

CO-EXISTING WITH NATURE IN A SUSTAINABLE AND BUSH-FRIENDLY MANNER

A GPNR forum on guidelines relating to the interaction between humans and the natural environment

For the next few months we'll be looking more closely at the GPNR Constitution and the valuable objectives and principles it contains.

Please send us your input and interpretation of the objectives and principles contained in the Constitution, such as:

- 1. Sustainable conservation of the ecosystems of the reserve in their most undisturbed state possible (clause 7.2).*
- 2. To promote bush atmosphere and appearance within the parameters of the Reserve (clause 7.7).*
- 3. To allow the unhindered movement of game (clause 7.7.1).*
- 4. To act at all times in line with the ethos of a nature reserve and not to disturb fauna, flora or any other Members (clause 11.1).*

Send your comments to liz.lewis.sa@gmail.com

Guideline 1 from our Constitution:

Sustainable conservation of the ecosystems of the reserve in their most undisturbed state possible (clause 7.2)

Comments received (slightly abbreviated)

1. Grietjie and other nature reserves form an important part of the Greater Kruger National Park ecosystem. **With conservation bigger is always better.** The bigger an ecosystem the less intervention/management is required and the more natural ecosystem drivers will be present. If Grietjie were on its own we would not be able to have large predators and mega-herbivores because it is too small.

We at Grietjie are therefore really privileged to be custodians of a small portion of a much bigger picture.

Section 17 of the Protected Areas Act clearly states the purpose for the declaration of protected areas, including nature reserves. We are therefore not a zoo or game farm but part of a larger ecosystem where natural processes play out. Some of these processes go against our human nature, hence our desire to assist animals that suffer, control veld fires, create rehab centres and sometimes feel like providing fodder and water. These kinds of **interventions normally work against the natural selection processes** necessary to keep animal populations resilient and healthy. I don't mean that there is no place for interventions, but we always have to consider them carefully.

2. We need to recognise, that no matter how big the ecosystem we are dealing with is, it cannot be regarded as a natural system (even the Kruger), as the social, physical and economic impact of humans is huge. Our constitution also talks about an environment for both humans and (other) animals. This suggests that **we have to find the most pragmatic balance between the needs of humans (on Grietjie) and the need for maintaining as natural an environment as is possible** - and I believe the crux of the drive should be:
 - a. To try be involved in the growth of the "open" area so that more natural processes can be enjoyed;
 - b. To ensure no further degradation of our micro system (Grietjie);
 - c. To improve the resilience of the micro system by being able to draw from the larger open area for those natural processes to be more effective;
 - d. To support interventions when necessary and as described by those charged with these, including the wardens, the ARC, SANparks, etc;

- e. To ensure that there is understanding that the achieving of, and maintenance of the system in the required/possible state of the system, is **the responsibility of all who reside on Grietjie** and not just the committee. It **needs the input from all** in terms of finances, behaviour, policing and commitment to the system.
3. It is understandable that things would have had to change, and will continue to change appreciably going forward. To have the memories of yesteryear's freedoms be replaced with imposed limitations and the rigours of a larger disparate community must be unsettling to many, to say the least.

However, **the privilege of having a home INSIDE the parameters of such a large and open ecological system as we now have, is absolutely invaluable from an investment as well as an emotional perspective.** Space is the ultimate commodity and to be part of one which includes such wildlife and habitat diversity as Greater Kruger, cannot and should not be jeopardised through the long-term inconsequential and petty disagreements which can fragment communities.

This precious tract of land is so much more than the total sum of its parts. Concerns about the off-take of some individual animals is understandable, but **sight must not be lost of the bigger picture**...that of a large intact habitat which can sustain natural populations in greater numbers and resilience than what the historically fragmented and smaller area ever could, **which is more important than personal differences.**

To this end it would be prudent for every single stakeholder to take a drive to a favourite spot and quietly settle in for a moment and re-evaluate what is really important. Habitat integrity is paramount for any chance of a long-term future for the wildlife which we so love. Ecologically the health of a system depends on diversity of utilisation, size and the **maintenance of an approach which places the interest of the land and wildlife on an equal footing to that of the human residents.**

4. Clause 7.2.1 demands **adherence** to the **APNR Master Plan** with respect to the **scientific preservation and management of the RESERVE'S fauna and flora**: We have to **minimize**

the effect that human settlements have on the environment (reducing our foot print, exposure, noise and light pollution, bush clearing, waterholes etc.) and **optimize on how humans can assist the environment** (locally: eradicating alien plant species, erosion protection, anti-poaching etc. and regional: joining existing open areas to ensure that the fauna can migrate to better feeding grounds, to escape over-population and other threats or only to optimize their natural ranges, etc. this would then give the flora a better chance to recover). We thus must **abide by the principles and guidelines of the APNR.**

Clause 7.2.2 is encouraging **(a) participation in research programmes** (On Grietjie we have not done too well here; the Ecological Monitoring program by ARC [Mike Peel] however continues.); and

(b) implementing management plans (There is a lot more we can and should do: we need to control the land use of Grietjie and its associated over-development and must be able to legally enforce our current and future rules/regulations. It is also not good enough if we have say 60% compliance to our “voluntary” Constitution and the remaining 40% do their own thing.); and

(c) implementing maintenance plans (We have rangers patrolling the Reserve, we have the Black Mambas for anti-poaching and do maintain our infrastructure – I think we are doing reasonably well in this regard).

TO ALL THOSE WHO RESPONDED:

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INSIGHTFUL COMMENTS!