

Wolwekraal Nature Reserve – honouring our heritage, inspiring our youth

Sue and Richard Dean

You may have noticed the new WOLWEKRAAL NATURE RESERVE signs (PHOTO 1) between the Prince Albert Municipal garbage dump and the Swart Rivier Olive Show Farm, on the main road to Leeugamka. Wolwekraal Nature Reserve is a small farm that lies between the sewage works, Waterkop, Drierivieren and Road 373. It was formally declared as a Nature Reserve in June 2011 in terms of Section 2 of the Western CapeNature Conservation Board Act (Act No.15 of 1998).



Klaas Pieterse and Wilfred Luttig next to the newly-erected Wolwekraal Nature Reserve signboard

The owners of Wolwekraal (Part 2 of Farm 211), Sue and Richard Dean, have signed a management agreement with CapeNature, the Provincial Nature Conservation Authority, which now has custody of the deeds for the property. The agreement is that the property be managed for conservation of biodiversity. No housing development, industry, livestock keeping or introduction of non-indigenous game is permitted, except on the 9 ha set aside as a nursery. Invasive alien plant species such as pink tamarix have to be removed, the fences maintained and erosion controlled. Permitted landuse includes research and educational uses, nature walks and bird watching. Although the property may change hands, any new owner would need to commit to the “in perpetuity” management agreement.

Wolwekraal was identified as an area worthy of being declared as a Nature Reserve because it contains a good example of Prince Albert Succulent Karoo, a type of vegetation not conserved anywhere else (**PHOTO 2**). The property falls within an important Ecological Support Area according to the Biodiversity assessment done for the Central Karoo District Municipality by Andrew Skowno and co-authors (Biodiversity Assessment of the Karoo District Municipality. DEAP Report EADP05/2009, [http://bgis.sanbi.org/ckdm/CKDM BiodiversityAssessment.pdf](http://bgis.sanbi.org/ckdm/CKDM_BiodiversityAssessment.pdf)). Moreover, there are some highly localized and rare species on Wolwekraal Nature Reserve. There are also cultural heritage sites on the land. The farm needs long-term conservation status to protect its cultural heritage, the rare plants and the soil and pollinators that support them, as well as to maintain the functions of the Dorpsrivier corridor that passes through the land. The link that the Dorpsrivier has with the Gamka and Gouritz Rivers give Wolwekraal Nature Reserve special significance.

