General Manager’s Message

Calendar days are filling up quickly! The new Financial Year is upon us and there’s relief all around as the Region spent its budget responsibly and attracted more visitors to the Park compared to the previous year, income is not looking and at all. Well done! Employee participation in wellness activities is a clear indication of the seriousness employees take the organisation’s investment into the betterment of their lives. Read all about the recent game between SANParks and SANDF held in Karatara.

The ‘Read my lips’ campaign commemorated by staff throughout the GRNP is a step in the right direction to take a stand against sexual abuse, hope it will encourage other organisations to do the same. We continue with our core business of conserving nature and reaching more visitors and more communities. Law enforcement efforts scaling up is an indication of our seriousness to protect nature at all costs. Equally, our partnership and programmes with communities provides an opportunity to raise champions for nature both now and for future generations.

Nature is interconnected, so are we. This theme is carried throughout this edition of the GRNP newsletter. Read all about the latest Walking Festival which allowed visitors to walk through the Park. See the report from the KKNK which interestingly mentions one of the popularly asked questions by visitors was about the cocktail of hiking trails suitable for all seasons during and beyond any festival.

As we battle teething problems with the newly-introduced CSD system where suppliers are captured on a more transparent central supplier database managed by the National Treasury Department, please ensure we adhere to the process and work with our Finance Department to make this work for our Region.

We welcome new executive who will be invited to the Region to engage further about issues of national concern facing us. Congratulations to our new Managing Executive for Parks- Property Mokoena. Our new Managing Executive for Tourism and marketing-Hapiloe Sello has already visited the Region and reported how impressed she is with our Parks. We wish all our employees who have left the organisation all the best with their new endeavour, we are confident you will do well in your new endeavour. Till next time!

Jill Bunding-Venter
General Manager: GRNP
Global News

Top travel trends globally, according to a global travel blog (treksoft.com):
• China has the largest number of travellers and spent over $400 billion on ‘outbound travel.’
• Wifi becomes important even in remote areas
• Travellers venture into the unknown- ‘untouched and unique places’
• Smarter travel apps
• 20% of the world’s tourists are young travellers calling for unique and original experiences
• ‘Staycations’ or travelling closer to home is an indication of the number of local/domestic travellers.

Local News

The theme for this year’s world water week celebrated in South Africa was ‘Life - 20 Years of Water Delivery for Social and Economic Development.’ Izak Smit (SANParks) used the ARC dataset below to illustrate how the SANParks estate is located in relation to the current drought across large parts of Southern Africa.
These maps show the remote sensing (MODIS) derived Normalised Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) of 21-31 January 2016 compared to the 17 year (2000-2016) long-term average NDVI for the same time of year. NDVI is an index of vegetation greenness.
Yellow/Red depicts below average NDVI, whilst green depicts above average NDVI – the intensity of colour is an indication of how much the highest recorded NDVI between 21-31 Jan 2016 differs from the long-term NDVI for the same 10-day period measured over the previous 17 years.

SANParks’ plan of action (adapted from Wild magazine, 2015)

• ‘Appropriate artificial water sources that are well considered and won’t be detrimental to plants and animals will be provided.
• River management plans are in place in some parks and engagements are envisaged between water user associations and catchment management agencies for water releases from dams upstream from parks.
• Awareness campaigns are currently underway to encourage SANParks staff to conserve water in staff villages.
• Water restrictions have already been in place for some time in certain parks.
The Sting of the Green Scorpions
Adopted from the Citizen newspapers (March 2016)

According to the George Herald, there was a clampdown on illegal fishing and bait collecting along the Eden coast and estuaries. The Green Scorpions of the National Department of Environmental Affairs, the Provincial Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning, SANParks; Eden District Municipality and Cape Nature together with officials from the National Department of Forestry and Fisheries and SAPS held an undercover operation on the Garden Route coast area. The area extended from the Great Brak River Estuary in the east, to the Breede River in the west.

According to the Eden District Municipality "The teams encountered transgressions, and fines were issued and individuals arrested. The illegal activities included non-compliance of fish factories; fishing without permits; pollution of rivers and estuaries; illegal developments; boat-based whale watching operators who carried no permits; illegal collection/buying and selling of bait; and illegal oyster harvesting.

