working here;
- The kloof must provide opportunities for everyone, not just those who have capital or land;
- The plan must acknowledge the biodiversity and cultural heritage of the kloof, and find ways to use this for future generations.

The Baviaans Conservancy

Established in 1997, the conservancy is located in the foothills of the Baviaanskloof Mountains, 20 km from Steytlerville. It involves 17 landowners and covers 53 000 ha on 23 farms.
Established in 1997, the conservancy is located in the foothills of the Baviaanskloof mountains, 20 km from Steytlerville. It involves 17 landowners and covers 53 000 ha on 23 farms.

businesses for people whose families have been small-stock farmers for generations. Our conservancy is off the beaten track, 160 km from Port Elizabeth and 40 km along a gravel road in the Steytlerville area. The Eastern Cape already has numerous well-established protected natural areas like the Addo National Park and Shamwari Game Reserve, which are accessible from major roads. With competition like this, why would tourists visit us?” she asks.

It is clear that a radical change from agriculture to ecotourism is unrealistic. But the study has provided the members of the Baviaans Conservancy with a variety of other scenarios to explore. Agriculture may need to remain the mainstay of the local economy for many years, but landowners can now start developing additional income-generating opportunities like farm-stays, nature-based tourism, hiking and hunting. Rather than trying to replace agriculture with biodiversity-based activities, the challenge seems to be to find ways to integrate these two land use types.

Members of the Baviaans Conservancy commissioned a feasibility study to investigate the game farming and ecotourism potential of the area.

What have we learned?

- Changing from agriculture to more biodiversity-friendly land uses is not a simple matter. In the Baviaans Conservancy, numerous factors make radical changes financially unviable and therefore unsustainable.

- Farmers are highly unlikely to give up farming in favour of a livelihood with which they are unfamiliar (e.g. ecotourism), especially if the risks are high and the returns are unpredictable. It is more realistic to slowly and incrementally diversify one’s business.

- Conservationists need to provide farmers with more specific information on how they can help to conserve biodiversity pattern and process on their land. This will enable farmers to integrate biodiversity conservation with their farming activities.

- More research is needed into sustainable farming methods that are appropriate to specific areas.

- State incentives for land use change will have to be well defined, concrete and long-term in order to influence landowners.
(iv) Pride of Groendal

Based on their well established Pride of Table Mountain project in Cape Town, the Wilderness Foundation has developed the Pride of Groendal youth leadership development project in the eastern part of the Baviaanskloof Mega Reserve. The project operates in the Groendal Wilderness Area, which is ideally situated close to the towns of Uitenhage and Despatch and the city of Port Elizabeth within the Nelson Mandela Metro.

The Pride of Groendal project provides opportunities for youths over the age of 14 years to develop their leadership potential by training as field guides. To date four young people have become confident trail leaders, and another four are now involved in the training programme. The youth leaders have taken more than 300 young people on guided trails, exposing them to the natural splendour of the Groendal Wilderness Area. Through this programme, the Wilderness Foundation hopes to give thousands of youths from disadvantaged urban areas the opportunity to experience, enjoy and develop respect for their natural heritage.

For most, this trail is their first Wilderness experience. The sights, sounds and smells of the bush have a profound impact on the youth, and most can’t wait to return. As new trail leaders are trained, more and more young people will be able to share in the Groendal experience.

Zamuxolo Tanda of Lwandlekazi Senior Secondary School says “This was my first time in a Wilderness Area and I learned lots of things about plants and animals and how nature is important to us. I would love to come back here.”

2.7 The Gouritz Initiative

(i) The Gouritz Initiative

Making a plan for the Gouritz

The C.A.P.E strategy proposed that three conservation corridors should be created to sustain biodiversity processes in the CFR, namely the Baviaanskloof, Cederberg and Gouritz corridors. Phase One of the Gouritz Initiative (GI) got under way in May 2003 with the aim of developing a management plan to conserve and restore the biodiversity and water resources of the Gouritz conservation corridor.

It was important to the project team to plan in a manner that would build support among its major stakeholders, from government departments and conservation agencies to landowners and local communities. During the two-year planning process, biodiversity research was conducted simultaneously with extensive consultations with a wide range of stakeholders. The decision to consult stakeholders like the Department of Agriculture and private landowners before deciding on the boundaries of the planning domain contributed to greater openness and trust. It also enabled the GI project team to plan more realistically; for example, conservationists could suggest other productive uses of marginal agricultural land, while avoiding including highly productive land in plans for conservation areas. The outcome was a management plan that is supported by a wide range of stakeholders in the Gouritz region.

A multitude of habitats

Researchers have identified 64 distinct habitats within the Gouritz region. Although only about 12% of the planning domain has been transformed and nearly 26% of the area enjoys some level of protection, nearly half the habitat types are endemic to the planning domain. This means that it is entirely up to the people of the Gouritz region to safeguard these unique communities of plants and animals that occur nowhere else on earth. Already habitat transformation caused by agriculture, coastal development and alien plant invasions has destroyed more than half the original extent of three of these endemic habitats. The Gouritz Initiative is determined to halt any further loss of these threatened vegetation types.
The initial vision for the GI was to establish a conservation corridor along the Gouritz River, stretching from the inland mountains (Anysberg-Swartberg and Gamkaberg-Rooiberg) via the coastal mountains (Langeberg-Outeniqua Mountains) to the sea. This corridor would allow for the movement and dispersal of animals and plants and would conserve natural habitats across a range of altitudinal gradients, which is believed to be necessary to buffer the effects of climate change.

As the specialists met to consider the immediate and long-term needs of a number of key plant and animal species, the extent of the Gouritz corridor continued to expand. The idea of a corridor following the Gouritz River system worked for some species, like thicket vegetation, aquatic animals and a number of carnivores, but it was actually the mountain ranges that proved to be more important.
corridors for fynbos plants and some bird species. Conserving mountain corridors would also contribute to effective fire management and allow movement of species in response to possible changes in rainfall seasonality from west to east.

In addition to these fairly continuous river and mountain corridors, research in the Gouritz region identified special habitats like quartz patches and koppies that have large numbers of unique species, but which occur as “stepping stones” rather than as corridors in the landscape. Eventually, instead of a simple corridor, the GI developed a management plan for a planning domain that was so extensive that it was necessary to divide it into five sectors to allow for effective planning and management.

**Inform, inspire, involve**

One of the strengths of the GI has been its enthusiasm to inform and involve others. The implementation team knows that they cannot possibly achieve the goals of the GI alone. The project will be a success if the people who live, work and play in the region understand how special the environment is and know what they can do to care for it.

To help inform and involve the public, the GI has produced booklets, pamphlets and a website in the two main languages of the region. Sometimes scientists find it difficult to translate their knowledge into a form that the public can appreciate; but this has definitely not been a problem in the GI. Publications have been written in everyday language and an up-beat style, making information accessible, interesting and inspiring.

