

# Blyde Restoration Custodianship

## PROJECT SUMMARY



# Project partners

In 2001 the K2C Biosphere Region (K2C BR), under the supervision of the National Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), was officially ratified by UNESCO in the Man and the Biosphere (MaB) Programme. This Programme aims to explore local solutions to global challenges by mainstreaming sustainable development, integrating economic, social and environmental aspects and recognizing their vital interlinkages, in order to achieve sustainable development in all its dimensions. The Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region Non Profit Company (K2C) was established to support these goals and implement the actions mandated through the MaB Programme Strategy.

The main project partners include Department Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), the four Communal Property Associations (CPAs) that have claimed the reserve (namely, Sethlare, Maorabjang, Moletele and Mahubahuba), Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA), Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) Natural Resource Management and South African Environmental Observation Unit (SAEON).

1. Sethlare, Maorabjang, Moletele and Mahubahuba CPAs: These four CPAs are in the process of claiming the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR). An interim co-management committee (ICMC) has been formed to assist with the collaboration between all the entities. The ICMC mainly comprises the four CPAs, MTPA and DAFF representatives.
2. MTPA is the management authority for the BRCNR and the provincial conservation authority.
3. DAFF is the current custodian of the Lowveld plantation areas. Although this land is in the process of being incorporated into the BRCNR, DAFF is the current manager of this land as governed by the National Forestry Act.
4. DEA NRM has been involved in major historical restoration efforts from the late 1990s and early 2000s.
5. SAEON is supporting the development of a monitoring plan which will form part of the management and restoration plans and is a crucial component necessary to track the impacts of restoration interventions undertaken by this project.





# Introduction

The upper reaches of the Blyde and Klaserie sub-catchments originate in the North Eastern Drakensberg escarpment of the Mpumalanga province flowing into Limpopo province. This area receives very high rainfall ranging from 1000 to 1500mm along the escarpment. As a result, the area falls within a National Strategic Water Source area (within the Mpumalanga Drakensberg node). The area also supports exceptionally diverse biodiversity found across a number of different ecosystems, and thus plays an important role in conserving high levels of threatened, rare and endemic species. This is largely driven by the highly diverse physical environment with extensive topographic, geological and climatic variation.

Although this area is partially protected through the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BNR) and a few smaller nature reserves, large portions of these catchments have been transformed through plantation forestry. This kind of forestry provides the seed source for invasive alien species to invade natural habitats outside plantations, especially grasslands and riparian areas, including within the protected areas.



## Vision of Project: Blyde Restoration Custodianship

A healthy upper Blyde, Sand and Klaserie Catchment, in which degraded areas have been restored and are maintained thus sustaining biodiversity and the critical ecosystem services that support the livelihoods and well-being of local and downstream residents in the long term.

# Project Purpose

To support and enhance current efforts on invasive alien plant (IAP) control and ecosystem restoration in the larger Blyde area (including the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve and the sections of the Lowveld Plantations which are to be incorporated into this), as well as the beneficiation and capacity development of local landowner and community members.

The following are key aspects:

- Securing critical ecosystem services originating from the area;
- Reducing threats to and conserving the high value biodiversity occurring in the area;
- Developing custodianship over natural resources by local landowners and users;
- Developing natural resource-based livelihoods and securing natural resource dependent aspects of human well-being.

Considering the challenging terrain, one of the key gaps in the ongoing restoration efforts on the ground is IAP control in remote areas at the top of catchments which are difficult to access. These areas are not necessarily very steep, and fall somewhere between current High Altitude Team efforts on cliffs and very steep slopes, and normal clearing teams in more accessible and flatter areas.



A further gap in the current restoration efforts is around ensuring maintenance of cleared areas once the major IAP clearing efforts in such areas have been concluded, or preventing spread within relatively intact areas (with very low densities of IAPs), which has undermined the security of initial larger investments in IAP control.



View of Mariepskop with previously cleared area in the foreground

# Activities



Appointment of the project team was made based on the High Altitude Team (HAT) model. K2C negotiated and helped develop selection criteria for employment where a 60:40% ratio was agreed for CPA vs adjacent community members. In addition, appointments are also made representing all four CPAs.

