

SAFEGUARDING ONE OF THE WORLD'S 'HOTTEST HOTSPOTS'

TMF's contribution towards the Western Cape's Protected Area network



South Africa's Western Cape province is a botanical treasure chest, home to the smallest yet richest plant kingdom in the world. So biodiverse is the Cape Floristic Region (CFR) in fact, that it sustains well over 9000 plant species, almost 70% of which are found nowhere else on the planet.

Paradoxically, the diversity, density and endemism of this system is highly threatened. Growing developmental pressures linked to South Africa's emerging economy drive ever-increasing urbanisation and agricultural expansion, and the absence of proper land-use planning bears the risk of significant natural habitat loss. Large-scale threats to a system of such biological importance have put the CFR in the global spotlight, earning it World Heritage Site status as well as biodiversity hotspot acclaim.

As modern development continues to 'push the boundaries', our local and international obligations to safeguard this most significant universal asset cannot be ignored. Conservation action through land protection is urgently required; and the Table Mountain Fund (TMF) prides itself on its role as a pivotal enabler in this regard.

The Table Mountain Fund and land protection

With the goal of statutory land protection in mind, a large part of TMF's strategy, since inception, has focused on land acquisition, as well as numerous other methods of formal land protection such as conservancies, stewardship agreements and servitudes. In keeping with international commitments as well as national and provincial policy, after the first Western

Cape Protected Area Expansion Strategy was drafted in 2010, TMF directed a significant portion of its investments towards supporting the implementation thereof. This continued when the strategy was updated in 2015 and remains a key strategic focus of TMF's work today.

Partners in protection

Implementing an effective land protection strategy is a complex task, particularly when the majority of South Africa's biodiversity lies in the hands of private landowners. Co-funded by the Millennium Trust, TMF has worked with a range of skilled conservation partners – CapeNature being the lead – to make a significant contribution towards the Western Cape's Protected Area network. Unpacking this contribution reveals the remarkable efficacy with which TMF's funding and partnership models have been able to safeguard conservation priority land, and the biodiversity contained within it.

What is the Western Cape's Protected Area Expansion Strategy?

Protected Areas are tracts of land or sea protected by law, typically in the name of biodiversity conservation. In 2008, South Africa's Department of Environmental Affairs acknowledged the urgent need to better sustain biodiversity and ecological processes within our protected area network. This resulted in the release of a National Protected Area Expansion Strategy, aimed at achieving 'cost-effective Protected Area expansion for ecological sustainability and increased resilience to climate change'.¹



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Filtering down from this national strategy is the Western Cape Protected Area Expansion Strategy (WCPAES), drafted by CapeNature, and aimed at meeting province-specific ecological requirements in terms of local biodiversity thresholds, as well as contributing to political commitments made at a national level (the Western Cape's protected area targets correspond to the area committed to by the South African Government in the Convention on Biological Diversity's Aichi Target 11.) At the heart of both the national and provincial strategies is the need to ensure that biologically diverse land is kept safe from inappropriate development and that biodiversity targets are met.²

Why do we need a strategy?

Underpinning the Western Cape's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy is a fundamental acknowledgement of the 'Outstanding Universal Value' held within the Cape Floristic Region. At a global level, it is our moral responsibility to conserve this world-renowned biodiversity hotspot and World Heritage Site. Further, as a signatory committed to the goals of the Convention on Biological Diversity, we have a political obligation to protect our invaluable natural heritage. In the face of the immense developmental pressures that come with an emerging economy, the principal of sustainable development could not be more imperative; we need to ensure that *all* development serves the interests of both present and future generations.²

At ground level, this is a delicate line to tread. One of the key challenges we face is mitigating the negative effects of habitat loss due to burgeoning development. Research from SANBI shows the presence of 23 Critically Endangered, 16 Endangered and 31 Vulnerable ecosystems within the Western Cape province, which amounts to the highest concentration of threatened ecosystems countrywide. Furthermore, the 2009 Red

List of South African plants draws attention to the fact that 67% of South Africa's threatened plant taxa are found in the Fynbos biome.²

These alarming figures point not only to a highly threatened provincial biodiversity, but also to a threatened local economy. In 2003, the total value of ecosystem services provided by the natural resources and biodiversity in the CFR, was estimated to be at least R10 billion per year, which would theoretically account for more than 10% of the Western Cape's GDP.² By impinging on this natural asset, we risk losing large portions of the current and potential economic value bound up therein.

