



Stewardship case study

Pietersrivier: Establishing a contract nature reserve within a supportive conservancy

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In the Middle Keurbooms Conservancy landowners are increasingly involved in conservation. This dynamic conservancy targets key decision makers, and tries to lead by example.

- ***They have found that it is most effective to find local people with a passion for conservation and work through them.***
- ***They emphasise the need to understand the agricultural challenges a landowner faces, and his or her personal attitude to conservation.***

The Conservancy provided the supportive context for the establishment of a contract nature reserve:

- ***Involvement in the conservancy exposed Katot Meyer to different stewardship options.***
- ***He was motivated to commit to long term conservation because of his desire to conserve Pietersrivier in perpetuity.***
- ***CapeNature supported the establishment of a contract nature reserve at Pietersrivier as it meets all conditions for high priority biodiversity conservation.***

Most biodiversity-rich areas which are not yet protected are to be found in production landscapes under private ownership. Conservation agencies are able to purchase and manage only a small percentage of these areas. The conservation of this biodiversity is therefore dependent on landowners becoming involved in conservation through stewardship programmes. South Africa has developed a legal framework which provides a range of options to landowners willing to be involved in conservation. These options have recently been linked to tax and rates incentives.

This case study describes an ideal situation in which an active conservancy provides a supportive context for a landowner committed to conserving important biodiversity through the establishment of a contract nature reserve.

THE MIDDLE KEURBOOMS CONSERVANCY

CapeNature started working in 2003 with farmers in the Keurbooms area towards establishing a conservancy. The area includes the De Vlucht Valley and the mountainous region between the Little Karoo and the Garden Route. High profile local individuals were appointed to drive the establishment of the conservancy. Initial progress was slow, as the landowners had many other commitments, as well as existing obligations to other farming organisations with different goals.

A small group of five or six individuals who were passionate about conservation therefore decided to become involved in the establishment of the conservancy. These landowners gathered the necessary information and CapeNature helped them to formulate a proposal. The Middle Keurbooms Conservancy was registered in 2006, with the aim of promoting ecotourism and conservation in this beautiful and diverse area.

The Conservancy operates with a small committee of very committed individuals who each carry responsibility for a different portfolio. These people are all driven by a personal desire to make a difference. They focus their efforts on activities of greatest significance to the local people. They have started with projects which require a change of attitude rather than big changes on the ground.

It is a matter of policy that they operate with extreme care, and they have found that their considered actions and attitude have proved the best advertisement for the Conservancy. Many of surrounding landowners, not yet committed to participation, are watching carefully to see how the initial implementation is undertaken.

Committee members maintain contact with decision makers in government departments and relevant private organizations. Committee meetings are kept very simple and are often held in the veld while undertaking a conservancy-related activity. Using this time-efficient approach, the Conservancy has been able to achieve significant progress:

- One of the greatest strengths of the Conservancy has been its collective mandate. If local landowners have a problem they can now draw up a letter for endorsement by the Conservancy. This gives the request far greater impact.
- Illegal hunting for bushmeat or for control of "problem animals" was occurring. The Landmark Foundation was therefore called in to assist

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local farmers with non-lethal predator control.

- The Conservancy helps patrol other illegal activities such as plant harvesting along the scenic Prince Alfred's Pass.
- In 2008 it provided assistance for management of invasive alien plants which are a significant threat to the biodiversity of the area. The funding for alien clearing was provided through the Siyabulela programme and was co-financed by local landowners.
- The first management unit of the local Fire Protection Association has been established by the conservancy.
- The Conservancy serves as a base for ecotourism: mountain biking, hiking, game drives, 4x4 tracks, kloofing and bird watching are available and are advertised on the conservancy's website. Within the conservancy they have self help information on the conservancy and how to enjoy the area responsibly.
- They have approached the Eden Tourism Board describing their challenges and how they have overcome them, and inviting the Board to work with them in advertising this area better.

The Conservancy is guided by a list of objectives which lists specific priorities for action. This is supported by a spirit or vision which includes upholding existing legislation and sharing benefits with the community. They welcome all those who want to make a difference in the area.

PIETERSRIVIER

Information meetings held by the Conservancy provided an ideal forum to inform landowners about stewardship options. At one of the meetings the various stewardship options available to landowners were presented. Subsequently, at the end of 2007, Katot Meyer, one of the local landowners, approached CapeNature about the possibility of committing to the long term conservation of his land through the creation of a contract nature reserve.

Pietersrivier had belonged to the Meyer family for several generations and Katot wanted to ensure that it would be conserved in perpetuity. The land was in good condition and had not been used for grazing in recent years. His current use of the land was restricted to low-impact ecotourism which would be compatible with conservation. Through the Conservancy he had developed a close relationship with the CapeNature staff based in his area and he trusted their ability to deliver improved land management. His primary goal was to provide long term security for the area's biodiversity. A commitment to establishing a contract nature reserve was therefore very much in line with his personal vision for the farm.