By participating in agricultural and municipal forums, developing educational programmes for learners and teachers, and spending time in one-to-one visits with farmers and municipal officials, GI partners are making information available, sowing the seeds of ideas, inspiring enthusiasm and involving people in living more sustainably in the Gouritz region.

**Start small—and build**

The implementation phase of the GI has only just begun. CEPF funding has been secured and a four-person team appointed to co-ordinate the programme over a period of 30 months. The projects to be tackled during the implementation phase aim to improve linkages between existing conservation areas, to develop a sustainable land use ethic among the people of the region, and to restore severely transformed habitats that are critically important to biodiversity. They also aim to contribute positively to the economy of the Gouritz region.

A suite of “starter projects” has been selected from the GI management plan. The team believes in starting small and having something practical to show for their plans before expanding, so in most cases they will work with partners on pilot projects. As they start showing results, the team believes it will be easier to attract the interest of funders or investors, which will enable the projects to expand. Where private landowners are concerned, it may take some time for farmers to start exploring biodiversity-friendly options like stewardship agreements and tourism development. But the GI team is confident that once a few champions have shown the way, others will follow and these projects will snowball.

**Water, biodiversity and people**

A very important goal of the GI is to conserve the water resources of the Gouritz River for the benefit of both people and biodiversity. The Gouritz River and its tributaries flow through arid parts of the Great and Little Karoo before crossing the rapidly developing coastal plain between Albertinia and Mossel Bay. A survey has shown that the catchment cannot sustain even current levels of water use. More and more people are moving into the region and putting pressure on local resources; it is therefore essential to learn to manage the water resources of the Gouritz more effectively.

There is a considerable amount of groundwater abstraction in the catchment, with boresholes tapping water as deep as 2–3 km below the surface. In the Kammanassie Mountains, for example, water abstraction has caused perennial streams to dry up; this has caused the death of endemic Cape mountain zebras, which cannot survive more than 2 km from a supply of fresh water. Farmers have also suffered, with many going bankrupt as their weirs no longer supply enough water to allow them to irrigate.

There are risks associated with relying on groundwater: the deeper the reserves, the more mineralised the water, making it expensive to clean. It is not possible to measure how much groundwater is available and once it has been extracted, aquifers can take a very long time to recharge. This makes it difficult to predict how much water will be available for growing developments. For all these reasons, it is essential to protect water catchments and to reduce the abstraction of deep groundwater.
Incompatible legislation

One of the challenges that the GI team has had to face since the implementation phase began is the realisation that much existing legislation is incompatible with the notion of conservation corridors. In recent years, bioregional programmes have brought about unprecedented levels of co-operation between government departments, parastatals and other agencies involved in land use planning and conservation. However, much existing legislation was promulgated before these approaches became commonplace; many laws and regulations therefore support narrow sectoral interests rather than integrated thinking and planning. So, while the establishment of conservation corridors requires the removal of fences to allow for the unfettered migration of animals, it is illegal in terms of agricultural regulations to take down jackal-proof fencing. And whereas it would seem logical that a farmer should build cabins for tourists on old agricultural lands that have very limited biodiversity value, agricultural regulations stipulate that agricultural land should be retained and new developments should take place on undeveloped land! In order to enable the creation of conservation corridors, government departments will need to undertake a review of legislation and regulations. Bioregional programmes like GI can serve as catalysts to get people from different departments talking to one another to address these problems holistically.

What have we learned?

- The more you invest in the planning phase, the easier it will be to start implementing the project.
- A team effort between the various role players like CapeNature, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning and local authorities is helping the GI to achieve its objectives.
- To ensure that the goals of regional biodiversity initiatives are reached, these goals should inform the activities of partner organisations; for example, CapeNature has aligned all its activities to the GI objectives.
- You must consult landowners during the planning phase and not just present them with the plan of the corridor; this will undermine their trust and support.
- Where possible, project staff should be appointed from the area; local knowledge is valuable and if people already know and respect the staff member, it makes it easier to establish working relationships.
- While farmers’ co-operatives and municipal meetings are good places to make initial contacts with landowners and municipal officials, nothing beats one-to-one contact. You must take the initiative to follow up.
- It is very difficult to get projects off the ground in politically divided communities.
- Although the Gouritz area is often referred to as a ‘marginal farming area’, agriculture provides the main income in the region and many farmers are sceptical of alternatives.
- Although game ranching is already popular with some farmers in the region, this is not as simple a solution as it seems; some farmers want to introduce game that is not locally indigenous (e.g. giraffe, impala, buffalo) in order to promote tourism, and advice relating to game management (e.g. carrying capacity) is not readily available.
- Establishing ecotourism ventures may require considerable investment and it can therefore take a number of years before these initiatives become profitable; for instance, developments are subject to environmental impact assessments (EIAs), which can be costly and time consuming. Ecotourism will have to co-exist with traditional farming practices, at least until the former proves to be financially viable. Many farmers find it difficult to accept that conservation-relat-
emotionally charged and often polarised elsewhere. Within this rapidly changing, destinations are turning their attention for “unspoilt” holiday resorts morph into suburbs by the sea,ing property prices. As coastal holiday feel are threatening to turn the Garden “up-market” developments, which some and social lobby groups to a number of growing resistance from environmental Over the past few years, there has been tion for developing planning frameworks is no simple matter, as the GRI planning structures and systems that will enhance communication, co-operation and co-ordination of conservation efforts. This is no simple matter, as the GRI planning domain incorporates six local municipalities and two district municipalities in two provinces. But Andrew hopes that improved communication between national, provincial and local government departments, as well as the NGO community, will result in more proactive planning and better co-ordination of conservation actions in the region.

Fine-scale planning
In order for development planning to become more sustainable, provincial and municipal planners need information on regional biodiversity priorities. The GRI is therefore ensuring that fine-scale biodiversity planning takes place. Fine-scale biodiversity information is the foundation for developing planning frameworks and guidelines that will help planners to identify which areas should be protected (either in formal conservation areas or by other means) and where development can take place without compromising the biodiversity and natural capital of the environment, the GRI is looking for more sustainable ways forward.

Co-ordinated conservation action
The Garden Route has no shortage of committed environmentalists, and numerous organisations and projects are currently addressing many of the environmental and social challenges facing the region. With the support of the GEF through the World Bank, the GRI was established in July 2004 to improve co-ordination of biodiversity conservation actions in the region. Its mission statement declares that the GRI is “a partnership programme that seeks to co-ordinate the conservation and restoration of the unique biodiversity and sense of place of the Garden Route while supporting the sustainable development of the area and the delivery of benefits to local communities.” As the major government conservation agency in the Garden Route, SAN- Parks houses the GRI project management unit, which acts as the secretariat for the partnership and takes responsibility for planning, initiating and implementing projects.