While we have traditionally looked to government for formal land protection measures, limited budgets have made state acquisition of land (and the basic management costs associated therewith) prohibitive in many cases. What we see instead is a growing role played by NGOs, as well as private and communal landowners, working collaboratively to address biodiversity threats and challenges. The WCPAES provides a spatial blueprint, as well as a framework of methods, with which to meet these targets.

What needs to happen?

The Western Cape's Protected Area Expansion Strategy is driven by two overarching goals:²

1. To expand the Western Cape Protected Area network to encompass a more representative and resilient suite of areas that support biodiversity and ecological infrastructure, especially those threatened species and ecosystems that remain unprotected as yet; and
2. To regularise existing Protected Areas so that environmental security is ensured for everyone in South Africa, and the costs and benefits of appropriation accrue to the appropriate entity.



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Based on these high-level objectives, the province's practical targets outlined for 2020 include the need to secure an additional 348 840 ha of priority terrestrial biodiversity and 25 216 km² of our marine environment, as well as increasing the proportion of the current Protected Area network which is fully compliant with NEM:PAA from approximately 40% to 50%.²

How is the Table Mountain Fund contributing to these targets?

Since the drafting of the first WCPAES in 2010, the Table Mountain Fund has directed a significant portion of its investments towards supporting the implementation of this strategy. Lack of land acquisition by the state has necessitated formal protection of land via alternative mechanisms, many of which rely on public-private collaboration and a more modern and innovative approach.

In its capacity as a capital Conservation Trust aimed at protecting and restoring the natural heritage of the CFR, the Table Mountain Fund develops and funds projects that secure biodiversity through Protected Areas. Working with a range of conservation partners over the last 7.5 years, TMF has helped to achieve formal protection of land via a multitude of mechanisms, some pioneering in this country. Its contribution to the Western Cape's Protected Area network is varied and far-reaching, with measurable results as testimony.

Investments and successes

Since the establishment of a formal Protected Area expansion strategy and programme within the Western Cape, the formal Protected Area network of the province has grown by 328 100 ha (roughly 37% of the network). During this period, the Table Mountain Fund has invested a total of approximately R13 000 000 within formal land protection projects in the Western Cape. Of this R13 000 000, R 3 900 000 (30%) was co-funded by the Millennium Trust. These funds have fueled numerous successful formal land protection projects, with Protected Area expansion and regularisation as the core objectives.²

Land acquisition

In 2010, TMF contributed an amount of R810 000 towards the purchasing of Erf 1510, the Sentinel Houtbay. The strategic acquisition of this 6 000 ha property was to alleviate development pressures on the neighbouring Sentinel Peak. The property has since been registered in the name of SANParks to be declared part of the Table Mountain National Park (TMNP).

In 2013, a joint initiative by SANParks (TMNP), The National Parks Trust of South Africa, WWF-SA and TMF enabled the purchase of the remaining two, of five, privately owned properties on the Roodeberg, for consolidation into the Table Mountain National Park. This consolidation was of critical importance due to the significant and irreplaceable nature of the vegetation found within the two properties, and the priority conservation value thereof. The purchase resulted in the addition of 199.5 hectares of land to the Protected Area network and inclusion of the properties in the TMNP, which would include a SANParks management plan to rehabilitate the land from degradation and the invasion of alien species.

Building Biodiversity Stewardship

Where land acquisition has not been possible, formal protection of private conservation-worthy land through Biodiversity Stewardship has proven an effective alternative. Having drafted the WCPAES, CapeNature runs the Biodiversity Stewardship Programme and is a key role-player with regards to Protected Area expansion, playing secretariat to the Protected Area Expansion Reference Group. This group, comprised of a wide range of provincial role-players, oversees Protected Area expansion in the Western Cape, adding a degree of oversight and quality control which significantly lowers risk when it comes to Protected Area expansion.

