

SANBI

Biodiversity for Life

South African National Biodiversity Institute



Biodiversity Stewardship

Partnerships for securing biodiversity

What is biodiversity stewardship?

Biodiversity stewardship is an approach to entering into agreements with private and communal landowners to protect and manage land in biodiversity priority areas, led by conservation authorities in South Africa. It recognises **landowners as the custodians of biodiversity** on their land. Biodiversity stewardship is based on voluntary commitments from landowners, with a range of different types of Biodiversity Stewardship Agreements available to support conservation and sustainable resource use. Some types of Biodiversity Stewardship Agreements are formally declared as protected areas in terms of the Protected Areas Act, providing long-term security for the sites involved.

Biodiversity stewardship contributes to landscape management and protected area expansion

Biodiversity stewardship is implemented on sites that have been identified as important for biodiversity and ecosystem services, based on best available science. Biodiversity stewardship is a **highly cost-effective mechanism for expanding protected areas**. Both the processes to negotiate and declare a protected area through the biodiversity stewardship model, as well as the ongoing cost of supporting the landowners to manage the biodiversity stewardship sites once they are declared, are many times less costly to the conservation authority than the cost to purchase land and manage protected areas themselves.

Under biodiversity stewardship, the land remains the property of the landowner. Biodiversity stewardship is particularly **effective in multiple-use landscapes** where biodiversity priority areas are embedded in a matrix of other land uses. A flexible range of biodiversity stewardship agreements is available that can combine biodiversity protection and sustainable agricultural production. This makes biodiversity stewardship appropriate for a wide variety of landscapes, including agricultural and communal areas.

Biodiversity stewardship began as a pilot in one province in 2003. Within ten years, biodiversity stewardship programmes had been initiated in all nine provinces in South Africa. By October 2014, provincial biodiversity stewardship programmes had secured over 450 000 ha through the creation of 74 protected areas, making substantial contributions towards meeting national protected area targets. An additional 550 000 ha are in negotiation, creating a potential further 145 protected areas across the country with long-term security.

Defining Protected Areas and Conservation Areas

Protected Areas are defined as geographic areas that are formally protected by the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act (Act 57 of 2003). They are managed mainly for biodiversity conservation, and contribute to the protected area estate.

Conservation Areas are areas that are not formally protected by the Protected Areas Act but are nevertheless managed at least partly for biodiversity conservation. They contribute to the broader conservation estate.





Types of Biodiversity Stewardship Agreements

There are **five different types of biodiversity stewardship agreements**, ranging from non-binding to long-term, formally declared protected areas. Each successive level of agreement provides more protection for biodiversity and involves more land-use restrictions. In line with this, increased support is provided to the landowner at higher levels of commitment. In addition, the relative importance of biodiversity is taken into consideration for eligibility at each level. In order to qualify for the higher levels of agreement, the property must have sufficient biodiversity importance.

The Protected Areas Act provides the legal framework for the two highest levels of biodiversity stewardship: **Nature Reserves** and **Protected Environments**. These are established by a formal declaration by the national Minister or provincial Member of the Executive Council. Nature Reserves and Protected Environments that are declared through the biodiversity stewardship programme have the same legal standing as state-owned and managed protected areas, and contribute to South Africa's protected

area estate. Nature Reserves are declared on property with high biodiversity importance and have long-term title deed restrictions, which mean that even if the land changes hands its status as a protected area remains in place. Protected Environments are slightly more flexible than Nature Reserves and can be declared across multiple properties. Protected Environments can allow for some forms of production on the land, as long as this is integrated into an approved management plan.

Biodiversity Management Agreements are made possible under the Biodiversity Act. They are based on the development of a biodiversity management plan under this legislation. **Biodiversity Agreements** are based on contracts between landowners and the provincial conservation authority. They include an agreed management plan. These agreements are not considered protected areas, but do contribute to the conservation area estate. Both are intended to be shorter term agreements than Nature Reserves or Protected Environments.

Biodiversity Partnership Areas are informal agreements between the landowner and conservation authority, and do not legally bind either party to any obligations.

| Biodiversity importance → Site security → Landowner commitment → State support → | Agreement type | Legal mechanism | Typical contract length | Binding on the property | Binding on the landowner |
|---|-----------------------------------|---|------------------------------|---|--|
| | Nature Reserve | National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act 57 of 2003 | 30–99 years or in perpetuity | Protected area declaration and title deed restriction | Contract agreement |
| | Protected Environment | National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act 57 of 2003 | A minimum of 30 years | Protected area declaration and title deed note | Contract agreement |
| | Biodiversity Management Agreement | National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act 10 of 2004 | 5–10 years | Not binding | Agreement governed by the Biodiversity Act |
| | Biodiversity Agreement | Contract law | 5–10 years | Not binding | Contract agreement |
| | Biodiversity Partnership Areas | Informal agreement | | Not binding | Not binding |

Key role players in biodiversity stewardship

Landowners are the most important participants in biodiversity stewardship. Landowners can be individuals, communities, companies or municipalities. Biodiversity stewardship is a voluntary commitment and has proven to be a popular way for willing landowners to play a part in conservation. A management plan is developed between the provincial conservation authority and the landowner. Landowners retain ownership and management of their land. A number of incentives become available to landowners once a biodiversity stewardship agreement is signed.

