The 7th World Wilderness Congress

Wilderness and Human Communities

BY VANCE G. MARTIN and ANDREW MUIR

The World Wilderness Congress (WWC) returned to its African roots in November 2001 when it met in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. The 7th WWC—after a planning period beset with political, financial, timing, and terrorism-related issues—was arguably the most productive of the WWC series, which began in Africa in 1977. And, by unanimous agreement, both the debate and the after-hours sessions were filled with an enlivening spirit that overpowered the issues and obstacles, making the road to practical accomplishments both productive, enjoyable, and full of hope and anticipation.

The WWC has convened seven times—South Africa (Johannesburg), 1977; Australia, 1980; Scotland, 1983; United States, 1987; Norway, 1993; India, 1998; South Africa (Port Elizabeth), 2001—and is the longest-running international public environmental forum. A project of The WILD Foundation, each WWC is hosted by a local non-governmental organization (NGO) in partnership with WILD and a number of relevant host-country organizations, agencies, and companies. The WWC has no central, ongoing budget and must raise its funds each time from local, regional, and international sources. It meets when timing, issues, needs, and resources converge.

In the recognition that the world is only diversifying more rapidly and in all ways, an important principle in planning and implementing the WWC is “focused diversity.” Despite the difficulties inherent in such an approach, solutions are ultimately more effective and long-lasting when crafted by diverse but focused input—including technical, cultural, political, financial, social, and spiritual—and through a process that utilizes different methods of thinking, assimilation, and living. Therefore, the WWC is multidisciplinary and involves a range of people and perspectives—from ministers of state to philosophers, scientists to game rangers, businesspeople to artists—representing government, education, the private sector, and NGOs.

In planning the 7th WWC and aiming for quality objectives and accomplishments, an even higher priority than usual was placed on professional, racial, and gender diversity. This began with the membership of the Executive Committee itself, which was charged with overseeing all aspects of the 7th WWC, and included senior figures in politics, finance, business, and culture from government, private, and NGO sectors—both men and women, the majority being nonwhite. The body of 7th WWC delegates—700
people from 45 nations— included almost 250 nonwhite field professionals, community activists, and others on full scholarship provided by the 7th WWC. Also among the delegates were 25 to 30 members of South Africa’s National Parliament from the Environment Portfolio Committee—a tremendous symbol of South Africa political interest in the 7th WWC.

The program also reflected significant professional and racial diversity. The content was presented by a majority of either nonwhite professionals, or by multiracial partnerships. Female presenters were encouraged and included as often as possible. Further, the structure of the program was designed to use both right and left brain functions, the heart as well as the head, by interspersing cultural elements, outdoor social functions, and field trips with the normal plenary, working sessions, and panels. In addition, the service aspects of the 7th WWC included, and directed benefits to, many local communities in the local area and in South Africa as a whole—such as the making of delegate badges, briefcases made of native materials, special taxi-driver training, daily cultural programs, community workshops, craft production and sales, and more.

As much as it emphasizes a holistic approach to creating conservation solutions, the WWC is also action-oriented and strives to produce practical results through collaboration and cooperation. Some notable results include:

- **Immediate Funding**—The Global Environmental Facility of the World Bank announced grants of $1 million each to the Baviaanskloof Wilderness Area in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, and to Angola to assist the Kissama Foundation’s work to rehabilitate Angola’s Quiçama National Park.

- **Private Sector Wilderness**—Shamwari, a private game reserve outside Port Elizabeth, announced the first private sector wilderness in Africa, and a unique and creative legal structure for its designation. The reserve’s lawyers worked with owner Adrian Gardiner to draft legal title restrictions to declare and protect over 3,000 hectares (7,500 acres)—or 16% of Shamwari—as wilderness, placed under legal servitude to the Wilderness Foundation of South Africa, founded by Ian Player and headed by Andrew Muir. Within 24 hours, other private landowners at the WWC announced that they would do the same, including two from Namibia, Carl Hilker and Albie Brueckner.

- **Murphy Morobe,** (Chairman, SA National Parks), Chairman of the 7th WCC. Photo © The WILD Foundation.

- **Credo Mutwa,** Zulu prophet and healer, with Gwen Mhlangu and other SA Parliamentarians. Photo © The WILD Foundation.
• Wilderness Legislation—Wilderness conservation efforts in Africa received a boost through an announcement at the WWC by the government of Namibia that it was in the process of drafting national wilderness legislation to cover both public parks and private conservation areas. There are also plans for a new wilderness national park in southwestern Namibia, as well as a three-country transfrontier park (with wilderness zones) stretching from the Northern Cape Province of South Africa, all the way through Namibia, into southern Angola.

• New Fundraising Initiatives—Additional funding for wilderness will come through three new initiatives: My Acre of Africa, the African Protected Areas Initiative, and the Ian Player Wilderness Experience Scholarship Fund. My Acre of Africa is an Internet-based public fundraising strategy for southern African parks, protected areas, and local communities. (Details are available at www.myacreofafrica.com.) The African Protected Areas Initiative is a strategy to be developed and launched at the 5th World Parks Congress in Durban in June 2003 with numerous international agencies, funders, and NGOs to address the need for additional funding for all African protected areas. Finally, a new scholarship program to support members of economically and socially disadvantaged communities in experiencing wilderness areas—the Ian Player Scholarship Fund—was launched and initially funded during the 7th WWC.

• Conservation Education—Private sector support for environmental education came from Johnnic Holdings Ltd, South Africa’s media giant and one of the country’s largest black-controlled companies. Chairman Cyril Ramaphosa announced that conservation education was now one of only two top priorities in his group’s corporate social and community outreach program.

