

Promoting Public Participation in Caring for Tokai's Core Cape Flats Flora Conservation Site

Final Performance Report Quarter 2, 2005 (1 April to August 31, 2005)

INTRODUCTION

This is the final Performance Report for the Project. While it may be the final report for a specific CEPF project, it is the start of an ongoing undertaking by the Friends of Tokai Forest (FOTF) to care for the Core Conservation Site in the Lower Tokai Forest. The CEPF funding gave the FOTF the impetus to implement significant conservation work and communicate the importance of the Core Conservation site to the public.

This final performance report for the two and a half year period ending the 31st of August 2005 will cover the issues initiated by the CEPF funding and summarise what has been achieved to date:

- THE SOUTHWARD EXPANSION OF THE CORE CONSERVATION SITE SET FOR SEPTEMBER 2005
- ONGOING CLEARING PLANTING IN THE SOETVLEI WETLANDS
- ONGOING MAINTENANCE – ADOPT A PLOT
- THE BIODIVERSITY CORRIDOR – FROM SOURCE TO SEA
- NEW PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
- PUBLIC OBJECTION TO AN APPLICATION TO SUBDIVIDE A FARM ON THE EDGE OF THE WETLANDS
- PATHS – HERITAGE DAY WALK
- SUMMARY

THE SOUTHWARD EXPANSION OF THE CORE CONSERVATION SITE SET FOR SEPTEMBER 2005

The southward extension of the resuscitated portion of the plantation has now been brought forward to September 2005. The harvesting contractor has returned to work in the upper Tokai plantation and plans to move down to the lower plantation next month. After so many delays in the past we are hopeful that there will be no further delays.

In terms of the “exit policy” that has been negotiated between the MTO Forestry Company (MTO) and SANParks, the MTO will harvest the pines from the edge of the existing resuscitated area to the Prinskasteel river to the south. The logs will be removed by the MTO for commercial purposes and the slash will be left on site. At this stage the MTO will have been deemed to have “exited” the site and will pay SANParks an agreed amount of money per hectare for the rehabilitation of the land exited.

The Friends of Tokai Forest will help SANParks prepare the site for a “quick hot burn” in February/March 2006 by removing the larger branches from site and by spreading the slash evenly over the site. SANParks will create firebreaks, apply for a burning permit and supervise the burn.

ONGOING CLEARING PLANTING IN THE SOETVLEI WETLANDS

Since our first quarter report of 2005, the F.O.T.F. have employed members of the Burning Spear Movement for 64 workdays to continue clearing the wetlands. This labour intensive period consisted of clearing the biomass from the surface of the wetlands and stacking it on the plantation edge. The plan was to burn the biomass during winter on the assumption that we would not need a burning permit. However, it transpired that a burning permit is in fact necessary for any controlled burning close to the urban edge – winter or summer. We are now distributing the fines evenly under pines in the plantation to free the edge of the wetland for planting. Some of the fines will be strategically stacked to create microhabitats for rodent's, frogs and snakes. The larger tree trunks and branches will be logged for firewood and removed from the site and any remaining biomass will be burned. The cost of chipping the balance of the biomass would be prohibitively expensive.

In the autumn a sea of Black Wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*) and Long-leafed Wattle (*Acacia longifolia*) saplings sprouted up in the cleared wetland area. We had originally anticipated dealing with this problem by hand pulling the saplings but we were concerned that any further disturbance of the soil would only aggravate the situation. Working for Wetlands was consulted and they put in a team that sprayed the saplings, the bramble shoots and any stumps that had coppiced. The spraying has been successful and spring should see another sprouting of alien vegetation seeds.

Working for Wetlands has propagated a number of wetland species for rehabilitation purposes. Dr Patricia Holmes vetted all species before we allowed any planting, as we will not allow any species to be introduced that do not have genetic integrity and are endemic to the area. To date Working for Wetlands have planted 4,100 plants in the cleared wetlands to support the natural resuscitation. In all Working for Wetlands will work on site for three weeks, which will represent another 150 workdays since the first quarter report.

ONGOING MAINTENANCE – ADOPT A PLOT

The wetlands have been divided into a number of plots. Member of the public have been encouraged to Adopt A Plot, which means they are responsible for maintaining their plot free of alien vegetation. The scheme is gathering momentum and we now have 16 people looking after 10 plots or about a third of the wetlands. The Adopt A Plot team was encouraged to plant their own plants out of those provided by Working for Wetlands. The idea is that the amateur and professional botanists can watch their plants mature and participate in getting the wetland back to its natural state. (Dr Pat Holmes and Dr Tony Rebello have adopted plots!)