The TMF Stewardship Fund has supported CapeNature's Biodiversity Stewardship Programme on an annual basis since inception, and continues to be a strong partner in powering a range of highly worthwhile projects:

- **Stewardship assistance:** As part of the ongoing quest to bring new private land into the Protected Area network, TMF and CapeNature have spearheaded a number of projects incentivising private landowners to commit their properties to stewardship contracts. Through more elaborate partnerships involving Conservation at Work and the City of Cape Town, technical assistance has been provided to landowners who have agreed, in principle, to sign contracts entering into 'Biodiversity Agreements' or declaring their properties 'Contract Nature Reserves' or 'Protected Environments' in terms of the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act. Assistance is offered in the form of management actions that will benefit the biodiversity conservation of their property, incentivising them to close the loop and complete the declaration process. Projects of this nature have been instrumental in advancing Protected Area network expansion: the support provided not only drives positive feedback from landowners with regards to the conservation and sustainable management of their land, but also sets an example for other landowners to follow a similar path, in this way increasing the conversion rate of high-priority biodiversity areas to Protected Areas.
- **Biodiversity assessment:** TMF has, on various occasions, provided CapeNature with the means to assess the biodiversity value of certain land areas i.e. 'The Koup', with a vision to awarding these areas with Protected Environment and

Stewardship status if appropriate. This is the first step in the Biodiversity Stewardship process – and therefore a critical one.

- **Legal facilitation:** Recognising the acute need for a more streamlined legal process, TMF granted funding for the appointment of a legal advisor to provide support to CapeNature's internal Law Support, thereby improving the processing of stewardship agreements and ministerial submissions for the purposes of Protected Area expansion.

As the declaration of Nature Reserves requires survey diagrams and notarial support for submission of deeds and agreements, TMF's financing of external notaries and surveyors is playing an essential part in getting numerous Nature Reserves declared – a definite feather in the cap for CapeNature and the City of Cape Town's stewardship programmes.

- **Biodiversity corridors:** Once again in partnership with CapeNature, TMF has funded the expansion of Protected Areas through the establishment of biodiversity corridors: a key mechanism for mitigating the effects of climate change with regards to landscapes. Using the stewardship method, projects focused on securing the conservation of priority terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems through the declaration of core biodiversity corridors. A stewardship programme helped to align private landowners in voluntary stewardship agreements with the strategic conservation objectives held by CapeNature: expansion of Protected Areas; industry engagement; human well-being; local economic development; environmental awareness; and coordination.



- **National Biodiversity Stewardship Guideline and Collaborative support:**

Underpinning the ongoing process of Protected Area expansion is a complex web of stakeholders and responsibilities. Success can often depend on the support that these role players receive. Through TMF funding support, NCC Environmental Services has been able to coordinate the production of the National Biodiversity Stewardship Guideline in order to support the roll-out of Biodiversity Stewardship nationally. NCC has also been instrumental in assisting CapeNature in other provincial collaborative extension measures such as skills development, strategic and operational co-ordination, and development of digital tools for a Community of Practice.



- **Driving socio-economic upliftment**

Alongside driving the environmental security that is critically required for the Cape Floristic Region, the stewardship process can also act as a catalyst for social upliftment and upskilling, bringing with it significant economic benefits for local communities. Exemplary projects funded by TMF and executed by CapeNature include the DG Murray Trust Farm Worker Vocational Training, which provided accredited Nature Guardianship training to stewardship site farm labourers, to build the necessary skill set required to manage these important biodiversity areas. Another project is the Pioneer Foods People Working for the Environment Project, which in its first phase created training and employment opportunities for about 36 people supporting the implementation of management activities on stewardship sites in the Boland Area. In the projects second phase, it went on to provided roughly 4000 work days for rural youth servicing stewardship sites elsewhere in the CFR.

Pioneering alternative conservation mechanisms

Since the drafting of the WCPAES, TMF and its partners have looked not only to 'tried and tested' methods for Protected Area expansion, but also focused on testing new and innovative ways to bring about the large-scale change required. In early 2017, the first conservation easement was declared in South Africa - a revolutionary step towards conserving the largest remaining remnants of Western and Central-Rûens Shale Renosterveld in the world, and hopefully the first of many conservation easements across the province.