Green Scorpion for Eden District Municipality Vernon Gibbs Hall said, "This cooperative and collaborative effort towards this exercise was a truer reflection of environmental law in practice, and enjoyed huge successes in environmental enforcement. South Africa has the best environmental legislation in the world, and seeing this being enforced is always positive to ensuring the protection of our natural resources."

May all environmental offenders be warned of the sting of the Green Scorpions.

GRNP steps up on law enforcement

Four people in their 30s were apprehended two nights ago by SANParks rangers who were on a night patrol around Swartvlei (Sedgefield). This area is managed by the Wilderness section of the Garden Route National Park. Rangers recovered a stolen boat (a dingy) and returned it to its owner. They also removed a 120-meter gill net on site, which was strung across the channel near the island in Sedgefield by the suspects.

So says Jonathan Britton, SANParks marine ranger ‘we continue our search for all stolen goods from the Park including on land and in and around estuaries in the Wilderness section. We also urge boat and vessel holders to be in possession of their permits to avoid confusion of what’s legal or not during night patrols.’

SANParks would also like to thank members of the public who report sinister and suspicious happenings in and around the Garden Route National Park.

In Knysna, a partnership between SAPS, the traffic Department and all law enforcement agencies including SANParks conduct regular roadblocks. They also have proactive campaigns like ‘Operation Fiela.’ Its main aim is to show visibility and get all partners geared up for various seasons. Owen Govender, Senior Section Ranger for the Knysna section of the Garden Route National Park (GRNP) reports while R8,000 of fines were issued, SANParks was on the look-out for poached fauna and flora.
The Garden Route National Park team has complied fully with the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METTs). An audit conducted last quarter through an Internationally recognized tool to measure management effectiveness of protected areas (METTs) prove SANParks is managing the GRNP effectively.

The GRNP obtained an overall 77.6% with the highest scores for its planning division, research programmes, human resources, security and operations budget, income generation, education and awareness, public relations and processes.

The audit revealed a weakness in risk assessments, corridor and buffer zone management. There are necessary adjustments when it comes to working with landowners, cultural assets, capital budgets, staff housing and others.

Another tool that indicated an average score for the GRNP is the State of Area Integrity Management (SoAim) which measures the functions of section rangers and conservation staff in terms of Key Performance Management Areas (KPAs). These include legal documentation, maintenance of infrastructure, staff morale, administration, relationships with landowners and stakeholders.

The METT score was developed by the World Bank in conjunction with WWF due to a shared concern that protected areas were managed effectively. The tool is designed to assess various elements- the context (such as threats emanating from the environment such as policy and others), planning (system designs, etc), inputs (resources), processes (effectiveness and appropriateness of management processes), outputs (effectiveness of outputs), outcomes (impact/ effects of management outcomes in relation to objectives).

‘METT helps us track and monitor progress against global targets set by the World Bank / WWF alliance world protected management effectiveness goals.’
The status of the Serpentine River

The Wilderness section of the Garden Route National Park (GRNP) incorporates 2 saline lake systems (Wilderness and Swartvlei) into which 7 rivers flow- the Touw River, Duiwe River and Langvlei Spruit into the Wilderness system and Diep, Klein, Wolwe, Hoekraal and Karatara Rivers into the Swartvlei system.’ IA Russel (1999).

When a suspicion of an aquatic invasive plant (salvinia molesta) was suspected in the Serpentine River in February, rangers in Wilderness went on high alert to inspect it. It turned out to be an algal bloom! Algal blooms are common in summer and towards the end of summer due to relatively warm temperatures. They are fuelled by wind and water currents. While they appear in water rich in nutrients, it is too soon to pinpoint the cause.

