

ECOSYSTEM REHABILITATION PROGRAMMES

WORKING FOR WETLANDS



An eroded streambed prior to rehabilitation.

Wetlands. Recognising the potential of SANBI to play such a cross-cutting and integrating role, the Biodiversity Act confers on the Institute a mandate to co-ordinate and implement programmes for the rehabilitation of ecosystems, with the necessary involvement of civil society. This approach also allows SANBI to integrate EPWP-aligned outputs within a broader set of co-ordinated and coherent activities related to the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. In this way, an ecosystem approach is promoted that does not pursue rehabilitation in isolation of other activities, and in turn contributes to strengthening the sustainability of interventions undertaken through Working for Wetlands.

The year under review was a successful one for the Working for Wetlands Programme, with almost all its targets being achieved, and some targets exceeded.

Working for Wetlands focuses on the rehabilitation, protection and sustainable use of South Africa's wetlands, and since 2004 has been managed by SANBI on behalf of the departments of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Water Affairs and Forestry, and Agriculture. Through its 'managed network' model of operating, SANBI is ideally placed to tackle the challenges of securing the vital collaboration between relevant players, in order to bring about the outcomes desired by all the partners in Working for



A retaining weir, built by Working for Wetlands, reduces erosion of a montane stream during summer flooding.

	Target	Actual	% achieved
Jobs created	1,610	2,135	133%
Person days	279,400	268,772	96%
Training days	25,100	25,437	101%
SMMEs	106	196	185%
Gabion structures built	12,000 m ³	13,632 m ³	114%
Concrete structures built	4,750 m ³	5,235 m ³	110%
Earthen structures built	32,000 m ³	16,547 m ³	52%
Earthworks	119,200 m ³	132,089 m ³	111%
Revegetated areas	125,700 m ²	147,135 m ²	117%
Cleared areas	934 ha	1,136 ha	122%
Eco-logs built	43 m ³	22 m ³	51%
Firebreaks	1,000 ha	1,000 ha	100%
Wetland plants propagated	80,000	101,076	126%
Fencing of structures	4,300 m	3,500 m	81%
Boardwalk construction	400 m	572 m	143%
Waste removal	240 m ³	132 m ³	55%
Rock packs	440 m ³	1,862 m ³	423%

This year saw a budget increase of 63% in the funding received from DEAT, which significantly expanded the programme's reach into new catchments and rehabilitation sites. This also allowed the programme to increase the number of workers employed, thereby contributing further to the employment creation and skills development objectives of the EPWP. The programme's 43 rehabilitation projects, spanning state, communal and private land in all nine provinces, implemented a range of interventions aimed at improving the ecological and hydrological functioning of the target wetlands.



A Working for Wetlands team member celebrates the successful completion of her project.

Working for Wetlands and the Directorate for Biodiversity Programmes, Policy and Planning have been joined by the Water Research Commission in driving the national wetland inventory project. Specific wetland mapping and modelling was commissioned as part of the National Landcover 2000 project, and this data is being used as a baseline for further mapping and cataloguing of South African wetlands. The inventory will have numerous applications, including measuring future change in wetland area, function and values, and as a key tool for integrating wetlands into planning, management and monitoring frameworks. DEAT, provincial environment and conservation authorities, Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, and Department of Agriculture are all major partners in the project.

A comprehensive research programme on wetland rehabilitation, co-funded by the Water Research Commission and Working for Wetlands, delivered its first substantial products, including tools for assessing wetland health and identifying ecosystem services provided

by wetlands. Research on the origin, evolution and degradation of wetlands in southern Africa has identified erosion, frequently accelerated by human activities, as a primary threat to many wetlands.

During 2005, Working for Wetlands explored mechanisms for compensating for the loss of wetlands. A rehabilitation project, funded by Anglo Coal and implemented through the programme, is the result of Anglo Coal being granted a licence to open a new mine on condition that it compensates for the destruction of wetlands due to mining, by rehabilitating equivalent wetlands elsewhere in the catchment. This concept of offsite mitigation is new in South Africa, but has been applied for years in other countries as a tool to offset the loss of wetlands. Working for Wetlands implemented this project in the same way as its other projects, thereby generating additional job and training opportunities that were reported to the EPWP. The project is also being treated as a pilot for exploring the desirability and feasibility of adopting offsite mitigation as a more widespread policy option for reducing biodiversity and wetland loss in South Africa.

Research undertaken earlier this year on the socio-economic impact of Working for Wetlands was showcased in a publication launched globally by WWF-International in September. The publication, *Freshwater and Poverty Reduction: Serving People, Saving Nature*, was launched to coincide with the United Nations World Summit in September 2005. The report presents an economic analysis of the livelihood impacts of four freshwater conservation initiatives from around the world. The South African case study focused on the potential of the Working for Wetlands model to enhance the ability of wetlands to support sustainable livelihoods.

SANBI and the global non-governmental organisation Wetlands International are planning to co-host an international workshop on Wetlands, Water and Livelihoods in St Lucia, KwaZulu-Natal in February 2006. Drawing on a hundred participants from 40 countries, the workshop will focus on pro-poor approaches in the management of wetlands. The programme will expand its focus in the next year to explore sustainable use of wetlands, particularly with regard to how they can contribute to sustainable livelihoods. Attention will also be paid to improving the programme's systems for planning, monitoring and evaluating wetland rehabilitation, and to building capacity at all levels in the programme.