Laying the foundation
GRI co-ordinator Andrew Brown sees one of his priorities during this first phase of programme development as setting up structures and systems that will enhance communication, co-operation and co-ordination of conservation efforts. This... (continued)

Andrew Brown was selected as Co-ordinator of the Garden Route Initiative following his extensive experience in project management at the Table Mountain National Park. He is charged with the responsibility of getting to grips with the conservation priorities on the Garden Route and mobilising an effective programme to ensure that the mosaic of protected areas and intervening lands are conserved.

C hileen Simons received the C.A.P.E. Gold Conservation Award on behalf of the Guardians of the Garden Route, who have mobilised civil society participation in opposing ill-considered commercial developments in pristine environments in the area.
Garden Route Initiative

Stretching from the Gouritz River in the west to the edge of the Nelson Mandela Metro in the east, the Garden Route Initiative straddles two district municipalities and six local municipalities in two provinces.

region. Fine-scale planning information and products will be used by the project management unit and GRI partners to advise the authorities on which areas are suitable for development and which areas should be conserved. Putting planning frameworks in place should reduce the number of inappropriate development applications and the conflict that inevitably ensues. It should also streamline the development approval process.

Consolidating protected areas

The Garden Route is well known for its rich diversity of natural habitats, from mountain fynbos and afromontane forest, to freshwater lakes, estuaries and diverse marine and coastal environments. The region is fairly well-endowed with protected areas, especially along the coast: SANParks currently manages the Tsitsikamma, Knysna Lakes and Wilderness National Parks, while CapeNature is responsible for the Robberg and Goukamma Nature Reserves. A long-term goal of the GRI is the development of a 140 000 ha Garden Route National Park, which will incorporate a number of existing nature reserves as well as privately owned conservation areas, enabling more effective integrated natural resource management.

This dream was given a boost in April 2005 when the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) handed over management responsibility for a total of 97 000 ha of indigenous forest, mountain fynbos and pine plantation (to be felled and rehabilitated), mainly in upland areas, to SANParks. DWAF also transferred about 130 experienced staff members plus operational budget to enable SANParks to manage this area, which includes the largest contiguous indigenous forests in the country.

Upgrading existing tourism infrastructure and developing new facilities in these conservation areas will provide much needed poverty relief work for many of the unemployed people living in the area. Already R27 million has been allocated for infrastructure development over the next three years.

In addition to consolidating protected areas on land, the GRI is also reviewing the effectiveness of existing Marine Protected Areas along the coast and drawing up new management plans and enforcement procedures. New staff members are being employed and trained, equipment purchased and facilities upgraded to ensure effective management of the region’s marine environment.

Biodiversity benefits

If wisely managed and protected, the natural environment and biodiversity of the Garden Route will continue to provide many benefits and services to
the people of the region, like clean water from mountain catchment areas, productive soils, healthy lakes and estuaries and scenic landscapes. The natural beauty and biodiversity of the area also make the Garden Route one of South Africa’s top tourist destinations. The GRI aims to promote responsible tourism, which will create further employment and training opportunities for local people.

Managing the region’s biodiversity also provides employment opportunities, such as invasive plant control, fire management, habitat rehabilitation, plant propagation and law enforcement. The GRI is also investigating opportunities for sustainable harvesting in natural areas, including medicinal plants, ferns for the floristry market, and wood for furniture and carvings. As protected areas are expanded and consolidated, the number of biodiversity-related jobs is expected to increase.

Planning for implementation
There has been growing reaction to the issue of large-scale speculative property development on the Garden Route. Concerns have been expressed that some developments are having negative environmental impacts, and that the natural assets of the area are becoming both physically and economically inaccessible to many local people. The GRI believes that a socially just, economically fair and ecologically sustainable future is possible if development planning is informed by a deeper understanding of the region’s biodiversity, and steps are taken to safeguard the natural assets of the Garden Route.

The first year of the GRI has been dedicated to laying a firm foundation of consultation, information gathering and planning. From 2006, the GRI will start implementing plans in earnest, consolidating and restoring protected areas, inviting conservation-minded landowners to participate in stewardship programmes, and ensuring that all the people of the region have access to the benefits of biodiversity.

(ii) Eden to Addo Corridor Initiative
The role of private landowners in conserving biodiversity is referred to numerous times in this publication. The Eden to Addo Corridor Initiative represents one of the boldest and most visionary private initiatives in the region. First mooted in 2003 by Joan Berning of the Indalo Conservancy outside Plettenberg Bay, Eden to Addo envisages a green corridor stretching from the Eden District Municipality, through the southern and Eastern Cape, to the Greater Addo National Park. Eden to Addo aims to help small groups of landowners who are caring for their land to link together to form green corridors that have far greater reach and impact than any of the individual properties. Private landowners could actually help to link the four major conservation nodes in the region, namely the Garden Route Initiative, Gouritz Initiative, Baviaanskloof Mega-Reserve and Greater Addo National Park, into a continuous corridor.

The Eden to Addo Initiative is encouraging landowners to participate in CapeNature’s Stewardship Programme (Chapter 4.1) by establishing conservancies or, where critical ecosystems occur on their land, entering into more binding stewardship arrangements. In addition to this, the Initiative is drafting a Memorandum of Understanding to be signed by members of the corridor, which will encourage land management practices that enhance the ecological functioning of the corridor as a whole.

The Initiative aims to help landowners to comply with environmental legisla-
The Eden to Addo Corridor Initiative aims to link protected natural areas between the Eden District Municipality and the Greater Addo National Park via private landholdings.

Pam Booth, who previously worked for the Working for Water programme, will be able to help landowners draw up alien vegetation clearing plans and advise on appropriate clearing methods and herbicides. She will also act as a broker to facilitate the appointment of Working for Water contractors who can undertake alien clearing on private land. Once the Bitou Municipality finalises its property rates rebate policy, landowners involved in the Eden to Addo Initiative will qualify for a rates rebate if they have a conservation management plan in place and are actively implementing it.

Even without major funding, landowners have started working collectively rather than as isolated individuals. The initiative has also provided a platform for improved communication and cooperation between private landowners and the conservation agencies that are spearheading the Garden Route Initiative (GRI). This can only bode well for making the vision of C.A.P.E. a reality in the Garden Route. Once funding becomes available, the implementation of this inspiring vision can start to be implemented in earnest.

The Eden to Addo vision has a very good chance of being realised thanks to the involvement of committed environmentalists and well-established environmental networks in the southern Cape, notably the Plettenberg Bay Community Environment Forum. Many residents are concerned about insensitive residential and resort development in the area and the Eden to Addo Initiative has provided them with a practical way of getting involved in counteracting this trend.