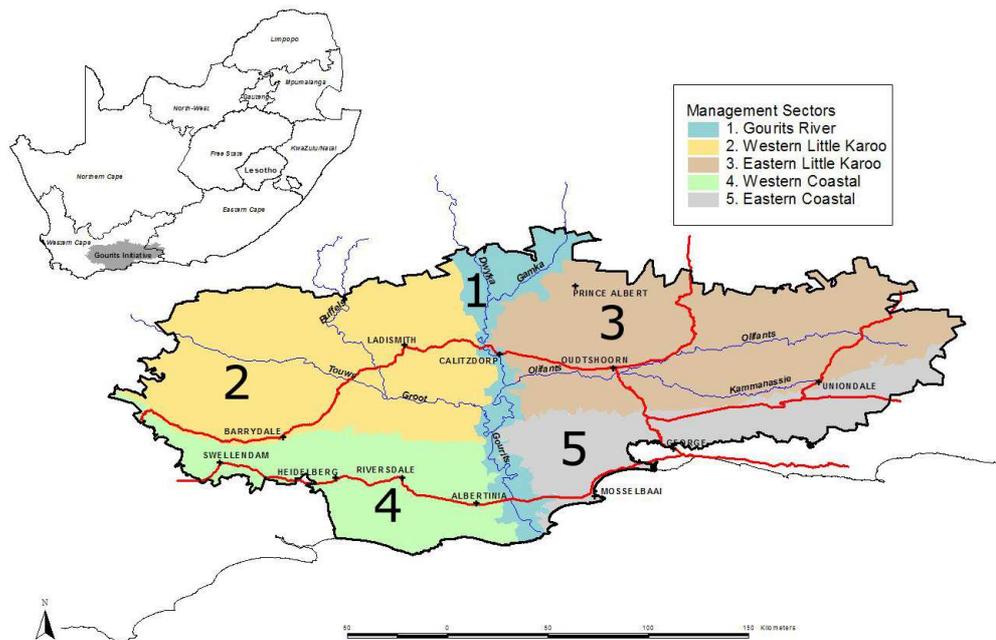


Landscape, succulent plants and Dorpsrivier on Wolwekraal Nature Reserve

The Dorpsrivier, the one from which the village of Prince Albert draws all its water, rises in the Swartberg, flows through the village and then into the Swartrivier which is a tributary of the Gamka. The Gamka in turn flows into the Gouritz River system, making Prince Albert and its environs part of the GOURITZ CLUSTER BIOSPHERE RESERVE.

The Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve (**MAP**) is South Africa's newest member of a group of landuse initiatives internationally designated as 'UNESCO Biosphere Reserves'. Incorporating the catchment of the Gouritz River and all its tributaries, it includes parts of the Great and Little Karoo and coastal areas on either side of the Gouritz corridor including the Prince Albert area (see map). It is the first block of land

in Africa to be designated as a 'Cluster Biosphere Reserve'. According to the Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve website <http://www.gouritz.com/> these are internationally-recognized regions dedicated to sustainable development in the 21st century. The challenge that such areas face is how to manage growth and development for the well-being of their human communities, while strengthening agriculture and natural resource conservation sustainably. A biosphere reserve differs from a protected area such as a National Park or Nature Reserve in that it does not exclude human activities such as villages, industry, agriculture, but rather promotes such activities in ways that do not destroy the natural capital (water, clean air, biodiversity) that ultimately supports people and the biosphere.



Map showing the management sectors of the Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve

Set up as a not for profit company the objectives of the Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve are to complement the work of CapeNature that secures priority landholdings for biodiversity conservation. The Biosphere Reserve company complements CapeNature by

1. contributing to the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variation;
2. fostering economic and human development which is socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable; and
3. supporting demonstration projects, environmental education and training, research and monitoring related to local, regional, national and global issues of conservation and sustainable development.

Wolwekraal Nature Reserve makes a contribution to all of the objectives of the Biosphere. It conserves an example of a desert environment without houses or roads and protects rare and common plant and animal species from habitat destruction. The river corridor through the nature reserve is used by birds, frogs and other creatures that move seasonally between the mountain and the plains. It offers a haven for snakes and monitor lizards (many of which were translocated from the village by Athol Loppnow). The reserve protects cultural heritage including Khoi campsites and early colonial walls and fences. The environmental education and economic

development component of Wolwekraal Nature Reserve is achieved through guided walks and demonstrations carried out with the assistance of our staff and interns. We have introduced locals, school goers, city dwellers and foreign visitors to Karoo natural and cultural history as well as generating awareness of the scarcity and value of water in Karoo landscapes.

A new development on Wolwekraal Nature Reserve is a set of land rehabilitation experiments being carried out by Willem Mathee, formerly an intern with Renu-Karoo and now a masters student at the George Campus of Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

Through these and other projects we believe that Wolwekraal Nature Reserve has made and will continue to make a significant contribution to inspiring our youth and honouring the natural and cultural heritage of Prince Albert.

For more information on biodiversity in the Central Karoo District Municipality, and on the Gouritz Biosphere Reserve see:

Biosphere Reserve Company Legal Documents: Articles of Association GOURITZ CLUSTER BIOSPHERE RESERVE (Association incorporated under section 21)

Available from

http://www.gouritz.com/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=81

Lombard, A. T., R. M. Cowling, J. H. J. Vlok, and C. Fabricius. 2010. Designing conservation corridors in production landscapes: assessment methods, implementation issues, and lessons learned. *Ecology and Society* 15(3): 7. [online] URL:

<http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol15/iss3/art7/>