• Tropical Forests—Potential United States legislation to help protect tropical forests was also announced at the WWC. Congressman
E. Clay Shaw announced the imminent introduction into the U.S. Congress of a bill addressing the need to stem the tide of unsustainable logging of tropical forests, using a number of different financial mechanisms such as debt swaps and the buyback of logging rights.

- Wilderness Training—A group of 20 wildlands managers and wardens from 13 countries graduated from a special training course on wilderness management, which was held in the week before the WWC (see article by Draper and Watson in this issue). This course was accredited and advised by the University of Natal, led by the Wilderness Action Group, and funded by the Sierra Club, WILD, and others, with participation by the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute, University of Montana, and U.S. Forest Service.

- Resolutions and The Port Elizabeth Accord—Over 30 resolutions, targeted at specific wilderness and environmental issues, were adopted by the 7th WWC for use in local, national, and international campaigns, addressing issues from Asia to Africa to the Americas. Embracing these specific concerns and more, The Port Elizabeth Accord (see sidebar) reconfirmed the importance, urgency, and possibilities for constructive action in all the issues presented and discussed at the 7th WWC.

In addition to the above practical accomplishments, The WILD Foundation presented its most recent Green Leaf Award. Awarded twice previously (to the People’s Republic of China, and to the people of the Tamyr Peninsula, Russia), the Green Leaf Award goes to.

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Port Elizabeth Accord of the 7th World Wilderness Congress 8 November 2001

At this time in our history, when the shadow of uncertainty pervades our thoughts and the presence of peril dictates our actions, all of our aspirations and initiatives must by necessity be positive, determined, visionary, collaborative.

It is with this realization that 700 delegates from 42 nations convened in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, for the 7th World Wilderness Congress. During the course of a week of presentations, consultations, debates, and decisions by a diverse array of people, cultures, professions, and perspectives, covering both challenges and solutions, some certainties were confirmed, namely that:

- Wilderness, wildlands, and wildlife—on land, in the sea, and in the air—are a resource of fundamental, irreplaceable value and substance in all human endeavor; and
- Wild nature is essentially more than a resource, rather being The Source of a particular gift of strength, sanity, and inspiration in a modern and fragmented world; and further,
- Wilderness—all of its many services and values—undeniably informs and supports human communities and is an essential element of the spirit and practicality of the 21st century.

However, our convention recognized the inescapable truth: where vast wilderness once surrounded and supported humankind, pervading and persisting with ease, it is now small and dispersed islands in a sea of humanity, retreating daily while assaulted by human numbers and greed, and cloaked by an atmosphere which is not of its own making, nor life-giving.

As a result, our convention reconfirmed the basic principles of international collaboration, cross-cultural cooperation, human equity, and freedom, combined with direct personal responsibility for the present and future well-being of wilderness, wildlands, and wildlife, on land, in the sea, and in the air.

Therefore, in light of this reality and these principles, we are resolved to act decisively, with intention, power, and determination, on the agreements, resolutions, and actions of this 7th World Wilderness Congress.
an individual, group, or country for exemplary action on behalf of wilderness, wildlife, and environmental protection. The 7th WWC Green Leaf Award winner was “The people of Angola and the Fundacao Quicama, for vision and perseverance on behalf of wilderness and wildlife in Angola,” and was presented at the WWC to Angola’s minister of fisheries and environment, Ms. Fatima Jardim, represented by Angola’s ambassador, Sr. Rodriguez.

Port Elizabeth (Eastern Cape, South Africa) was an excellent venue and host. The first two days of the 7th WWC—The World Wilderness Summit—were held in the beautifully restored Feather Market Hall (a 19th-century packing and auction house for ostrich feathers!). After a day of field trips to local natural and cultural areas, the final four days—the Wilderness Working Sessions—convened at the new Board Walk Conference Center, facing the beach. In addition to plenary sessions focused on international and regional wilderness issues, the afternoon technical sessions and workshops included:

- Science and Stewardship to Protect and Sustain Wilderness Values (Dr. Alan Watson, Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute)
- Wilderness and Jurisprudence (The Gaia Foundation)
- The Role of Legislators in Protecting Wilderness Areas (GLOBE, Southern Africa)
- Wilderness of the Mind and Spirit (Bill Petrie)
- Wilderness and Public Involvement—The Sierra Club Model (Bruce Hamilton)
- Sustainable Tourism—Africa (Michael Sweatman)
- The Open Council (Marilyn Riley, Dr. John Hendee, and Patrick Marsh)

The illustrated and published proceedings of the plenary presentations will be available late in 2002 at www.fulcrum-books.com (where one can currently also purchase the proceedings of the 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th WWC). The Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute will also publish the proceedings of their technical session, Science and Stewardship to Protect and Sustain Wilderness Values.

Wilderness and Human Communities: The 7th WWC demonstrated that not only is this topic important, but the will and expertise are available and eager to be applied in helping wilderness and human communities work together. Cooperation and collaboration are the catalytic factors. Let’s get on with it!

“Wilderness has never been as important as it is today. But it is not as important today as it will be tomorrow.”

— Vance Martin, President, The WILD Foundation
Policy, Perspective, Culture and Action— the 7th WWC

Dancers look at pictures taken of them during their performance on Charlotte Baron’s digital camera.

Dr. Vandana Shiva.

Philemon Malima (dark suit, Minister of Environment and Tourism, Namibia) and some of his staff.

The Soweto String Quartet.

Dr. Ian Player, founder of the WWC.

Not all of the cultural entertainment was of African origin.

Members of several South African dance troupes take a break between performances.

Dr. Walter Lusigi, Global Environmental Facility of the World Bank.