THE BIODIVERSITY CORRIDOR – FROM SOURCE TO SEA

The Table Mountain Fund is funding a scientific investigation into the possibility of creating a biodiversity corridor "From Source to Sea". The source is the valley below the Elephants Eye and the corridor follows the Prinskasteel River down the mountain through the Soetvlei Wetlands to the Keyzers River, Sandvlei and False Bay. The investigation also includes recommendations as to what work needs to be done to the river course and the wetlands it runs through. The corridor will also, where possible, serve as a trail for recreational and access purposes for the both the local communities and the tourist industry. This investigation started on the 11th of August.

NEW PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The northern bank of the Soetvlei wetlands borders on a suburb called Constantia Hills. The residents of this suburb are very protective of their rural atmosphere and have been watching the development of the vegetation corridor in the Lower Plantation with great interest. This interest has developed into active participation and a workgroup has been formed, that meets once a month, to remove alien vegetation from the fields on the edge of the wetlands. The FOTF are helping with chainsaw work and the provision of herbicide.

PUBLIC OBJECTION TO AN APPLICATION TO SUBDIVIDE A FARM ON THE EDGE OF THE WETLANDS

An application has been made to subdivide an old smallholding on the eastern edge of the Soetvlei Wetlands. FOTF and WESSA were requested to participate by the Constantia Hills Residents Association and a number of private landowners. During the process of objecting the FOTF were able to escalate the awareness of the Core Conservation Site and the impact the subdivision could have on the Source to Sea Project. Working for Wetlands, The Wetlands Forum and the Cape Town City Council were all apprised of the application by FOTF. We attach a copy of our objection for your interest.

PATHS – HERITAGE DAY WALK

Heritage Day is a public holiday in South Africa and is celebrated on the 24th of September this year. There will be a number of walks and lectures held in the historic Constantia valley to mark the occasion. The FOTF will provide a guided walk of the Diastella Trail in the lower Plantation, which will include a visit to the rehabilitated section of the Soetvlei wetlands. We see this as an opportunity to create greater public awareness and to recruit new members.

SUMMARY

CEPF funding has enabled significant changes to be made in Lower Tokai Plantation. Firstly a half-hectare site was cleared on the edge of the forest next to the public road running through the forest. This area has been maintained free of invasive alien vegetation and the naturally resuscitated indigenous flowers of the spring are starting to open for all to view. The hectare of resuscitated Fynbos we started with at the beginning of the project has been expanded to the north by clear felling a half-hectare of plantation pines. The Soetvlei wetlands adjacent to the conservation site have been cleared of alien vegetation and replanted with about 4,100 plants of 6 wetland species that were specially propagated for the area. The rehabilitated biodiversity hotspot in the lower Tokai plantation has expanded from one hectare to 5 hectares. The pines to the south of the Diastella area will be clear felled in September 2005 and the conserved area will expand to 7 hectares.

CEPF funding has paid for 323 workdays and \$5000 has gone directly to the local community. This project provided leverage for Working for Wetlands participation and this has directly created a further 395 workdays for the local community.

Through the Adopt a Plot program 16 members of the FOTF have adopted about 10 plots, which represents about a third of the rehabilitated wetlands. The program is catching on and we have an increasing number of the local community helping to

keep the area free of alien vegetation as their contribution to the conservation of the Cape Floral Kingdom.

CEPF funding has enabled the FOTF to create an awareness of the Core Cape Flats Flora Conservation site, the Soetvlei wetlands and the need to create a vegetation corridor from Source to Sea. This has been achieved through active participation in the Fynbos Forum, the Wetlands Forum, The Friends of the Constantia Greenbelts. Inter action with other Friends groups, like the Friends of Die Oog, which is facilitated by WESSA is also an important function of promoting public participation.

CEPF funding has allowed the FOTF to build a trail through the lower plantation which links up with the trails of the Constantia valley. The Diastella trail provides easy access to the resuscitated fynbos and wetland area. A notice board was erected to inform the public of the conservation activity in the plantation and surrounds.

CEPF funding has also enabled the FOTF to commission a Management Plan and a Biodiversity study of a very high standard. Dr Patricia Holmes, the author of both reports, has continued to work with the FOTF free of charge and serves as a committee member. The Management Plan has become the backbone of our future conservation plans.

The FOTF are extremely grateful to the CEPF to their significant contribution to the conservation of the Cape Floral Kingdom.