Work underway to understand water quality in the system include ongoing work by SANParks scientists and recently the development of a water quality index by a researcher from the CSIR. The index is meant to predict the impact of different land use activities on the quality of streams and rivers, is being piloted in the Wilderness lakes catchment. Dr. David Le Maitre of the CSIR is leading this development, which is set to inform citizens and other land-use groups regarding use of their living and working landscapes to protect water in the catchment area. The tool examines how different land uses ultimately affect the quality of water flowing to the Wilderness Lakes area, the sea and surrounds. Once finalized, this tool should be able to highlight impact hotspots in the catchment. Such impacts can potentially be countered through maintaining healthy riparian buffers.

It will consider the national land cover- whether an area is a natural ecosystem, degraded or mined area and will list different vegetation structures. This will ultimately provide an indication of which sections of a river are affected by which land use.

The recent round of the study focused on the Duiwe River and Langvlei Spruit where agricultural practice is the dominant land use. ‘The index is a qualitative assessment ranking various factors such as salinity, nutrients and others from between 1 and 3.’
Water bodies in the GRNP test negative for vibro-vulnificus

Test results conducted by the Eden District Municipality in all water bodies in Wilderness and surrounds last week came back negative for Vibro vulnificus in water bodies in the Wilderness section of the Garden Route National Park (GRNP). SANParks scientists who are based in the Garden Route monitor water temperatures, salinity and other factors could confirm water temperatures for the Touws River averaged 23 degrees and salt levels were around 31. Temperatures for Swartvlei were at 26 degrees and about 11 for salt levels. Readings were taken in January and February 2016.

Scientists are convinced, the recent death of a man from vibro vulnificus in the Kaaimans River, which a few kilometers from the GRNP, was the rarest case ever.

Pathologists who were called after the Kaaimans situation diagnosed the bacteria as ‘vibrio vulnificus’. Scientists say it is triggered by extreme water temperature (it is active in water temperature between 21 and 31 degrees) and certain salinity levels. It occurs in brackish water, ‘in an interchange zone between freshwater and seawater.’ Brackish water is salt water and fresh water mixed together. It is saltier than fresh water, but not as salty as seawater. Salinity levels is the saltiness or dissolved salt content of a body of water.

According to a statement released by the Eden District Municipality, ‘the transmission of the bacteria is from eating raw or undercooked shellfish, particularly oysters harvested from warm waters. Infections may occur when open soft tissue wounds are exposed to warm estuaries.’ An alert was issued by the District Municipality to persons with underlying medical conditions, any chronic condition especially liver disease and diabetes to not swim with open wounds in brackish water as they may be at increased risk of serious infection. Infections are seasonal and 85% occur in the summer months. Transient environmental factors such as warm water and moderate salinity can increase the number of Vibrio vulnificus in shellfish.’ Some evident signs of infection include severe pain, diarrhoea, vomiting and abdominal pain.

Did you know?

By planting indigenous plants especially near a wetland could increase wetland protection? By not applying fertilizers or pesticides within ‘25 feet’ could also be protecting a wetland as this area would serve as a buffer zone?

Wetlands are important because they protect our shores, reduce the impacts of floods, absorb pollutants and improve water quality. They provide habitat for animals and plants and contain a wide diversity of life, supporting plants and animals that are found nowhere else.
...It should be noted in this regard that Government has gazetted it’s intention to pro claim a number of additional MPAs, including the Addo and Namaqua MPAs, which are zoned according to these principles. This is in accordance with the widely held international environmental principles of the aims of protected areas now including the sustainable use of natural resources, and the integration with broader social development processes, in order to support the core role of biodiversity conservation. This is recognized in the Phakisa Oceans Economy initiative which recognizes the need to balance the imperatives of conservation with sustainable resource use.

Should the Tsitsikamma MPA be re-zoned in order to allow limited fishing by local communities in the defined zones, it will provide a platform for SANParks to manage the MPA in cooperation with local communities rather than in conflict with these communities, which has largely been the case up until the current time. Thus far from representing a retreat from our mandate on the management of biodiversity in this MPA, the redesigning of the Tsitsikamma MPA in line with 21st century thinking will allow a far better opportunity for buy-in for conservation from these communities, thus securing the persistence of this MPA into the long term.