(iii) Guardians of the Garden Route

The very rapid and often insensitive developments taking place on the Garden Route have dismayed many people. In an effort to mobilise a co-ordinated response to issues of inappropriate development, a number of organisations and individuals have formed a loose affiliation, the Guardians of the Garden Route (GOG). GOG represents a broad environmental movement; its members champion a spectrum of causes promoting social justice and ecological sustainability.

GOG demonstrates the unifying potential of a common concern. Garden Route residents who in the past had never shared a platform have come together to fight unsustainable and inequitable develop-
ments that are threatening the region. For some, the key issue is that political change in South Africa has made no difference to the economic status of the masses; as development transforms the Garden Route into South Africa’s new Riviera, the problem of landlessness amongst local people increases. Others regret the loss of the rural and sylvan character of the Garden Route, and are concerned about the growing pressure on the water resources and biodiversity of the region. But whether rich or poor, land owner or tenant, as the Guardians talk and learn together, they find increasingly that they share common ground.

In November 2004, GOG co-ordinated simultaneous peaceful protest marches in several towns along the Garden Route to draw attention to its concerns. The marches attracted a huge amount of media attention, which in turn generated public debate around sustainable development issues. The marches also demonstrated to property speculators who try to play the “greens” off against the “poor” that these groups are now united against the common enemy of greed.

While the diverse membership of GOG may initially have gathered to fight inappropriate development, their struggle has evolved into a quest to clarify the norms and values that unite them. In addition to knowing what it is they are “against”, GOG is clear about the society and environment they are working to achieve.

A vision for a just and sustainable environment

- Protect vulnerable ecological and social settings, agricultural land and natural resources;
- Respect cultural heritage and promote social cohesion;
- Provide affordable and accessible land and access to natural resources for livelihoods;
- Develop in ways that bring communities together;
- Provide meaningful opportunities, empowerment and employment, particularly for marginalised people.

(iv) The Garden Route Botanical Garden—serving community and environment

Until 2002 the Southern Cape Herbarium operated out of a “cupboard under the stairs” at the George Museum. In that year, a dream vigorously championed by the herbarium staff and volunteers became a reality: the herbarium moved to new premises adjacent to the Garden Route Botanical Garden in George, creating a centre that has become a vital botanical and environmental hub in the southern Cape. The flourishing of the centre and its numerous associated projects has much to do with the thousands of hours contributed each year by more than 30 volunteers. Chief amongst these is the energetic and visionary Yvette van Wijk. Yvette has a passion for plants

What have we learned?

- There is a growing awareness that social and environmental activists share a common vision; as these two groupings stand together critical mass grows.
and the diversity of projects based at the Garden reflects the many facets of this fascination.

Celebrating local plant diversity

The Garden Route Botanical Garden is not just an indigenous South African garden; it specialises in locally indigenous southern Cape plants. Even in the section that displays the cultivated hybrids that are commonly grown in people’s gardens, at least one of the parent plants comes from the southern Cape. The recently developed “medicinal mound” is garden-based evidence of IMITHI Amayezwa, a long-term project to share and build on indigenous knowledge of healing plants with traditional healers, local clinics and HIV/Aids groups. More than 60 different types of medicinal plants from the area are grown on the mound, and these are harvested and distributed to people who need them. The mound attracts many groups who want to learn about these plants and their cultural uses.

The Southern Cape Herbarium, located midway between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth is the only public herbarium for 450 km. It provides an invaluable service to the community: in addition to housing more than 10 000 pressed and named plant specimens from the region, the simpler “quick guide” of about 2 000 specimens helps students, scholars and the general public with identifications and research. Focusing on plants from the area, the herbarium is well situated to support research and planning initiatives linked to both C.A.P.E. and SKEP.

The herbarium is far more than a library of pressed plants; it also houses a botanical and environmental reference library, and is striving to make its information resources available via the internet by digitising its databases, checklists and collections and developing an on-line image library. The Southern Cape Herbarium is becoming a critical information hub for environmental research and conservation action in the southern Cape.

Striving for financial sustainability

In the face of rapid residential and resort development along the Garden Route, the Botanical Garden and Herbarium are making important contributions to sustainable development. The Herbarium collections are vital to enable consultants carrying out EIAs to identify plant specimens collected on potential development sites. If developments get the go-ahead, the Garden undertakes “search and rescue” missions to collect threatened plants, which are then grown in the Garden in the hope that they may be used in future re-vegetation projects.

The Garden Route Botanical Garden and its partner projects are strongly community-focused. Networking and education feature high on the Garden’s list of priorities, making it an influential environmental centre in the region. Staff and volunteers network locally, regionally and internationally and the Garden plays host to GREEN, the Garden Route Environmental Education Network (Chapter 6.3 v).

Educational programmes range from the “Fabulous Fynbos” Wildflower Show held each October in George, to the annual Environmental School Expo that reaches more than 2 000 learners from local schools. The Garden also produces educational booklets, information sheets and displays to support environmental learning and action. It runs courses and provides information for teachers, local government, conservation agencies and the tourism industry, as well as for its staff and volunteers. For the last seven years, the Garden and Herbarium have been running weekend courses for the paying public. These popular events have strengthened public knowledge and awareness of the environment and environmental issues, and raised much-needed funds.

In 2003, the Garden started providing formal horticultural and landscaping training for its staff. Once qualified, the gardeners will in turn provide training for unemployed prospective gardeners, as well as for grounds staff employed by large golf and housing estates in the southern Cape. In this way the Garden hopes to encourage developers to plant locally indigenous rather than alien plants, and to contribute to the sustainable management of large landholdings in the region.

Yvette van Wijk is a conservation institution in her own right. With seemingly boundless energy, she has co-ordinated a group of extraordinary volunteers and has developed the Garden Route Botanical Garden “from scratch”.

Strengthening community conservation efforts

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Striving for financial sustainability

The biggest challenge facing the Garden and Herbarium is becoming financially sustainable. Fundraising strategies include events like the annual flower show, sales of books and plants, partner-
ships with environmental organisations and donor funding for special projects. Without the many hours invested by volunteers, however, a number of its initiatives and services would not be possible. Most members of the Friends of the Garden and Herbarium Association are talented and experienced professionals who have retired to the Garden Route, and who now invest their time and energy in serving their adopted community and environment. The Garden Route Botanical Garden, with the Southern Cape Herbarium, has become a vital environmental focal point in the region; a strategy must be found to sustain the programme and its services.

2.9 The Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative

(i) A focus on the Agulhas Plain

Diverse attractions

“Cape Agulhas!”