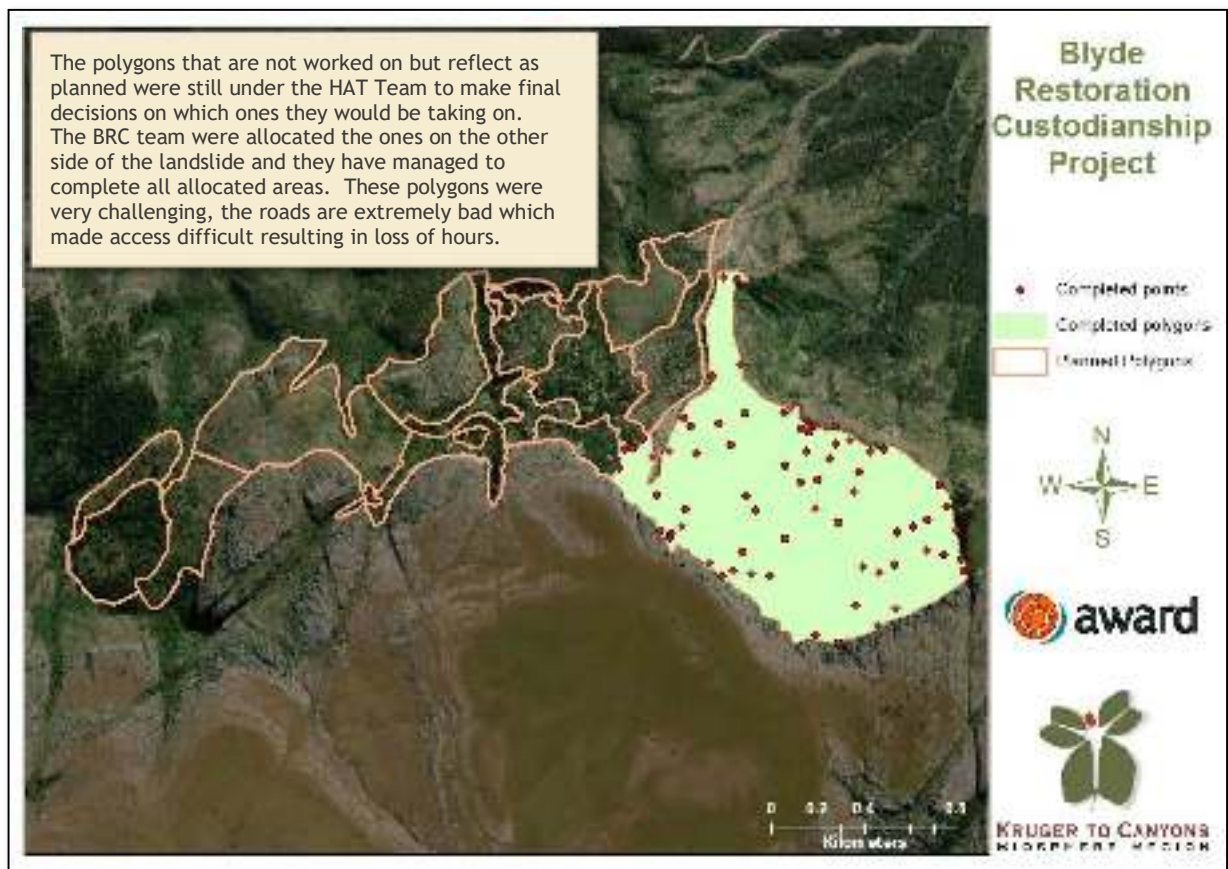
Spatial planning, prioritization and methodology are developed as part of the development of the restoration strategy.

Team training in first aid, health and safety, eco literacy and bush awareness, snake awareness, herbicide application, mapping and GIS, governance and corruption, computer literacy and climate change adaptation.

