

# **CEDARVILLE CONSERVANCY**

## **FINAL PROJECT CLOSE OUT REPORT – January 2016**

### **CONTEXT OF PROJECT and MISSION STATEMENT OF GRANTEE**

The voluntary Conservancy group was established in mid 2010, by concerned farmers on private commercial grazing land located in the upper Umzimvubu catchment, based on observing the increasing degradation of grassland and arable lands, and the possibilities for improved management through learning and sharing.

Mission: to adopt and expand conservation practices within the conservancy, which is currently productive commercial farmland, with the objective of achieving long term sustainable land use, and improvement of ecosystem status and function. Possibly expand land area to adjacent farmland and communal rangelands to increase area under improved management



### **ORIGINAL PROJECT AIMS**

MPAH strategic directions:

No 2: Expand conservation areas on private land particularly for habitats underrepresented in the current protected areas; and

No 3: Maintain and restore ecosystem function and integrity in the highland grasslands corridors

The Conservancy planned to improve grassland cover and composition on the six original conservancy member farms through:

- subdivision of camps through re-aligning fencing, to support improved grazing management practises, through high intensity rotation and recovery to reduce moribundity and overgrazed areas, and improve vigour
- reduce burning regimes to support organic activity and limit carbon release

The Conservancy also aimed to reduce threats posed to the biodiversity and ecosystem integrity on their grassland farms through reducing the extent and spread of alien plants, as well as controlling the threat to mammal and bird species from illegal poaching. Loss of small stock to jackals is also a challenge, and members were keen to explore innovative and ecologically appropriate methods of reducing such losses to their commercial ventures.

### **PROGRESS TO DATE**

- ✓ Proclamation of 17 000 ha Cedarville Protected Environment, with support from EWT and EC Parks & Tourism Authority. This adds extremely valuable protected hectareage to the vulnerable grassland biome in the upper catchment.
- ✓ The six members made use of the fencing budget allowance to subdivide 18 internal camps into smaller areas. three members used permanent wire strand fence, while three made use of electric fence which can be relocated to manage grazing access. This facilitated shorter more intense grazing periods, with stock generally eating all increaser species, and not just the usual selective grazing, which is visibly reducing pioneer species and increasing forbs, decreasers and basal cover. This is based on the holistic grazing management concept of short duration high intensity use.
- ✓ A Ph. D student from Stellenbosch University is currently assessing grassland vigour and biodiversity impacts resulting from the different grazing and burning management practises using fence line contrasts, and initial findings are that the sub-divided camps which are managed according to a mix of holistic grazing and adapted

traditional rotation are showing impressive results for increased basal cover, biodiversity and biomass production.

- ✓ One member used the fencing allowance to secure 700m of external / boundary fence at the Conservancy edge to control illegal grazing and poaching access from the nearby Cedarville Commonage
- ✓ Burning frequency by farmers in the area has traditionally been on a 2-3 year cycle. Several of the Conservancy members have been practising no burn, or very long periods in excess of 14 years between burns. Observations in the various camps in the conservancy under different burn regimes indicated that a mosaic of different practises is having the highest positive impact on biodiversity recovery through better representation of species.
- ✓ Poaching has been a large problem for many farms in the area, but increased vigilance by members, and increased use of the Protected Area for recreational activities such as mountain biking and horse riding, has led to increased presence in the remote areas of the Conservancy, which has been a deterrent to poachers: riders make instant contact with land owners who can respond immediately to hunting packs and the police have been called in to assist on several occasions, and arrests have been made.
- ✓ Alien plant clearing has been carried out by various landowners: several employees were given informal training by two local NGOs (EWT and ERS) who support the PE, and a set of basic equipment for alien plant control was purchased with the budget. Manual removal methods are used wherever possible. Some herbicide has been supplied by the local NGOs where necessary for follow up use, and the ECPTA and DEA offices are in the process of supplying ongoing support for appropriate herbicide.
- ✓ With the help of EWT's Crane Custodian programme, the Conservancy has developed a Management Plan for the Protected Environment properties, to which all members subscribe and which is promulgated for under the Protected Areas Act.
- ✓ An adventure triathlon was hosted on the PE together with local school and community and generated raised awareness of the potential of the area for ecotourism. The triathlon made use of the Umzimvubu river for a paddling section, as well as the stock paths for a mountain biking trail: the latter is also regularly used by a local school mountain bike club. Another event is planned for later in 2016, with the intention of making this an annual event.

