WILDERNESS ISSUES IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

Freek Venter
South Africa only recently introduced legislation for formal wilderness protection – Protected Areas Act (Act 57 of 2003).

Previously legal wilderness protection was restricted to Forest Act - associated with the commercial forestry industry (including cultivation of exotic plantations).

Groundbreaking work by a few individuals, certain conservation agencies and the Wilderness Action Group, but very little has been done by the state.
South Africa has 403 protected areas:
6 638 658 ha (5.4% land area)
Wilderness - a perception issue
Kruger National Park boundary
Conservation management may also interfere with wilderness objectives.
Objectives for the designation of wilderness areas

- to protect and maintain the natural character of the environment, biodiversity, associated natural and cultural resources and the provision of environmental goods and services;
- to provide outstanding opportunities for solitude;
- to control access which, if allowed, may only be by non-mechanised means.
“wilderness area” means an area designated ... for the purpose of retaining its intrinsically wild appearance and character or capable of being restored to such and which is undeveloped and roadless, without permanent improvements or human habitation
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EXISTING WILDERNESS

- Identified & zoned
- Proclaimed and protected officially
Potential future wilderness
* ID & zoned
* 100-200 year vision
* Rehabilitation plan
Past level of fragmentation in KNP

LEVEL OF FRAGMENTATION

No. of PATCHES - 481
Average size of PATCHES - 5728 ha

- No. PATCHES
  - >1000 ha - 290
  - 1000 - 5000 ha - 142
  - 5000 - 10 000 ha - 44
  - >10 000 ha - 5

- 60%
- 30%
- 9%
- 1%
Level of Wilderness fragmentation after removal of selected management roads.

LEVEL OF FRAGMENTATION

No. of PATCHES - 162
Average size of PATCHES - 15 200ha

No. PATCHES
<1000 ha - 5
1000 - 5000 ha - 88
5000 - 10 000 ha - 30
>10 000 ha - 39

54%
24%
19%
3%
### PROTECTED AREA ZONES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complies fully with the criteria of and is designated in terms of the Protected Areas Act</td>
<td>Managed to protect and maintain natural and cultural resources biodiversity and the provision of environmental goods and services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An area retaining an intrinsically wild appearance and character, or capable of being restored to such and which is undeveloped and roadless, without permanent improvements or human habitation.</td>
<td>Apply principles of wilderness management (needs to be compiled as a norm). Only apply limited management interventions and these may only under be carried out in extreme conditions applying “tread lightly” principles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An area that provides outstanding opportunities for solitude.</td>
<td>Restrict visitor numbers. Allow for rest periods of no visitors. No contact between different user groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An area with awe inspiring natural characteristics.</td>
<td>Leave no trace ethic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sight and sound of human habitation and activities barely discernable and at far distance (except your own group)</td>
<td>Over flying by aircraft to be strictly controlled.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**ACTIVITIES:** “No-trace-left” activities; guided nature observation on non-defined hiking routes, research, bird watching. “pack it in and pack it out” principle.

**FACILITIES:** No structures excepting those existing structures of cultural significance (guided by SAHRA). No audible equipment or communications structures. Facilities serving the zone placed in adjoining zones and in particular the Primitive zone.

**ACCESS:** Non mechanised access for visitors and management. Numbers of groups and numbers per group to be set. Non-motorised river rides acceptable.

**ROADS:** No roads.
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<td>Provides a &quot;Wilderness&quot; experience, but does not comply with the criteria for legal designation as Wilderness</td>
<td>Need to mitigate impacts of visible and audible human activities impacting from outside the zone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human impacts (evidence of human use / existence) from outside the zone may be visible or audible from certain vantage points.</td>
<td>No mechanised access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could only be rehabilitated to or designated as Wilderness in the long term.</td>
<td>&quot;Leave no trace&quot; camping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FACILITIES: No facilities. Facilities serving the zone placed in adjoining zones and in particular the Primitive zone. No audible equipment or communications structures.</td>
<td>No new accommodation (eg hiking huts etc) Existing cultural buildings could be used in line with guidelines set by SAHRA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCESS: Non-motorised. Parking provided in Primitive zone.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROADS: No roads, but C1, C2 or D for management access under controlled levels of use.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Provides basic self catering facilities and access to Remote zone and Wilderness Area.</td>
<td>Roads or other infrastructure limited to minimum required to serve Remote/Wilderness zones for both recreation and management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access is limited to users of the facilities. Limited number of users.</td>
<td>Minimum contact between users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views of human activities and development outside of the park may be visible from this zone.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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**ACTIVITIES:** 4x4 routes (sensitively planned and dictated by topography), Access routes to facilities serving Remote and Wilderness zones. Horse trails.

**FACILITIES:** Small permanent "touch the earth lightly" camps, No cell phone coverage/usage.

**ACCESS:** Limited and controlled mechanised access on designated routes.

**ROADS:** B2, C1 or C2.
Welcome To The
MAKULEKE
CONTRACT PARK
The Heart of the
Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park
Legal Context

- The Protected Areas Act (57 of 2003)
  - “To promote sustainable utilisation of protected areas for the benefit of people, in a manner that would preserve the ecological character of such areas.”
  - “Enter into a written agreement with a local community inside or adjacent to a park, reserve or site to allow members of the community to use in a sustainable manner biological resources in the park …”.
WILDERNESS TRAILS
SUMMARY

- Immediately proclaim existing wilderness areas
- Identify, zone and proclaim potential future wilderness areas (areas that have the potential to be rehabilitated to wilderness)
- The perceived negative effect of hunting versus the perceived positive outcome of ecotourism needs to be scrutinized.
- Think carefully about the future use of land successfully claimed by communities
- Adapt management styles in wilderness areas
- Generate wilderness awareness through every possible avenue
THANK YOU