FRIENDS OF TOKAI FOREST

PO Box 442 Bergvliet 7864



Ms M vd Westhuizen
Land Use Development
Private Bag X5
Plumstead
7801

18 August 2005

Dear Madam/Sir

Reference Number LUM/16/3355 and application number 94244

**APPLICATION FOR SUBDIVISION, CONDITIONAL USE AND
DEPARTURES: ERF 3355 AND REMAINDER OF ERF 3356,
CONSTANTIA AT SOETVLEI AVENUE.**

Your letter of the 28th July 2005 headed as above refers. The Friends Of Tokai Forest object to the Application for the reasons detailed below. The Applicants appear to be unaware of a number of environmental and planning issues that make their Application unacceptable. These environmental and planning issues are detailed below under the heading ENVIRONMENTAL POSITIONING STATEMENT and serve as a background to our detailed objections and comments.

ENVIRONMENTAL POSITIONING STATEMENT

Because of the beauty and diversity of the Cape Floristic Region it has been declared a World Heritage Site. With some 6,200 plant species unique to the region, this biodiversity hotspot holds the world's greatest concentration of plants outside the tropics. Some of the most beautiful shop offerings in the world, such as protea, gladioli and freesia, come from this region. Today, only fragments of the original vegetation survive in a patchwork of nature reserves, parks, road verges, power line reserves and wetlands. The international community has donated many millions of Rand for the conservation and preservation of the Cape Floristic Region. Our Government has initiated innovative schemes like Working for Water and Working for Wetlands that not only conserve our precious water resources but also provide work as part of the poverty alleviation program. It is essential that we make every effort to

protect our flora and wetlands from further extinction through the inappropriate construction of housing and roads.

The western boundary of erf 3355 is shared with the Lower Tokai Forest. (Farm 1130 as shown on the Applicants Plan Number 7, is compartment A24 of the Lower Tokai Plantation. Please also see MAP 1 attached). SANParks took over the conservation, recreational and eco-tourism aspects of the Tokai and Cecilia plantations in the first half of 2005. To help facilitate Government's decision to incorporate the two state forest areas into the National Park, the MTO (Mountain to Ocean Forestry Company) has agreed to a 20-year lease period during which they will gradually clear-fell the area for rehabilitation into natural vegetation. With the clear felling of the pine and gum plantations the landscape will change considerably. When resuscitated the lower Tokai Plantation will offer spectacular views of fynbos, wetlands with the mountains as a backdrop.

The entire Lower Tokai Plantation is a Core Cape Flats Flora Conservation Site. The Friends of Tokai Forest were awarded a grant from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund in 2004 to Promote Public Participation in caring for Tokai's Core Cape Flats Flora Conservation Site. The Sandplain Fynbos we have in the lower plantation is highly endangered and unless about 30 hectares are resuscitated it will not be sustainable and we will lose these species in their natural environment. "Empirical research in mountain fynbos shows that as reserve area decreases, more species are lost, and that only reserves exceeding about 500 hectares in size retain their full species complement. Thus in Tokai, the long-term aim should be to link the Sandplain Fynbos remnant to the Mountain Fynbos in the TMNP via a corridor of natural fynbos and riparian vegetation." (Dr Patricia M Holmes – 2004). The importance of a riparian zone in the conservation of our Cape Floristic Region cannot be emphasised enough. Working for Wetlands is in the process of clearing the alien vegetation out of the Soetvlei wetlands and replanting it with endemic wetland species.

The Table Mountain Fund is funding a scientific investigation into the possibility of creating a biodiversity corridor "From Source to Sea". The source is the valley below the Elephants eye and the corridor follows the Prinskasteel River down the mountain through the Soetvlei Wetlands to the Keyzers River, Sandvlei and False Bay. The investigation also includes recommendations as to what work needs to be done to the river course and the wetlands it runs through. The corridor will also, where possible, serve as a trail for recreational and access purposes for the both the local communities and the tourist industry. This investigation started on the 11th of August and will take some time to complete.

Working for Wetlands and the Friends of Tokai are in the in the process of clearing the alien vegetation out of the Soetvlei wetlands and replanting it with endemic wetland species. The cost of removing invasive alien vegetation and grasses has been extremely high and a lot intensive ongoing maintenance will be necessary. Some of the worst problems are caused by vegetation that has "jumped over the garden fence". In other words bird or wind dispersed seed from domestic gardens. Kikuyu and Pampas grass are proving extremely invasive and difficult to remove from our wetlands. Unless the vegetation adjacent to a conservation area is controlled the cost of maintenance can become prohibitive.