Total expenses to date are R 129 410 according to funds received. This has covered fencing materials, and a limited amount of tools and equipment for alien plant control.

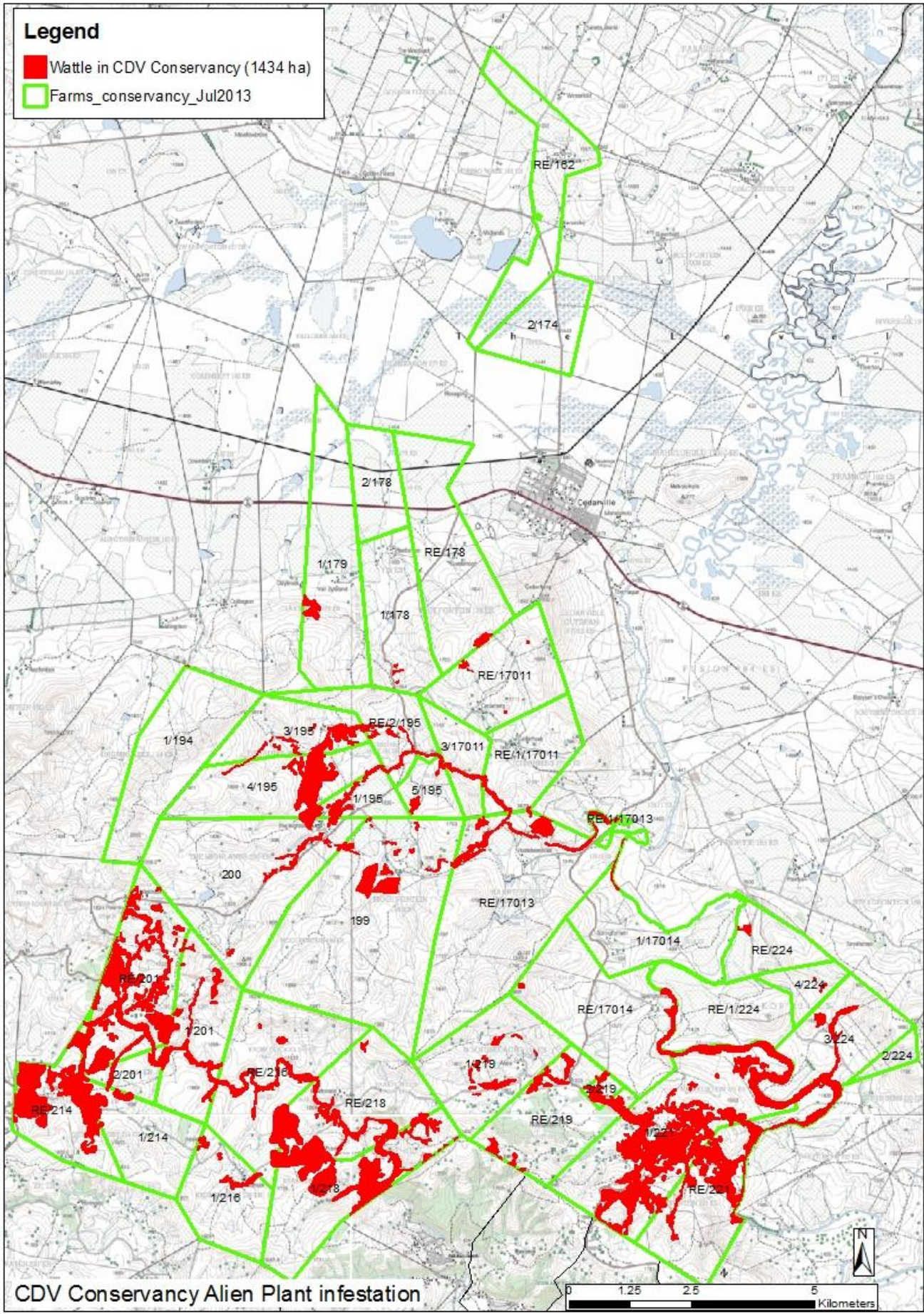
Request is hereby made for the final retainer amount of R 6 390, invoice attached.

The Conservancy members gratefully acknowledge the role played by CEPF and EWT in supporting this initiative.



### Legend

- Wattle in CDV Conservancy (1434 ha)
- Farms\_conservancy\_Jul2013



CDV Conservancy Alien Plant infestation