Another busload of tourists disgorges at the candy-striped lighthouse, jostling to have their photographs taken at the southern tip of the continent of Africa. In recent years, the list of reasons why people choose to visit the Agulhas Plain has been growing steadily: whale watching, shark cage diving, the fynbos, local history, culture and crafts. Both directly and indirectly, biodiversity is proving vital to the local economy. Ecotourism is growing rapidly and the harvesting of fynbos wildflowers is currently one of the largest industries on the Agulhas Plain. In this predominantly rural area with up to 50% unemployment, the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI) is investigating how to use the region’s biodiversity in a sustainable manner so that it can benefit local communities in the long term.

The Agulhas Plain stretches from the Klein River in the west to the Breede River in the east, covering 270 000 ha of coastal lowlands and hills that stretch northwards towards the mountains (see map). The diversity of indigenous fynbos and Renosterveld plants is enormous: of the 2 500 species that occur here, 100 are endemic to the Agulhas Plain and about 112 are found on the Red Data list. Originally, the Agulhas Plain supported large herds of game, and 72 of the 81 species of terrestrial mammals that occurred in the CFR were found here. Some species like blue buck, quagga and Cape lion are now extinct and today many species are found only in protected areas like De Hoop Nature Reserve and Agulhas National Park.

Conservation by default … or by design?

Despite the value of biodiversity on the Agulhas Plain, by 1990 only 4% of the area was formally conserved; most of the protected areas were small and isolated and together they conserved only three of the 35 vegetation types in the region. This reflected a lack of systematic conservation planning in the past. In fact, the proclamation of some protected areas had...
The planning domain of the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative incorporates a number of priority habitats, from lowland fynbos and coastal renosterveld to wetlands of international importance.

had little to do with conservation priorities. Issues like state security during the Second World War and the stabilisation of sand dunes to protect local agriculture were the reasons for the creation of the De Mond and Walker Bay State Forests in 1941 and 1960 respectively. It is one of the great ironies of the history of conservation in South Africa that the very trees planted by the state to stabilise the dunes, are today costing the government millions of rand a year to eradicate.

Another conservation irony is that we sometimes have to come close to losing a valuable area before the necessary action is taken to conserve it. In 1994, plans to build a nuclear power station on one of the most important biodiversity hotspots on the Agulhas Plain resulted in the drafting of the first strategic and systematic biodiversity conservation plan for the area. The Institute for Plant Conservation (IPC) at the University of Cape Town and the Botanical Society of South Africa supported SANParks to work with local people to identify how best to implement this conservation management plan. With most of the biodiversity of the Agulhas Plain occurring on privately owned land, it was clear that conservation efforts would be fruitless without the co-operation of local landowners.

**Establishing the Agulhas National Park**

Also in the early 1990s, SANParks started investigating the establishment of a National Park on the Agulhas Plain. In 1996, the SANParks Board approved the declaration of the Agulhas National Park (ANP), which incorporated conservation priority areas that had been identified in the IPC study. SANParks planned to purchase 26,000 ha of land outright and to enter into contractual arrangements with landowners to incorporate a further 44,000 ha. The consolidation of the Agulhas National Park is proceeding as planned.
When plans to establish the Agulhas National Park were first discussed, it became clear that many local landowners did not want to sell their land to SANParks; they wanted to retain title to their land and continue farming. Most farmers accepted that they had a responsibility to conserve the natural environment, but they believed farming and conservation activities could take place side by side on the same property. This led to the need for a new approach to conservation on the Agulhas Plain.

**ABI: a ecosystem approach**

When plans to establish the Agulhas National Park were first discussed, it became clear that many local landowners did not want to sell their land to SANParks; they wanted to retain title to their land and continue farming. Most farmers accepted that they had a responsibility to conserve the natural environment, but they believed farming and conservation activities could take place side by side on the same property. This led to the need for a new approach to conservation on the Agulhas Plain.

The conventional institutional approach to conservation, in which state agencies establish and manage formal protected areas, developed into an ecosystem approach in which a range of stakeholders are involved in conserving biodiversity within “living landscapes”. The Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI) was developed as a key C.A.P.E. project to investigate the implementation of both institutional and ecosystem approaches to biodiversity conservation on the Agulhas Plain.

There have been dramatic changes in both attitudes and approaches to conservation and sustainable natural resource management on the Agulhas Plain since 1990. Systematic conservation and land use planning, the establishment of new state and private protected natural areas, and the involvement of officials and landowners in a variety of conservation initiatives across the landscape, are all evidence of this transformation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land uses on the Agulhas Plain</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40% livestock</td>
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<tr>
<td>10% mixed farming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28% fynbos</td>
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<tr>
<td>22% conservation</td>
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The Agulhas Lighthouse symbolises the iconic destination that is the southern tip of Africa, where three oceans meet (Indian, Southern and Atlantic) and where conservation, agriculture and local municipalities are combining forces to develop an innovative model of landscape-scale conservation that extends beyond the boundaries of protected areas.
Biodiversity across the landscape
In contrast to the figure of 4% of the Agulhas Plain that was formally conserved in 1990, today 22% of the Agulhas Plain is classified as conservation land. And looking at the other land use figures for the area, it is clear that land that is formally conserved represents only a small proportion of the remaining natural landscape. In fact, if grazing veld and fynbos on private properties are included, as much as 75% of the Agulhas Plain is estimated to be natural vegetation. In some areas veld management is limited and 15% of the Plain is densely invaded by alien plants, so challenges do exist. But the ecosystem approach introduced by ABI offers landowners and land managers in the private and public sectors the opportunity to work together to conserve biodiversity and manage land sustainably across the whole of the Agulhas Plain.

Private sector conservation initiatives
Private landowners have taken a great deal of initiative to conserve the biodiversity of the Agulhas Plain. As early as 1969, the Albertyn family established the first private nature reserve in the area.

Feedback from the biological surveys undertaken during the 1990s reaffirmed what many farmers in the area already knew: the Agulhas Plain was a biodiversity treasure. Rather than seeing this as a threat to their farming operations, some landowners recognised that conservation offered them opportunities to diversify and improve their incomes. Once they knew which terrestrial and wetland habitats should be conserved, they could set these aside and continue farming on the less critical sections of their properties. The conservation areas then became an ecotourism draw-card.

In one case, a group of twelve landowners decided to form a Section 21 Company to strengthen conservation efforts on their properties. The Nuwejaars Special Management Area now comprises a combined area of 44 000 ha, of which 20 000 ha (60–70% of which is wetland) has been designated conservation land. With funding from the Development Bank of South Africa, the partners have been developing business plans to promote sustainable agriculture, ecotourism and socio-economic development in the area.

Other groups of conservation-conscious landowners have established conservancies, which together conserve 14 000 ha of land on the Agulhas Plain. A conservancy is a voluntary association of landowners with a joint conservation management plan for their combined properties. Members of conservancies benefit from co-operating with their neighbours. For instance, members of the Walker Bay Fynbos Conservancy in Hermanus share responsibility for maintaining fire belts and strategic boundaries, share the services of a part-time manager employed by Grootbos, and have established a hiking trail that traverses their properties. At Salmonsdam, members of the Akkedis Conservancy share the costs of clearing invasive alien plants from their properties.