Fire is a natural and normal process in fynbos. Generally Fynbos needs to be burned every 10 to 12 years otherwise it becomes so dense that only some species survive. Good management of the Fynbos in the lower Tokai plantation will include regular burning.

In the light of what has been written above we are now able to summarise the environmental position of erf 3355 and the remainder of erf 3356. The property is:

- On the Urban Edge
- Adjacent to a Core Cape Flats Flora Conservation Site
- On the boundary of the Table Mountain National Park
- In a biodiversity corridor
- Part of the Soetvlei wetlands
- Adjacent to a rare fynbos conservation area that must be burnt on a regular basis as part of its key ecological process
- In keeping with the MOSS study seeking connectivity of open spaces

Our objections and comments are as follows:

We object to a linear form of development.

The western boundary of erf 3355 is shared with the Table Mountain National Park (TMNP). Because of the minimum spaces between the long lateral footprints of the houses, a linear development will look like a block of flats or row of townhouses from most angles. From the wetlands in the National Park the houses will dominate the skyline of the eastern boundary of the TMNP. The ‘terrace house’ appearance is totally out of place in a rural environment. As the trees in the lower plantation are clear felled and replaced with fynbos the development will become even more dominant and intrusive on the skyline.

Comment on linear form of development and fire.

- In view of the possible fire hazard created by the periodic burning of the Fynbos in the TMNP the possibility of a house fire could be increased with a linear form of development.
- The homeowners must acknowledge the right of the TMNP to periodically burn Fynbos or slash on the urban edge and indemnify the TMNP against claims for fire damage.

We object to double story houses.

Double story houses will destroy the scenic views and the rural nature of Sweet Valley.

We object to the elongated shapes of the subdivisions

The minimum subdivision for property in Soetvlei is 4000 square metres because of the need to retain the rural ambiance. A square 4000m plot has a side of about 63 metres while 5 of the plots on erf 3355 are only about 25 metres wide. The grossly elongated shapes of the subdivisions force an unacceptable linear form of development and the need for double storied houses.

We object to the application for lateral departures

The linear form of development and the shape of the subdivisions are self-imposed. There should be no need for seeking departures if the subdivisions proposed were in keeping with a rural ethos of Soetvlei.

We object to the exclusion of public access to the wetlands

The Developers clearly state ...“The proposed development plan for the riverine system does not identify the river adjacent to the site for a bridal path or cycle path” and ...“The “Open Space” zoning of a portion of the site does not create the expectation or imply that this portion of land should be used for Recreational Use or made available to the public for access or utilization” (see page 9 of Developers motivation)

In section 5.2.6 of their motivation the Developers suggest a 10 m wide servitude measured from the middle of the stream as a walkway subject to the approval of a Homeowners Association yet to be formed. The area suggested as a walkway straddles a stream and is impassable most of the year. The creation of a walkway in the suggested area would have an ongoing negative impact on the resuscitation of the biodiversity of this conservation area.

The Application is in direct conflict with the aims of the Constantia Valley Riverine Open Space Study and a Source to Sea biodiversity corridor. The Application ignores the Moss study, which seeks connectivity of open.

Comment on public access

Public Access must be planned in coordination with the other stakeholders.

We object to the land below the 100 year flood line being made Communal Open Space

By making the wetlands communal open space the public will not have access to the wetlands and the Source to Sea corridor will be impacted. The wetlands are part of Cape Towns water resources and cannot be entrusted to an unknown “homeowners association” yet to be formed.

Comment on the need for TMNP to approve the vegetation species planted on the erf 3355 and the remainder of erf 3356.

Because the property is in a biological hotspot the TMNP must be able to dictate the plant species used for landscaping the property. TMNP must also have the right to demand the removal, at the cost of the owner of the property, of any vegetation deemed to be in conflict with the wetlands or the core conservation site.

Comment on the future of the Soetvlie wetlands

The future of the Soetvlei wetlands will only be understood when all the alien vegetation has been removed and the Source to Sea investigation is complete. Until a scientific assessment has been made we cannot agree to any application or subdivision affecting these important wetlands.

Summary

We have the privilege of living in the diversity of the Cape Floristic Region and it is our responsibility to protect our heritage and natural resources for future generations.

We are dealing with an internationally recognised biodiversity hotspot, which we could destroy forever by making hasty or irreversible decisions.

Yours faithfully

James Forsyth
Chairman