



# m&e case study

## Using municipal Spatial Development Frameworks to protect biodiversity

# #4



One of the key objectives of the C.A.P.E. partnership is to support and improve land use regulation. The spatial component of municipal strategic planning is captured through the development of Spatial Development Frameworks (SDFs). These SDFs, if properly implemented, can promote wise regulation at a municipal level.

Multi-faceted intervention is required to ensure that municipalities identify priorities for biodiversity conservation, include them in their SDFs, and then protect them by denying approval for any inappropriate development. The C.A.P.E. partnership has therefore undertaken a number of projects which support the development of sound SDFs which protect biodiversity priorities through appropriate zoning. This also, indirectly, expedites development by directing it towards areas where biodiversity impacts are minimal.

### DEVELOPING FINE-SCALE BIODIVERSITY INFORMATION

The early C.A.P.E. conservation plans were large scale products and it was difficult to use them to inform municipal planning. The C.A.P.E. partnership therefore commissioned the development of fine-scale biodiversity maps for priority municipalities where there were high levels of biodiversity, coupled with high pressure for development.

The first fine-scale biodiversity maps were produced in a pilot study for the Drakenstein, Cape Agulhas, Swartland and Theewaterskloof municipalities. The Fine-scale Biodiversity Planning Project, implemented by CapeNature, is currently producing systematic conservation plans now referred to as Critical Biodiversity Areas Maps for the Saldanha Bay, Cederberg, Bergrivier, Matzikama, Hessequa, and Mossel Bay, Breede River/Winelands, Breede Valley and Witzenberg local municipalities. In addition, as part of the Garden Route Initiative, Critical Biodiversity Areas Maps are being produced for the George, Knysna, Bitou, Koukamma and Kouga municipalities.

At the time of writing, in April 2009, these Critical Biodiversity Areas Maps are largely complete. They have used innovative and scientifically defensible approaches to identify biodiversity priorities needing conservation. These plans are being translated into user-friendly computer-based products which include guidelines on how best to manage the local biodiversity.

Ultimately, the intention is to integrate all of these individual Critical Biodiversity Areas Maps to develop a single provincial biodiversity plan which will include all the best biodiversity information into one integrated, and regularly updated, product.

### TRAINING AND GUIDELINES

In order to establish how well biodiversity was being incorporated into municipal planning, a review was undertaken of the SDFs in the province. It was found that biodiversity was inadequately addressed in all SDFs and that in some it was not dealt with at all. Guidelines were therefore developed both for those reviewing SDFs and also for those compiling them. The guidelines emphasize that fine-scale biodiversity information is available and explain how it must be consulted when drawing up SDFs.

To support the use of the Guidelines, training courses on the use of biodiversity maps and systematic conservation plans were held for municipal officials and for consultants involved in drawing up SDFs and Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs). The initial courses

At a municipal level there were procedural weaknesses at each stage of the regulatory process protecting biodiversity. C.A.P.E therefore supports a suite of projects which are:

- Developing fine-scale conservation plans showing biodiversity priority areas.
- Providing training in the importance of biodiversity and the legal obligation to protect it.
- Demonstrating the potential of engaging with authorities and consultants to promote uptake and enforcement.



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focused on explaining what biodiversity is, and on the legal obligation to protect it. They also provided information on where to find relevant fine-scale biodiversity information.

More recently, workshops were held at selected municipalities, in which participants were shown Critical Biodiversity Areas Maps of their own municipality and were then taken out into the field to see key biodiversity areas. In future, once the Critical Biodiversity Areas Maps are complete, technical training workshops will be provided on how to use this information to inform the development of SDFs.

### INCLUDING BIODIVERSITY PLANS IN SDFs

A pilot C.A.P.E. project focused on in-depth interaction with a few municipalities for which fine-scale biodiversity plans had been fast-tracked. They found that building relationships with municipal officials and consultants, through repeated interaction, was the best way to ensure that biodiversity priorities were incorporated into SDFs. This labour-intensive approach was also successfully used by the Garden Route Initiative. It was found that contact needs to be maintained for the impact to be sustained. The people building these relationships were temporary appointees, and furthermore they often worked with consultants rather than with municipal officials. The long term challenge will be to maintain this influence with long term staffing.

Six additional municipalities have been selected on the basis of the availability of sound biodiversity information and high development pressure. There will be intensive engagement with these six, with the aim of promoting the inclusion of the Critical Biodiversity Areas maps into their SDFs. The timing of engagement with municipalities is critical as revision of SDFs is completed on a 5 year cycle. It is important to intensify engagement with municipalities when they are in the process of revising their SDFs.

Experience indicates that biodiversity priorities outside the urban edge are more easily incorporated into the SDF. Unfortunately, where there is a conflict between biodiversity priorities and pressure for development, biodiversity priorities are frequently not formally incorporated into the SDF.

### SUPPORTING IMPLEMENTATION

Once biodiversity priorities are incorporated into SDFs the next challenge will be to ensure that they are used to inform municipal planning processes:

In some municipalities there is currently a tendency to revise the SDF when it conflicts with new proposals for development. These revisions are often also in contravention of provincial guidelines for planning. This problem is probably best addressed through the provincial authorities mandated to guide the planning processes. Working within municipal level structures is challenging as a consequence of their large numbers and current capacity constraints.

The temporary placement of additional staff through these C.A.P.E. projects has demonstrated what can be achieved. It is essential that long term posts are created by the C.A.P.E. partners to support this process, both within the planning department of DEA&DP and within the conservation agencies. Encouragingly, as a legacy of these interventions, SANBI has created posts to support engagement with municipal planning and plans to place extension staff within district municipalities.

To take these interventions further, and to ensure that Critical Biodiversity Areas Maps are regularly used to inform decision making, there needs to be ongoing engagement, not only with municipalities, but also with provincial and national authorities.

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**Key Words:**

*Critical Biodiversity Areas Maps, fine-scale biodiversity planning, Spatial Development Frameworks, municipality*

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<sup>i</sup> A biodiversity map is a map of all biodiversity in an area. It does not prioritize areas for conservation action. A systematic conservation plan provides a scientifically defensible and efficient approach to strategically conserving the biodiversity of a region.