These are only a few of a number of private sector conservation and socio-economic development initiatives on the Agulhas Plain. You can read about other private sector initiatives like Flower Valley, Grootbos and Sandberg elsewhere in this publication.

The Department of Agriculture—a key partner
Trust is at the heart of all successful negotiations, especially when they involve
landowners and government. On the Agulhas Plain, attempts to get farmers to sell their land to SANParks resulted in some landowners feeling uneasy about the intentions of state conservation agencies. In an area where most of the land is zoned agricultural, the Department of Agriculture has become a significant role-player in biodiversity conservation efforts, in particular through its LandCare: Area-wide ide Planning (AWP) programme.

One of the functions of AWP is fine-scale farm planning. The Department of Agriculture works with landowners to identify zones on their properties that are suitable for different land uses. In rural areas, the distinction is made between priority agricultural land and priority conservation land. Through the C.A.P.E. Programme fine-scale (1:10 000) biodiversity maps have been prepared for the Agulhas Plain indicating the vegetation types and areas that are most critically in need of conservation. The Department of Agriculture uses these maps during AWP and farm planning exercises, and can therefore recommend not only which parts of the farm are most suitable for grazing, crops and infrastructure, but also which areas should be managed for biodiversity. Should farmers show an interest in conserving threatened habitats on their land, the Department of Agriculture will then recommend that they contact conservation agencies to ask for help with biodiversity management and to investigate conservation options. By integrating agricultural and conservation planning in this way, the Department of Agriculture is helping to implement the ecosystem approach to biodiversity conservation in a practical way on the Agulhas Plain.

**Mapping conservation priorities**

ABI has set conservation targets, which include biodiversity hotspots, irreplaceable habitats, priority wetlands and areas sustaining ecological processes. Conservation managers use fine-scale (1:10 000) biodiversity maps to help them identify these priority conservation areas on the Agulhas Plain.

These fine-scale maps put research information into the hands of conservation and resource use managers in a form that facilitates management planning. They also help landowners to appreciate the conservation value of their properties and how they can help to conserve biodiversity on the Agulhas Plain. It becomes easier to understand why it is important to conserve a particular habitat fragment on your property when you can see on the map that it is the last refuge on earth for a particular plant or animal.

In addition to conserving sites of biodiversity importance on their properties, landowners can also help to create linkages in the landscape by managing their land as part of a biodiversity corridor. ABI has used fine-scale maps to identify possible corridors: some follow the course of rivers or link protected areas along the coast, while others stretch from the mountains to the sea via protected areas and conservancies.

Access to spatial biodiversity information has helped landowners and resource managers to make more informed decisions about land use. By working closely with conservation organizations, landowners are able to identify areas that are critical for biodiversity and to integrate these needs into their farm planning.

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**Hennis Germishuys and Francis Steyn**

Recent winners of C.A.P.E. Silver Awards, Hennis Germishuys (left) and Francis Steyn (right) have made tremendous strides towards the integration of agricultural, municipal and conservation planning on the Agulhas Plain. A basic principle of their approach has been to make contact with the landowners and communities themselves, applying the well-tested approaches of Agriculture’s LandCare programmes. More than that, they have provided a bridge not only with communities, but among the various responsible agencies, finding common ground among the conservation, agriculture and development priorities generated in the preparation of municipal integrated development plans. A recent brainwave that already has practical expression is to develop an integrated “service centre” where representatives of the main decision-agencies already base themselves. They now offer a single point for the public and authorities alike to discuss issues of common concern. This is a model for the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative that bears replication in every other region of the Cape.
people making biodiversity work

managers alike to visualise how they can contribute to the conservation of biodiversity and natural resources on the Agulhas Plain. The growing number of conservancies, private nature reserves, special management areas and stewardship agreements in the area suggests that sustaining biodiversity across a productive Agulhas Plain is a dream that may well come true.

A one-stop shop

Programmes like ABI rely on the cooperation and effective participation of a number of stakeholders. Similarly, provincial and local authority initiatives require integrated planning across a number of sectors. In the Overberg, role players have come up with a strategy to help them operate in a more integrated and efficient way.

The Department of Agriculture and SANParks have entered into a Memorandum of Co-operation, which is currently being expanded to include CapeNature. One of the outcomes of this agreement is the establishment of the Bredasdorp Multi-purpose Centre, a “one-stop shop” that can potentially house stakeholders from a number of government departments, including the Department of Agriculture, SANParks, CapeNature, DEA&DP, DWAF, Department of Land Affairs, local authorities and social welfare organisations. The centre is strategically located in Bredasdorp where the offices of the District Municipality are situated. By physically working together, the partners believe that they can more effectively achieve their vision and plans for a sustainable future on the Agulhas Plain.

2.10 A tale of two biosphere reserves

(i) Bioregional planning and biosphere reserves

The Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning (DEA&DP) of the Western Cape Province has adopted a planning and development approach known as bioregional planning, which seeks to ensure that the province develops in a sustainable manner. Bioregional planning is an integrated approach to the planning and management of land resources that takes increasingly willing to work together to ensure effective biodiversity conservation.

- To date, most C.A.P.E.-related research has focused on biodiversity and there are therefore many biological arguments for biodiversity conservation. Land owners also need convincing economic arguments as to why they should conserve significant portions of their land.

- It is unhelpful to treat agriculture and conservation as incompatible land use types, or to assume that farmers will stop their agricultural activities in order to pursue biodiversity-friendly alternatives. Most farmers are willing to diversify but farming will remain their core business.

- Conservationists must listen to landowners and land managers, develop trust and work towards a common goal. Threatening land owners (e.g. with legal obligations) is not helpful; rather help people to do what is required of them.

- In general, landowners are willing to conserve biodiversity, but they need information. Extension officers must work with willing land owners and provide them with the necessary guidelines, maps and plans.

- People whose livelihoods depend on a particular resource are passionate about that resource!

What is Bioregional Planning?

Bioregional planning has been defined as “an organised process that enables people to work together, think carefully about potential problems of their region, set goals and objectives, define activities, implement projects, take actions agreed upon by the communities, evaluate progress and refine their approach”. World Resources Institute, 1999.

Bioregional planning takes place within an area known as a bioregion. In simple terms a bioregion is an area that represents both an ecological system and a home for residents and people dependent on the area’s resources. These two criteria determine the scale of a bioregion.

What have we learned?

- Most land owners are unwilling to sell their land to conservation authorities, but generally prefer to retain title and take responsibility for conserving biodiversity on their properties.