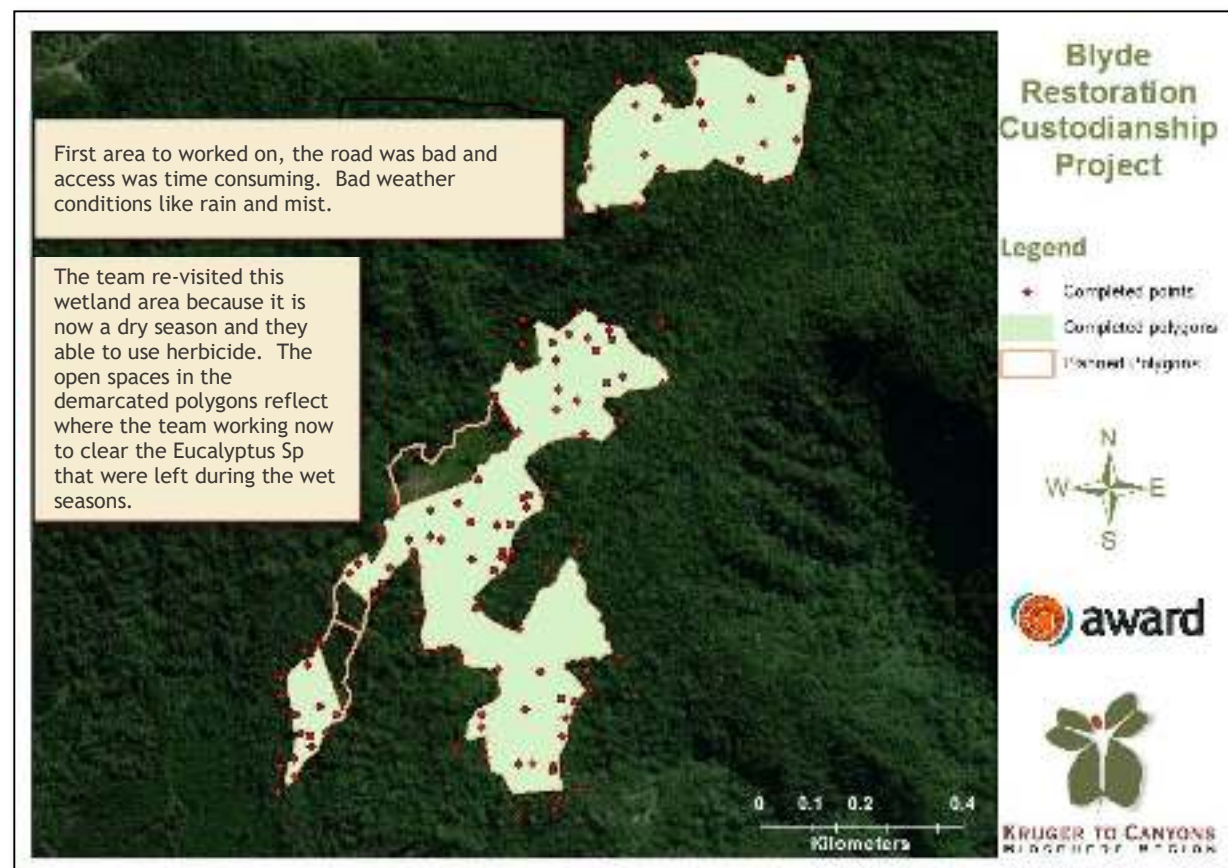
Clearing of alien invasive plants by ring barking, bark stripping, cut stump, uprooting and use of herbicides as appropriate.



# Results



The polygons that are not worked on but reflect as planned were still under the HAT Team to make final decisions on which ones they would be taking on. The BRC team were allocated the ones on the other side of the landslide and they have managed to complete all allocated areas. These polygons were very challenging, the roads are extremely bad which made access difficult resulting in loss of hours.