It should be noted that SANParks will be implementing monitoring of the priority areas to evaluate any changes in biodiversity and to assess management progress in accordance with SANParks Strategic Adaptive Management philosophy. A scientifically credible research and monitoring programme aims to produce scientific data that can be directly compared between areas and over time to facilitate future decision-making. This includes a five point social and ecological research and monitoring program along the Tsitsikamma MPA to quantify and evaluate the effects of local community fishing.

The proposed re-zonation of the MPA is in line with modern thinking around the design of MPA’s in order to balance biodiversity conservation with social justice and the legitimate needs of previously marginalised communities. The entire area of the Tsitsikamma MPA will also be expanded offshore in the south-western section providing additional reef habitat for spawning and reef fish population protection while increasing South Africa’s marine and coastal habitat types under protection. We are confident that, should the decision be that the regulations for re-zonation be approved, the partnership between the community and organs of the state will ensure the long term success of conservation efforts and the persistence of the Tsitsikamma MPA into the future.
Connecting society

Kids in Parks in Wilderness

*Muneer Moses narrates the story of how P&C and volunteers survived hosting more than 500 kids*

More than 500 learners visited the Wilderness section of the GRNP. So says Muneer Moses, the People & Conservation Coordinator for Wilderness ‘we ensured learners see as many attractions as possible and learn as much about the cultural history of the area. Learners visited the Woodville Big Tree was visited as well as the George museum.

The ecological significance of the Park was also shared with learners with a specific focus on the forest biome and the Swartvlei Beach. ‘There was a practical Rock pool fun exploration, where kids could delve into nature and identify various species.

As in every experience to a Kids in Parks Programme, says Moses ‘we work hard and play hard. We lined up some fun activities and allowed the kids to swim, canoe and play in the Touw River under the strictest supervision.’

‘We left the best for last daily when we’d sit around camp fires under the pitch black Wilderness skies, a perfect setting to talk about Careers in Conservation.'
New supply chain system
There is an effort to integrate systems starting with services. As from the 01st April 2016, service providers are to register on the Central Supplier Database (CSD). This effort driven by the National Treasury is to ensure all Government suppliers are managed from a central, transparent database. All suppliers who were registered on the SANParks database are now requested to apply on CSD if not registered there already to do any business with SANParks.
Registration is mainly online: www.csd.gov.za
Those with no access to the internet, can request assistance from SEDA (Small, Enterprise Development Agency), Thosong community centers and the Post Office.
According to Regional Finance Manager of the GRNP, Derec Giles, the following information is required for registration: ‘an active email address, cell phone number, an identity number, company registration number, and a tax reference number.’

Team finance conducted workshops about the new system (CSD) in all 3 sections of the GRNP.

Proposals under review by various committees
Water activities in the Knysna estuary were presented to interested bidders again. These include a sailing school, dinghies, stand-up paddling, kayaking, fishing cruises and others. The task team is in the process of evaluating proposals received from a recent call for proposals.

New concessionaire for Tsitsikamma
Treetop Zipline Adventure private partnership (PPP) was recently completed by the Business Development Division. So says Business Development Manager, Andile Namntu ‘the information memo was issued with PPP guidelines as contained in the National treasury regulations 16 issued according to the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA).’ He further adds ‘the SANParks strategic plan for commercialisation identified the PPP opportunity for ziplining in the Tsitsikamma indigenous forest.’
The process followed was to first advertise the opportunity to Regional and local media followed by a briefing session to potential bidders. The outcome of the evaluation committee is now under review at a national level.
Tourism
‘Adventure is in our nature’

Over 1000 people took the opportunity to walk the Garden Route National Park (GRNP) during the Easter Festival. The Garden Route National Park opened up its day hiking trails to nature lovers in support of the Garden Route Walking Festival. The most favoured trails in Wilderness was the Half Collared Kingfisher (a 7,3 km) route which attracted even more visitors outside of the walking festival. It is close to the Ebb & Flow Rest Camp, has numerous picnic spots and ends at a waterfall. Hikers have to use a pontoon at a river crossing, a kilometer after the start of the hike.

Of the 2 recently declared Green Flag status hikes in Knysna, SANParks opened up the Perdekop (in Harkerville). It is a 9,5 kilometer walk starting in front of the SANParks office in Harkerville. Green flag status is a global benchmark for hiking trails and includes the following criteria: Conservation status, health and safety measures, cleanliness and maintenance, sustainability, management and others.