- In farming areas, the Department of Agriculture must play an important role in encouraging biodiversity conservation through LandCare: Area-wide Planning.

- Different departments (e.g. Department of Agriculture, SANParks, CapeNature) are increasingly willing to work together to ensure effective biodiversity conservation.

...
Biosphere reserves use a system of land use zones to achieve their goals of biodiversity conservation and sustainable socio-economic development.

into account environmental, social and economic factors. It aims to ensure that all land is allocated and used in ways that provide sustainable benefits.

The Western Cape intends implementing bioregional planning using two main strategies, namely municipal development planning and the creation of biosphere reserves. To date, two biosphere reserves have been established in the CFR: the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve (est. 1998) and Cape West Coast Biosphere Reserve (est. 2000).

What is a biosphere reserve?

The concept of a biosphere reserve was developed by the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme of the United Nations Environmental, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

Biosphere reserves are managed to fulfil three distinct functions:

- **Conservation**: contribute to the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variation;
- **Development**: foster economic and human development which is socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable;
- **Logistics**: provide support for research, monitoring, education and information exchange related to local, national and global issues of conservation and development.

Biosphere reserves can thus be described as “living laboratories” for investigating integrated approaches to sustainable development. The World Network of Biosphere Reserves comprises more than 450 biosphere reserves in over 90 countries around the world, providing fertile opportunities for the sharing of information and experience.

Support from NEPAD

African environment ministers have called on NEPAD to use biosphere reserves as “laboratories for sustainable development”. In January 2004, they stated their commitment to “promoting the use of biosphere reserves as operational sites for sustainable development in the fight against poverty”.

- Logistics: provide support for research, monitoring, education and information exchange related to local, national and global issues of conservation and development.

Gonald Present

Gonald Present is CapeNature’s Business Unit Manager for the Kogelberg. He is using his talents as a people-person to draw together the many interests of the diverse stakeholders in the area.
A key issue when planning for the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve was to ensure the identification of the appropriate planning zones.

**Land-use zones**

Typically, biosphere reserves comprise three interrelated zones, the core area, buffer zone and transition area, with different types of activities being permitted in the different zones. In the Western Cape, DEA&DP has expanded this classification system to six zones, which include all possible land uses:

- **Category A - Core area**: conservation areas; no development allowed; non-consumptive use only. Ideally, core areas should be linked to one another by natural corridors like river systems or coastlines.

- **Category B - Buffer area**: conservation-worthy areas without statutory protection, including ecological corridors (e.g. rivers, coastlines) and areas that could be rehabilitated; act as a buffer between core and other areas; sustainable and non-consumptive land uses are allowed under certain conditions.

- **Category C - Agricultural area**: rural areas; extensive and intensive agriculture and forestry.

The Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve includes one of the most species-rich landscapes in the CFR and includes mountain, coastal and marine environments.
Local support for biosphere reserves

Biosphere reserves are internationally designated and recognised but rely on the initiative of the local community and the commitment of national, provincial and local government departments for their establishment and ongoing management. In the Western Cape, biosphere reserves are specified as an important component of bioregional planning. If the management plans of biosphere reserves are aligned with the development plans of provincial and local spheres of government, biosphere reserves will help government to achieve their goals and objectives. In turn, biosphere reserves will be able to look forward to greater recognition and support from government.

The following section describes some of the achievements and lessons learned in the two biosphere reserves in the Western Cape.

(ii) The Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve

Less than an hour’s drive from the centre of Cape Town you will find South Africa’s first biosphere reserve. Designated by UNESCO in 1998, the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve (KBR) can be described as the heart of the CFR. This area of over 103 000 ha is a biodiversity heaven, boasting about 1 600 different types of plants, of which around 150 occur nowhere else on earth. The marine life along the spectacular coastline, where warm temperate south coast waters interface with cold upwellings, is also magically diverse and productive. Beyond the biodiversity, the KBR is scenically one of the most magnificent parts of South Africa. The coastal road from Gordon’s Bay to Rooi Els traverses steep fynbos-clad slopes with towering cliffs above and below, providing panoramic views of False Bay, complete with whales from late winter to early summer. More than 80% of the biosphere reserve is mountainous, with the rest of the area comprising sea, coastal plains, rocky shores, sandy beaches and estuaries.

Deciduous fruit farming and commercial forestry are important local industries and there is also a considerable amount of wild flower harvesting, both from orchards and from the veld. The beauty and bounty of the nature area attract large numbers of visitors, with populations of some towns increasing almost three-fold during peak holiday seasons.

Lessons in management

Both biosphere reserves in the CFR are managed by Section 21 companies. However, the way in which the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve Company was set up limited the effectiveness of the biosphere reserve. The company is currently being revitalised but valuable lessons can be learned from this experience, which can inform the planning of other biosphere reserves and corridor initiatives.

One of the factors limiting the success of the KBR Company was that it was run entirely on a voluntary basis. There was no paid executive director, operations manager or secretariat to carry out the extremely demanding role of managing the company, liaising with the numerous stakeholders, raising funds and promoting the biosphere reserve. Furthermore, there was no local authority representation on the board of directors, so it was difficult to liaise with and garner support from the four municipalities that fall within the biosphere reserve. A lack of effective fundraising resulted in very few projects being initiated and relatively little publicity being generated for the biosphere reserve.

Reviving the Biosphere Reserve Company

During 2004, after a short period of dormancy, the major roleplayers, including municipalities and community organisations, took the initiative to start reviving the KBR Company. The Company now has the full support of the four local authorities and is supported by a technical committee, established under the Articles of Association of the Section 21 Company. A more regular schedule of meetings has been planned and funding through the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA) and the Provincial Government will enable the development of a strategic management framework for the KBR. This framework will determine the vision for the company, draw up a management plan guiding actions on the...
ground, and include a corporate plan outlining the functions of the Board and its functionaries. A consultant has been appointed to develop the strategic management framework, which is expected early in 2006.

Funding raised through C.A.P.E. will be used to appoint a full-time KBR co-ordinator for an initial contract period of four years. This will address one of the key management problems experienced in the past. Initially, projects will focus on strengthening marine conservation in the area, as well as the development of a tourism strategy for the biosphere reserve.

Support for the KBR is coming not a moment too soon: coastal development is proceeding apace and poaching is threatening to destroy local populations of perlemoen and crayfish. The people of the Kogelberg must work together to identify how the area’s greatest assets—its natural beauty and biodiversity—can be conserved so that they can continue to provide opportunities for ecologically and socially sustainable development.

(iii) The Cape West Coast Biosphere Reserve

The population of the City of Cape Town is projected to double between 2002 and 2012. The West Coast is experiencing growing pressure from urban expansion and coastal development, which are impacting on its unique character. Conscious of the need to plan development carefully, representatives of civil society on the West Coast lobbied for the proclamation of a biosphere reserve. The process of preparing the formal application to UNESCO brought together municipalities, provincial government and civil society on the West Coast, and set the scene for ongoing co-operation. National government also gave their support, with the then Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Mr Mohammed Valli Moosa, endorsing the application.