Mr. Meyer was one of the drivers behind the establishment of the Conservancy: He, together with others from the Conservancy, offered to provide compensation for landowners suffering damage from predators, and collaborated with the Landmark Foundation in promoting non-lethal predator control. Meyer also provided fencing and alternative grazing for those suffering damage from bushbuck. In addition, he provides free camping for those willing to undertake a day of conservation work.

From CapeNature's perspective, they had worked with Mr. Meyer and knew his genuine passion for conservation. The establishment of the Conservancy paved the way for the declaration of his farm as a contract nature reserve, by providing a supportive context.

ESTABLISHING A STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENT

One of the first steps in negotiating a stewardship agreement with a landowner is to establish which stewardship option would be most appropriate. This is dependent on two factors: The first is the level of commitment the landowner is willing to make; the second is the importance of the area for conservation.

The highest level of commitment for a landowner is to establish a contract nature

reserve. This also involves a high level of management support from the conservation agency and is therefore only suitable for areas which have been demonstrated to contain important biodiversity.

Biodiversity Assessment

CapeNature already knew from systematic conservation plans from both the Gouritz and Garden Route Initiatives that the farm Pietersrivier was 'high priority' from a **functional** perspective:

- It forms part of E-W, N-S migration corridors
- It forms part of an important upland-lowland gradient
- It is an important corridor for nectivores
- It contains an important riverine corridor
- It is a transition zone between different fynbos vegetation units
- It is important for hydrological processes for the Keurbooms catchment
- Predator-prey interactions seem intact, with frequent leopard sightings.

This was supported by a biodiversity site evaluation in 2008 which indicated that it also contained important biodiversity from both **structural and composition** perspectives:

- It contains under-protected vegetation types:
 - Kouga Grassy Fynbos and Outeniqua Waboomveld are under-represented in existing statutory protected areas.
 - De Vlucht forest Waboomveld and De Vlucht Sandolien-Renosterveld occur in no other protected area.
 - a. It contains several rare and endemic plant species including: *Acrolophia barbata*, *Erica inconstans*, *Psoralea keetii*, *Agathosma puberula*, *Muraltia juniperifolia*; *Acrolophia barbata*, *Erica trachysantha*, *Gladiolus sempervirens*, *Protea vogtsiae*; *Aspalathus glabrescens*, *Erica ingeana*, *Lotononis elongata*; *Trichodiadema (T.mirabile-orientale complex)*.

In 2009, on the basis of these considerations, CapeNature's Regional Management Committee approved the request to give Pietersrivier formal statutory recognition as a contract nature reserve.

Going forward at Pietersrivier

In future Pietersrivier will benefit from increased support from CapeNature in supporting sound land management. This will include increased assistance with clearing invasive alien plants and with veld management. A management plan is currently being drawn up for this farm. It is to be hoped that an additional benefit of Pietersrivier being a statutory protected area will be improved marketing opportunities for ecotourism.

Kat Meyer is very knowledgeable about the plants and animals on his land and has a passion for sharing this knowledge with others through low impact ecotourism. He works with the "outdoors magazines" to develop new 4x4 routes which have a "green" focus – these have included Burchell's original wagon route. He also organizes mountain bike races, including the well known Cape Pioneer Track Mountain Bike Challenge. This involves working with a number of landowners, exposing them to the benefits of ecotourism.

POTENTIAL EXPANSION

It is hoped that his positive influence will encourage other landowners to commit land to extend the Contractual Nature Reserve. However, such expansion will also require CapeNature to provide additional support for stewardship in the region. Many other landowners are watching what is happening, and are waiting for clarity about how it will benefit them and how it will affect their farming.



"Katot is motivated by the desire to conserve this land in perpetuity and has been a catalyst for conservation in this area..he emphasizes that "n bewararea moet ook die mens in die natuur sensitief bestuur."

Mr. Meyer has visited several other farmers with the CapeNature staff with a view to persuading them to become involved in the conservancy. He has valuable advice born of his own experience:

- He advises that it is important to approach other farmers armed with good local knowledge of farming in the area. He recommends that stewardship officers should prepare by getting information from the local agricultural office.
- If possible they should take with them a local farmer or landowner who has already joined the conservancy.
- It is helpful to give the farmer a list of telephone numbers of others already in the conservancy and invite the farmer to call them to get feedback on their experience.
- The most powerful approach is to invite the farmer to visit another farm similar to his own which has already joined the conservancy. The impact of the conservancy on farming can then be discussed on site. The key is to create an atmosphere of trust and not to create unrealistic expectations.
- He recommends getting the younger generation involved in this evaluation process, even if they are still in school or college, as they may help persuade the older farmer to consider new ideas. Ultimately, they will be the ones to take conservation forward into the future.
- He emphasizes that it is important to try to understand what each person's attitude is towards conservation. For some, these ideas are learnt in school or agricultural college. For others, it is a value which comes through families. Ultimately it is about personal commitment.

Key Words:

Stewardship, private landowners, Pietersrivier, contract nature reserve, ecotourism, Middle Keurbooms Conservancy