Other Green Flag status hikes opened to hikers in the GRNP include the Waterfall (3km) & Mouth Trail hikes in Tsitsikamma. These are 2 of the 12 hikes with Green Flag status in the Tsitsikamma section of the Garden Route National Park (GRNP).

Organiser and founder of the Garden Route Walking Festival, Galeo Saintz says his team has made 2 observations from an ongoing study albeit inconclusive results: Firstly, over 30% of participants who responded to an online survey conducted by the team indicated they are from outside of the Garden Route. 20% of this amount travelled to the Garden Route specifically for the Walking festival. Secondly, over 80% of the respondents indicated they would certainly walk in the forest again!

‘Over 20,000 of the amount generated from the fest will be donated to non-Governmental organisations (NGOs) and nature-based organisations.’ SANParks has indicated interest to get involved again next year.

‘Ours is to encourage people to walk with and in nature. The walking festival provided this platform to people willing to walk through the Park via guided walks. We find there is a general interest to hike in the Park and the festival created enough awareness to encourage people to go walking in the Park.’ The Walking festival was held during the Easter Festival this year.
New Appointments

Congratulations to all environmental monitors who were re-hired for an extended 3 years. We are relieved to have you back onboard with SANParks and know you will fly the SANParks flag high!

Wilderness

Thembiile Mpongoza
Ranger Corporal, Wilderness

Veronique ‘Bianca’ Appels
General Worker

Skhumbuzo Bizane
General Worker

Knysna & Regional Office

Giovanni Mondeka
Field Ranger

Elton Daniels
Field Ranger, Harkerville

Siya Dyubere
Supply Chan Practitioner, Finance
Regional Office

Melaney Barrath
Marketing Coordinator
Frontier & Garden Route NP

Bulelwa Dassie
Communications Intern: GRNP

Tsitsikamma

Francois Boesak
General Worker

Macmillan Agulhas
Field Ranger

Victor Cunningham
Senior Section Ranger, Tsitsikamma
We bid farewell to Werner Viviers who used to work in Tsitsikamma (Storms River Rest Camp), as part of the tourism team. Viviers now works for the Misty Mountain Reserve (Tsitsikamma) as a Marketing Manager. We wish Werner the best of luck in his new position and trust he will excel as he did in the GRNP.

We bid farewell to Hosia Maibelo, who worked in the Tsitsikamma section’s technical team (Storms River Rest Camp). We wish Hosia well in his new endevour!

We also bid farewell to Oom Adolf Swartz who had worked for SANParks for over 30 years in the Wilderness section of the GRNP. We wish him all the best in the new phase of his life. Please take time to rest lots Oom Adolf!

Oom Adolf receives his certificate from Senior Section Ranger, Nellie Grootendorst and is congratulated by other colleagues!

Pinkie Mbali who was an intern in the People & Conservation Office (P&C, Knysna)

Patricia Koli, who worked as the PA for the Area Manager: Tsitsikamma has also accepted an offer at Head Office and will be working closely with the ME: Tourism & Marketing. We know you will do well in your new position and wish you the best of luck Pat!
‘It’s not about vanity, it’s about visibility’ is the global campaign’s slogan. #RedMyLips campaign

The General Manager of the GRNP met staff to encourage the break of silence and more action against sexual abuse. ‘Sexual abuse can be to both men and women.’ Speaking at a gathering on the last day of the RedMyLips campaign, Bunding-Venter gave an analogy of the colour ‘red’ and its various stereotypes in various communities.

The campaign in the GRNP was presented with lots of humour and giggling but with a serious underlying take home message.

Sexual Violence is a term that describes a wide range of behaviors including:

- invasion of space & leering
- sexual harassment in person or online
- taking and/or distributing sexual photos/videos without consent
- unwanted sexual touching, kissing, groping
- vaginal, anal, or oral penetration without consent
- sexual contact with someone who is incapacitated or unable to give consent
- child sexual abuse
- human trafficking
#RedMyLips