Funded by TMF and managed by the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust (ORCT), the project has demonstrated a much swifter and more affordable means of securing conservation-worthy land than previous stewardship models have offered. Easements, otherwise known as servitudes, make conservation simple and accessible for the landowner. Unlike other protected area declarations, land does not need to be rezoned, and the agreement is highly collaborative, with partner NGOs playing a critical role in supporting management interventions.

Grootbos Foundation is also testing the conservation servitude approach. With funding provided by TMF, they are working to create a 'green corridor' linking the Walker Bay Fynbos Conservancy to the Agulhas National Park. The model is based on the establishment of various conservation servitudes, coupled with an eco-tourism economy to make the initiative economically viable. It is hoped that the innovative servitude approach will accelerate stewardship of threatened natural habitats across the Western Cape.

On a more holistic level, TMF, in partnership with NCC Environmental Services, has played a pivotal part in providing organisational strengthening assistance to Conservation at Work, helping them to regain an active position as the representative body for conservancies in the Western Cape. Conservation at Work now plays a central role in promoting and supporting the conservation of private land in the Western Cape, dealing with conservancies and conservation-minded landowners; forming new partnerships and growing the member base; facilitating meetings and workshops; collecting and sharing data; and providing environmental education on topics such as health and safety, basic plant and alien identification, alien mapping and eradication, herbicide application, fire awareness and fighting, snake awareness and handling, and compost workshops.

Enhancing the role of NGOs

NGOs are very well-positioned to act as one of the core enablers within the Biodiversity Stewardship sector. With this valuable resource not having been used to its full potential, TMF is currently funding work that aims to enhance the role of NGOs in Biodiversity Stewardship. A current project with Birdlife South Africa aims to understand key challenges within the Biodiversity Stewardship sector, particularly those that are inhibiting NGO involvement. The overarching goal will be to remove the barriers to NGO involvement, in this way improving the effectiveness of Biodiversity Stewardship through more streamlined NGO partnerships and support structures.

Transfer of state-owned land into conservation custodianship

While the majority of conservation-worthy land is in the hands of private landowners, there are indeed instances where large tracts of state-owned land hold priority value and need to be protected accordingly. An interesting project currently showcasing this kind of stewardship process is the Greater Kromme Stewardship Initiative, managed by Conservation Outcomes NPC. As far as the securing, transferring and managing of the biodiversity area goes, an innovative funding model has been used, where funds from the renewable energy sector (Wind Energy Collective) have been combined with funds from TMF to power the project.

Onward to 2030

Numerous proactive strides within the Western Cape conservation sector continue to generate promising progress in the context of our Protected Area expansion goals. While the targets are ambitious, organisations like TMF and its partners are continuously innovating around ways to accelerate and streamline expansion. In the context of an emerging economy with fast-growing developmental pressures, sustainable development is key. Our global commitment to protect one of the world's most precious natural systems is paramount, matched only by our local responsibility to deliver environmental security to the people of South Africa.

Evidenced by TMF's dynamic portfolio of work in the biodiversity conservation and Protected Area expansion spheres, it's clear that the Fund's role as an enabler in conserving the biological diversity of the Cape Floral Region is indispensable. Garth Mortimer, CapeNature's Senior Manager for Protected Area Expansion & Stewardship, acknowledges TMF as the largest funding support to CapeNature's Biodiversity Stewardship Programme, linked directly to incentivising Protected Area expansion. The leverage potential offered by the WWF brand, as well as the strong working relationships that TMF fosters, have been described as invaluable by partners.

In totality, the Western Cape conservation landscape would look very different in the absence of a funding body so resolutely committed to preserving our province's world-renowned natural heritage. Future challenges remain vast, and the need to continue and further build upon this contribution is crucial. With the sustained support of local and international donors and partners, TMF will be well-positioned to make an enduring impact.

REFERENCES

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The Table Mountain Fund is a capital Conservation Trust Fund that develops and funds projects to protect and restore the world-famous natural heritage of the Cape, known as the Fynbos. Founded by WWF-SA in 1993 and launched by Sir Edmund Hillary and Sir David Attenborough, TMF has to date invested more than R68 million in over 315 conservation projects throughout the Cape Floristic Region and remains the premier fund for fynbos.

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