Provincial conservation authorities are responsible for biodiversity conservation in each province of South Africa. They negotiate biodiversity stewardship agreements with landowners, provide ongoing support for biodiversity stewardship sites and conduct annual audits to ensure that landowners are complying with the agreements. Provincial conservation authorities are supported at national level by the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) and the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI).

Biodiversity stewardship benefits greatly from the support of **non-governmental organisations** (NGOs). NGOs played a key role in piloting the biodiversity stewardship approach and enabling the establishment of the first biodiversity stewardship programmes in the mid-2000s, and they continue to support biodiversity stewardship in several provinces. NGOs provide financial support and assistance from expert staff. They can play the role of a trusted mediator during negotiations between landowners and the provincial conservation authorities, and can contribute to site assessments and the development of management plans.

Incentives for biodiversity stewardship

The provincial biodiversity stewardship programmes aim to provide incentives to participating landowners, in relation to the level of commitment from the landowner. Incentives **include technical advice and support on biodiversity management**, such as invasive alien control and burning of firebreaks; game donations of founder populations by conservation authorities to the landowners; and **recognition and marketing opportunities**.



At a national level, **fiscal incentives** have been created for landowners. Those portions of Nature Reserves that are used solely for conservation are excluded from being charged property rates. Income tax deductions for management expenses are available for Nature Reserves, Protected Environments and Biodiversity Management Agreements. In addition, an income tax deduction based on the value of the property is afforded to landowners with Nature Reserves declared for at least 99 years.

Biodiversity stewardship, rural development and land reform

Biodiversity stewardship can be important to realising the **ecological, economic and social benefits** that healthy ecosystems can deliver over the long term. Biodiversity stewardship can stimulate rural economic development by creating a focus for nature-based tourism and sustainable natural resource use. This assists in the diversification of rural livelihoods, especially in agriculturally marginal areas. Biodiversity stewardship sites can also support job creation and skills development through direct land management and restoration, or indirectly through compatible commercial activities. In South Africa, land reform often results in new communal landownership. In these areas, biodiversity stewardship can help to ensure access to the economic opportunities associated with protected areas. The Land Reform Biodiversity Stewardship Initiative was established in 2009 and is demonstrating that conservation and land reform can work hand in hand.

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'Adopt a spot' to contribute to the beautification of George

Alida de Beer

George Municipality has invited members of the public to participate in its Adopt-a-Spot programme through which some open pieces of land can be adopted by individuals, businesses or organisations to maintain the properties at their own cost.

The programme is intended to encourage local communities to participate in managing and beautifying their open spaces. "The draft policy has been very favourably received and there has been much interest from businesses and individuals throughout George wanting to find out how they can participate once the policy is approved," says Lauren Waring, director of planning and development.

The idea originated from within the municipality. "It will assist the municipality in the management of open spaces to prevent illegal dumping through the activity on the land. Beautification of open spaces through the development of gardens and planting of flora will also be boosted."

She says all open land that is not identified for development can be adopted for a period of three years. "Land which is identified for development is not included. The policy sets out the sites which can be adopted, and applicants are welcome to identify specific sites which they wish to adopt and maintain."

The comment period on the draft policy ends on 10 April, after which the matter will be taken back to Council for the policy to be finalised.

"Once finalised, we will again advertise the policy and call for interested parties to apply."

The formal application will be available on the municipality's website and applications will be assessed according to the criteria set out in the policy. The municipality has started advertising to invite applications.

Ward committee member for ward 18

(Denneoord), Janke van der Merwe, has welcomed the policy. "Our green space is very important. If something negative happens on an open space, it causes the public to avoid it and then it becomes a shunned space, so this is a wonderful idea. One successful example of a public space that has been upgraded for public use is the pump track in Van Riebeeck Park."

Van der Merwe says the policy should be changed to make provision for public representation on the committee or group that adjudicates applications for an open space. "The ward committee, Community Police Forum (CPF) and neighbourhood watch should be able to comment on an application in their own neighbourhood. It should be a public participation process, even if it is just the ward committee that can give input."

In response to Van der Merwe, Ward says any proposals would go to the ward councillor for information.

According to the draft policy, sites that can be adopted include illegal dumping sites; recreational parks and facilities; public squares and parking areas; rivers, wetlands, flood plains, ridges and mountains; any dilapidated area zoned for such purposes; unused road reserves and road medians; and public / municipal servitudes.

The applicant will be expected to hand in an operational plan which details what they wish to do with the identified adopted spot. They will not be reimbursed by the municipality for any expenses and will not be granted exclusive rights or any other right over the property.

A memorandum of agreement will be signed between the applicant and the municipality. The municipality will ensure that there is a project manager for the Adopt-A-Spot programme to assist with the application process and form an Adopt-a-Spot committee to evaluate applications.