



m&e case study

Stewardship: Facilitating private investment in conservation at Elandsberg

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C.A.P.E. includes landowners among their partners as stewardship programmes are implemented to protect biodiversity priority areas in the lowlands.

- ***Landowners commit to legally binding conservation agreements which are linked to tax rebates and rates reduction, in addition to management support.***
- ***Elandsberg and the Renosterveld Conservancy have been pathfinders in the stewardship programme, demonstrating the important contribution that private land owners can make.***

The goal of the C.A.P.E. partnership is to protect the biodiversity of the Cape Floristic Region. Existing protected areas are largely located in the highlands. The majority of the priority areas identified by C.A.P.E. for future conservation action are therefore in the lowlands, where most natural vegetation has already been transformed for housing and farming. It is usually not possible for conservation agencies to purchase land in the prohibitively expensive lowlands. In addition, as the remaining natural remnants are scattered through the landscape, management would be very difficult. The protection of biodiversity in the highly threatened lowlands is therefore largely dependent on the establishment of conservation agreements with private landowners.

CapeNature has developed an extensive Stewardship Programme which establishes formal conservation contracts with landowners to conserve important biodiversity on their land. Already in 2009 there are 33 Contract Nature Reserves for CapeNature protecting 45 261ha. These include 17 Biodiversity Agreements totaling 11 336.52ha and 21 Voluntary sites covering 20 399.45ha.

There are different levels of commitment which landowners can make to conservation through the CapeNature Stewardship Programme: The least binding is the conservation area which commits the landowner to conservation of natural systems but which does not commit the landowner to a defined period of commitment. In return the landowner will receive extension services to support sound land management. The most binding is a contract nature reserve which is fixed on the title deed for a minimum duration of 30 years. Tax rebates and reduction in municipal rates have now been formally linked with these more formal commitments to incentivize those who commit to medium - long term conservation of biodiversity on their own land. Substantial assistance is also provided for sound habitat management.

Although the Stewardship Programme is very labour-intensive for conservation agencies, it provides a good return on investment as a result of the substantial contribution made by landowners. In addition to the new tax and rates rebates, the landowners benefit from management advice from CapeNature, which is presented in a unique management plan for each site.

In recognition of the importance of supporting private conservation through stewardship, C.A.P.E. has developed and run a specialized training course for stewardship extension officers. Following its successful initial offering in 2008 with 16 participants, the course is being offered in 2009 by the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University with 27 participants, with sponsorship provided to conservation agency participants through C.A.P.E.

An inspiring example of private investment in conservation is provided by the Elandsberg Nature Reserve. The pioneering participation of the owners in the stewardship programme is described below.

ELANDSBERG-PATHFINDERS

Elandsberg has played a leading role in the development of the Stewardship Programme in the Western Cape. The 3 800ha of renosterveld, protected by the contract nature reserve on this farm, represents the largest remaining area of this highly threatened vegetation type. The Parker family, who own this farm, had already set aside this area for conservation before the Stewardship Programme was established. Indeed, in the 1980s, they had taken the president, PW Botha, to court in an attempt to protect this important area.



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“Good stewardship programmes are based on people living and working within the community building relationships and trust.”

The Parkers were willing to act as pathfinders as the formal Stewardship Programme was being developed. Various contractual approaches were therefore tested on them and they willingly resubmitted their application as formats for ministerial submissions and mapping requirements were changed. A formal stewardship contract was finally signed with Elandsberg in 2006 and the nature reserve was formally gazetted in 2008. As a result of the new tax amendments, they now qualify for tax rebates and can deduct both the management costs of this area, and the value of the land set aside for conservation, from their assessed income. Furthermore, as the land is permanently contracted as a nature reserve no municipal rates are levied on this land.

Elandsberg has been audited several times and the owners have consistently complied with the requirements of their management plan. This includes alien clearing, fire management, erosion control and game management. In addition, they have matched funding which was made available for alien clearing through the Table Mountain Fund and the department of Agriculture LandCare programme. They also provided labour and rocks to fill the Table Mountain Fund-sponsored gabions to control erosion. Adhering to the management plan, they have also reduced non-endemic game.

Many landowners are nervous of undertaking the controlled burns needed to maintain renosterveld species diversity, but the owners of Elandsberg have had the confidence to burn ageing veld, leading to spectacular renewal of fire-driven species. They have also made their farm available as a site for research. Stellenbosch University has undertaken several long-term projects in the area to test different approaches to restoration. The findings of this work will be applied to the restoration of degraded renosterveld elsewhere.

THE RENOSTERVELD CONSERVANCY

Elandsberg forms part of the larger Renosterveld conservancy. This conservancy comprising 15-20 farms has demonstrated how stewardship programmes can facilitate the tremendously important contribution of private landowners.

The conservancy manages the funding for invasive alien plant clearing, ensuring that it is distributed evenly throughout the conservancy and that systematic clearing includes follow-up operations. Firewood collection previously provided an important resource for local communities. This has now been replaced by wood produced from alien clearing. Sustainable harvesting of medicinal plants has been licenced, and historical medicinal use in the conservancy is being recorded.

C.A.P.E. has also sponsored a new training course for farm workers from the area to develop an understanding of the role of conservation and of the global significance of the area they live in. These farm workers already understood all the technicalities of alien clearing, and road maintenance, but now also understand why this is done and what role they, themselves, can play in conservation. It is intended that this programme will form a bridging course for those who previously worked on farms with the training provided for field rangers, thereby providing an alternative career path for people from the area.

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