

Media Release- 27 July 2001

Progress report on the Greater Addo Project

After a lengthy process, consultants were appointed in April this year to undertake a number of conservation and socio-economic assessments of the Greater Addo Elephant National Park

Project. This project is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and is scheduled to run over an 18 month period. This project is also only the initial phase of a bigger project, which could attract further development funding from the World Bank in order to realise the conservation and development objectives for Addo.

The project is divided into four components and will be undertaken by a team of consultants. Contracts to study the biological impact of the project were awarded to the CSIR-TERU-IECM consortia, and the Socio and Environmental impact assessment to Coastal and Environment Services (CES)

The objective of the Conservation Planning Team is to consolidate the biological and physical information for the greater Addo area, inclusive of the marine areas, and facilitate the drafting of a conservation plan for the area. Critical to the expansion of Addo is the identification of core conservation areas within a greater planning domain, loosely related to the proposed 'Greater Addo' boundary, which would conserve the unique features of the area. This is essentially what the CSIR teams will be completing within the next 18 months. Consolidation of existing conservation areas is also important and will receive priority in the process. It is the vision of South African National Parks (SANParks) that a critical core conservation area, in excess of 250 000 ha, be established to support viable free ranging populations of the 'Big 5' tourist draw cards (only lion still need to be reintroduced). However, the park will offer much more than just the lure of the 'Big 5' in a malaria free environment. With the inclusion of a marine zone, species such as the southern right whale and great white shark are guaranteed ultimately making the park a 'Big 7' destination. Furthermore, with the emphasis on the conservation of biodiversity, the complete wildlife experience is possible across a series of landscapes unrivaled in beauty, all within a single conservation area.

The role of the Socio Environmental Impact Assessment (SEA) team is to assess the potential social, economic and institutional viability of the Greater Addo Elephant National Park. A team of consultants will visit a number of private landowners, private businesses and relevant institutions in the area for information on the above aspects.

As part of the SEA an ongoing public consultation process is to be driven by Sandy & Mazizi Consulting. This process will include Open Days, Public meetings, poster and pamphlet distribution, newspaper advertisements and one-on-one meetings with affected parties such as neighbouring communities and farmers.

Dr Mike Knight, Coordinator of this exciting project says that he is happy with the consultants who have been chosen. Not only were these two consultancies selected for having submitted the best proposals but also for the fact that the main role players are all based in the Eastern Cape. This means local knowledge and expertise. He is optimistic that this team will provide the project with excellent reports and guidelines to take this exciting project forward.

At the moment the bulk of tourism activities catering for over 120 000 visitors annually at Addo are restricted to the main elephant camp which is only some 13 500 ha. Unfortunately with the elephant population increasing at an average rate of over 6% each year there isn't enough space and SANParks is constantly on the lookout for new areas to increase the area for these mega herbivores. But the elephants aren't the only species doing well at Addo with over 250 disease free buffalo, almost 200 eland, as well as red hartebeest and nearly 600 kudu, not to mention the 39 black rhino.

For more information on this release contact:

CSIR - Ms J Nel @ 021 - 888-2607

CES - Dr T Avis @ 046 - 622-2346/7

Sandi and Mazizi Consulting @ 041 - 374-8426.

For additional information contact Dr. Michael Knight, SANParks, PO Box 20419, Humewood 6013, South Africa.
Tel: +27 41 5085412, Fax: +27 41 5085415, email mknight @upe.ac.za

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