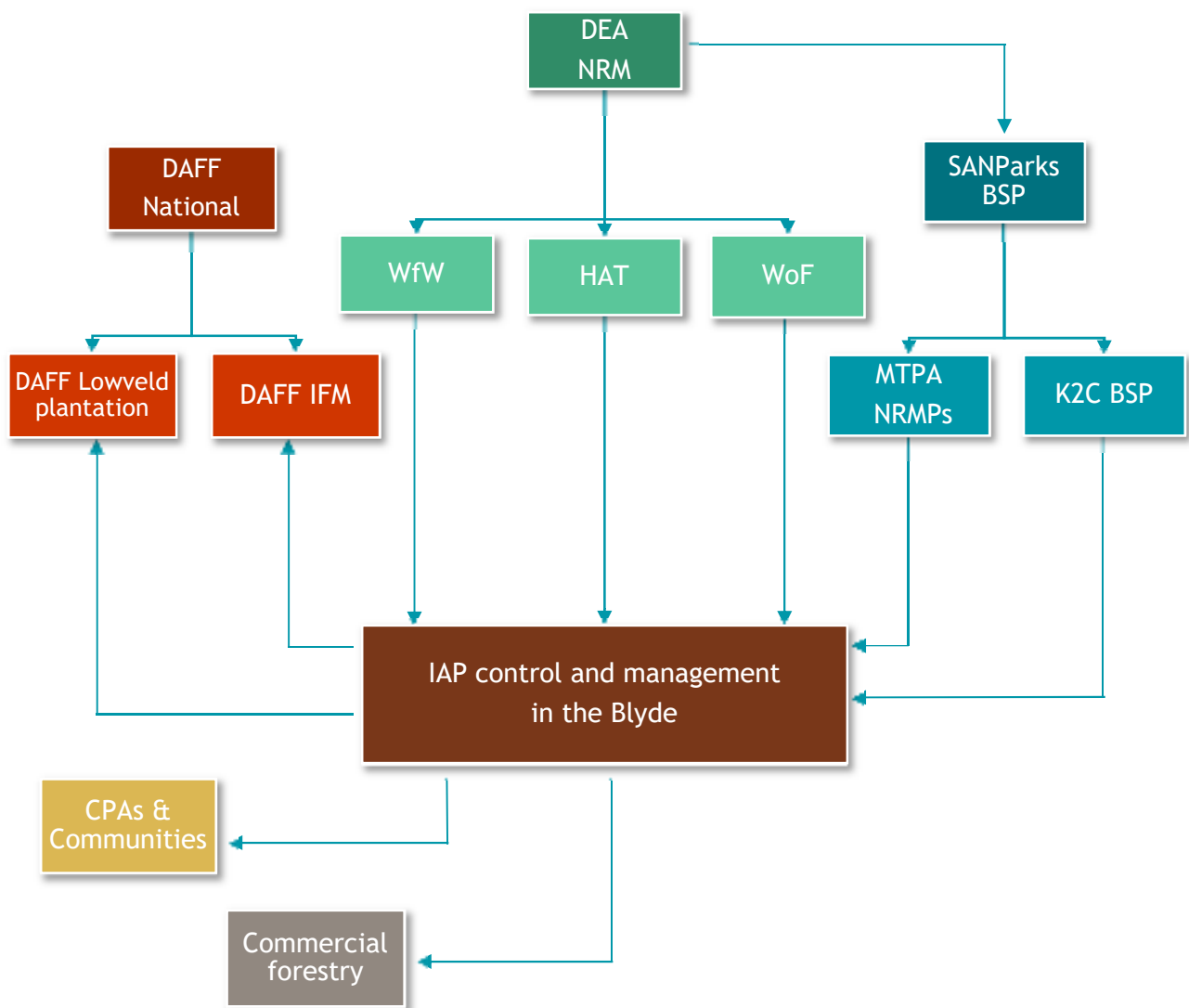
First area to worked on, the road was bad and access was time consuming. Bad weather conditions like rain and mist.

The team re-visited this wetland area because it is now a dry season and they able to use herbicide. The open spaces in the demarcated polygons reflect where the team working now to clear the Eucalyptus Sp that were left during the wet seasons.



# Recommendations

This project formed part of a larger project supporting protected area expansion, the development of a management plan for Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR) and the development of the restoration plan, as well as contributing to capacity development in the greater landscape. This has been a crucial building block in terms of a larger strategy to ultimately fund a coordinated restoration effort in the BRCNR, including the Lowveld plantation areas, guided by the restoration and management plan. This strategy, in essence, forms part of a succession plan to ensure post declaration support and management during the transition phase as the land is transferred from DAFF to MTPA and ultimately the CPAs.



## Blyde restoration stakeholders include:

- Natural Resources Management (NRM)
- High altitude team (HAT)
- Working on Fire (WoF)
- Mpumalanga Tourism & Parks Authority (MTPA)
- Common Property Associations (CPA)

Through further funding opportunities, the project is set to continue and expand.



# award

The Association for Water and Rural Development

AWARD is a non-profit organisation specialising in participatory, research-based project implementation. Their work addresses issues of sustainability, inequity and poverty by building natural-resource management competence and supporting sustainable livelihoods. One of their current projects, supported by USAID, focuses on the Olifants River and the way in which people living in South Africa and Mozambique depend on the Olifants and its contributing waterways. It aims to improve water security and resource management in support of the healthy ecosystems to sustain livelihoods and resilient economic development in the catchment.

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## About USAID: RESILIM-O

USAID: RESILIM-O focuses on the Olifants River Basin and the way in which people living in South Africa and Mozambique depend on the Olifants and its contributing waterways. It aims to improve water security and resource management in support of the healthy ecosystems that support livelihoods and resilient economic development in the catchment. The 5-year programme, involving the South African and Mozambican portions of the Olifants catchment, is being implemented by the Association for Water and Rural Development (AWARD) and is funded by USAID Southern Africa.

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