In November 2000, the UNESCO MAB programme designated 378 000 ha of coastal lowlands and inland agricultural areas as the Cape West Coast Biosphere Reserve (CWCBR). The Biosphere Reserve stretches from the Diep River in Milnerton, Cape Town, to the Berg River and
incorporates one of the fastest growing areas of the City. UNESCO recognises development pressure on the West Coast as a significant challenge to the Biosphere reserve.

The CWCBR includes a wide range of habitats, from marine, beach and dune environments to pans, wetlands, coastal plains and rocky outcrops. The Langebaan Lagoon, one of the core conservation areas, is also designated as a Ramsar wetland of international importance. New core areas have been added since the biosphere reserve was designated, namely Dassen and Vondeling Islands and their surrounding marine areas.

The natural assets of the West Coast make it a popular tourist destination, particularly during spring when the Strandveld is in bloom. The region also supports a diverse range of industries including agriculture and fisheries, mining, manufacturing and services. However, these economic opportunities are not equitably distributed, and many communities live in poverty, experiencing low levels of employment, skills shortages, overcrowded living conditions, and health problems like tuberculosis.

**An insecure future**

_Saldanha Limestone Dune Thicket and Hopefield Sand Fynbos occur entirely within the CWCBR—yet less than 0.5% of dune thicket and less than 3% of sand fynbos vegetation is adequately protected!_
Integrating conservation and development planning

In the face of pressing socio-economic challenges, the CWCBR Company takes pride in the fact that they have always promoted the “M” in UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB). A lengthy process of consultation with numerous stakeholders resulted in the preparation of strategic and business plans for the CWCBR, which are in line with Province’s bioregional planning framework. These are people-centred plans that acknowledge the fundamental importance of biodiversity conservation for sustainable development on the West Coast. They enable all role players in the area to work towards common goals and objectives, and ensure that the Biosphere Reserve fulfils its three core functions.

The strategic plan sets out a 20-year vision for the Bio CWCBR sphere, with a series of action plans providing the detail. By taking an integrated approach to conservation and development, the CWCBR aims to ensure that the people of the West Coast will both benefit from and safeguard the area’s distinctive natural diversity and cultural character.

In order to inform the development of its own strategic and management plans, the CWCBR commissioned a thorough review of a wide range of environmental, social and economic policy and planning documents. These included a number of biodiversity surveys highlighting conservation priorities and development opportunities in the region. This research drew attention to the socio-economic benefits of conservation and confirmed that the region has enormous potential for eco-tourism, especially in the core areas.

However, the study also warned that there has been substantial loss and fragmentation of natural areas in the CWCBR. In eight of the region’s 12 vegetation types, so much natural vegetation has already been lost that it will not be possible to meet a minimum conservation target of 25% of the original area. In order to meet even a 10% conservation target, it will be necessary to conserve more than 5 500 hectares of additional land. Of particular concern is that five of the vegetation types occur entirely within the CWCBR; if the biosphere reserve cannot guarantee their survival, nobody else will.

Most of the land in the CWCBR is privately owned, so biodiversity conservation in the region relies on the support and co-operation of a large number of stakeholders. Fortunately, as the creation of the biosphere reserve indicates, there is a great deal of support for sustainable development from civil society in the region.

The Biosphere Reserve Company is encouraging a balanced approach to land use and development planning in the CWCBR. Spatial biodiversity information can help to identify those habitats that need special protection, while also indicating less critical biodiversity areas where urban and agricultural development can proceed without threatening the region’s unique biodiversity. This information can also help the authorities identify priority areas where invasive alien vegetation must be removed.

Effective biosphere management

The CWCBR Company provides services to its members and stakeholders by co-
ordinating projects and programmes that integrate rapid growth and change with biodiversity conservation, sustainable living and heritage preservation. Since the Biosphere Reserve was designated in 2000, the Biosphere Reserve Company has achieved a great deal. The following approaches have contributed to effective management of the CWCBR:

- In the past, municipalities advised the CWCBR Board on technical matters only; a few years ago, representatives of the Saldanha Bay, Berg River and Swartland Municipalities, the West Coast District Municipality and City of Cape Town were nominated as Directors. This formal partnership has improved co-operation between the CWCBR and local government.

- Although Board members serve in a voluntary capacity, the Biosphere Company set up a full-time office with an administrator to enable the CWCBR to operate effectively.

- The Biosphere Reserve Company raised funds from the Western Cape Province, West Coast District Municipality, City of Cape Town and DBSA, which enabled it to develop and start implementing a strategic management framework.

- The management framework has been a major success. The strategic plan provides a long-term vision, which guides a shorter-term business plan and detailed action plans that are enabling the CWCBR to achieve its goals.

- A communication strategy was drafted to ensure that the CWCBR is promoted effectively. This resulted in the development of publications and a website.

Taking up the challenge

The CWCBR Company faces ongoing challenges, which include the need to appoint a professional programme co-ordinator, to raise funding and involve partner organisations in rolling out flagship projects, and to strengthen partnerships, co-operation and communication among role players in the region. A committed Board, a clear strategy and the support of stakeholders in the region will ensure that the CWCBR meets its primary objectives of reducing the rate of loss of biodiversity, reducing consumption of natural resources and stimulating economic development in this unique region.

What have we learned?

The experiences of the Kogelberg and Cape West Coast Biosphere Reserves have been very different. A comparison of the relative effectiveness of the two approaches suggests that:

- The management of biosphere reserves requires an integrated approach involving both government and civil society partners. Biosphere reserves cannot be run by a Section 21 company operating in isolation to achieve its own agenda.

- Biosphere reserves are established to fulfil conservation, development and logistic functions; they cannot focus on the conservation of biodiversity only but must also promote sustainable development projects and demonstrate tangible socio-economic benefits.

- The management framework of a biosphere reserve must include both strategic plans to guide overall management and operational plans to guide the day-to-day running of the company.

- The biosphere reserve concept is understood differently by different people; this leads to anomalies in the execution of plans and perceptions of stakeholders, including funders.

- Biosphere companies need secure funding, a full-time administrator and dedicated office space to operate effectively.

- Biosphere reserves should interact at all management levels with other role players in the area, to ensure that strategic goals and objectives are attained. Management structures should be set up to actively involve key role players (e.g. local government).

- Although donor funding may be required to catalyse specific projects, biosphere reserves must investigate opportunities to generate their own revenue and become more economically sustainable. The level of funding required will relate to how the biodiversity reserve company views its primary role (e.g. implementing agent, facilitator, pressure group, etc).