**Summary of Nature Reserve Assessment and Curatorship Protocols August 2020**

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The RENR remains an important component in the Rooiels vision and our designation as a Conservancy village. The reserve is situated in the middle of a built-up area, effectively providing a core area for conservation in a conservation conscious village. The RENR also forms a ‘stepping-stone’ from Kogelberg Core to the village coastal strip. It is a key element in the aesthetic appeal of our village and a motivating factor in our applications (as per the mandate given by stakeholders at 2018 RERA and 2019 Cascades meeting) for Rooiels to be designated as a buffer zone to the protected area of the Koegelberg Biosphere reserve.

*Our primary goal is conservation of this precious resource and our objective is to enhance, improve, maintain and secure our Rooiels Nature Reserve*

* **Maintain and restore natural functioning of ecosystems**
* **Preserve any unspoilt ecosystem in its natural state**
* **Protect flora and fauna species and enhance biodiversity**
* **Preserve the natural characteristics of the landscape**

**Proposed action plan**

Rejection of burning the vegetation and rejection of the proposed division of the nature reserve into 4 sections. Consultation with experts and closer assessment of the plant biodiversity concluded that this is not appropriate and instead strongly endorsed the removal of exotic plants. Any removal of deadwood to be carefully undertaken tp ensure that some deadwood is left as habitat, for composting and to minimize plant loss.

**Due to increased erf occupation and a consequent decrease in undeveloped ‘natural’ areas, the reserve will not be burnt**. There is no alternative habitat for insects, reptiles, small mammals and birds currently living in the reserve. A previous burn did not see a significant improvement in the health of the reserve vegetation and the main plant parasite infestations occur in the 1996 burn area. Current research has begun to question whether certain fynbos should ever be burnt. Burn rehabilitation is more appropriate where one has a large amount of alien plant encroachment or very mature (20 year+) fynbos whose seed germination is triggered by smoke / fire. Previous planned burns in the reserve were strongly opposed by some adjacent property owners. This presupposes an increasing and unviable liability risk.

Any **planned clearing** must be slow and intentional as the goal of any clearing of indigenous plant material is to provide opportunities for new growth. Concerns about deadwood fire-load **must be balanced** against the need to retain decomposing old plant growth that returns nutrients to the soil as well as providing both habitat and food for various bugs and small animals essential to sustain the ecosystem. The dead wood is also very important in protecting the new young plants establishing themselves again. It is essential that there is always some deadwood and brush left in the reserve.

**RENR road reserves** must be managed so that natural water drainage/seepage into the Reserve area is restored. Road grading has (in places) caused an imbalance between the height of the road and the reserve. The road reserves must not be cleared to the extent that they become informal parking spots. Presently the road reserves have a significant encroachment of alien grasses, parasite load and areas that have been damaged by heavy OM contract vehicles. Removal of alien plants and judicious removal of parasites and deadwood along the road reserves should be considered as this would promote new growth.

**Litter to be removed** from all areas. This is particularly relevant at the high water line after a NW wind.

**RENR MUST BE MONITORED IN REGARD TO FLORA AND FAUNA AT REGULAR INTERVALS.**

We need an updated general assessment of the ecological health-status of the reserve; particularly in regard to expected diversity and actual occurrence of both flora and fauna.

**Proposed monitoring projects**

1. Map and catalogue plants present in each sector. A long term plant mapping project is in progress. The data collected is entered into a software program that records botanical and common names, dates, locations and gives a brief description that includes medicinal or culinary uses.
2. Classify fynbos types and soil types in the reserve. Describe climatic conditions, the influence of sea / tides / spray. Assess and describe the fresh water seepage areas.
3. Maintain natural drainage into the reserve. It appears that the seepage of fresh water from our mountain slopes toward the coast has been interrupted by buildings, roads and lack of OM storm water management. This has a particular impact on the otters’ breeding habits as well as biodiversity and the vegetation in the reserve and along the coastal strip.
4. Catalogue fauna present in the reserve. Any proposed management or recreational activities in the reserve should be implemented in such a manner that there is limited disturbance to the existing ecosystems (e.g. breeding otters).
5. Investigate/invite the participation of university research students.
6. Maintain entrance signage and structures, paths and benches.

Please note that the founding document’s general by-laws state that “except for general maintenance (by means of natural materials only) and the maintenance of the existing two benches and three signposts, there shall be no development of any nature or description in the reserve.”

Investigate upgrading a portion of the existing paths so that they are wheelchair friendly. (The present wooden path structures are a good surface option but too narrow.)

The improvement and rebuilding of footpaths must remain within the existing path-footprint.

 Repair / replace existing signage regarding acceptable activities as well as informative / educational signage at the entrances

1. Parking. The parking space at Dassie Point is close to the North Rocklands entrance to the reserve. As per the founding document by-laws it would not be acceptable to encroach into the reserve to introduce extra parking. Considering the size of the reserve, it does not have the capacity to absorb large numbers of day visitors without compromising the various ecological systems, so an expanded parking area is unnecessary. Disabled access to the reserve falls into an ‘adventure’ category so cannot be facilitated in the same way as Botanical garden access.

**TO MAINTAIN**

* ***Conservation of indigenous flora and fauna*** - all veld to be maintained in its natural state by all means possible
* Protection of fynbos from alien vegetation encroachment and heavy parasite load
* Preservation of existing path, entrances and signage structures only
* Keep litter-free; maintain cleanliness of entrances (e.g. removal of dog scat)

**TO SECURE**

Ensure the safety of paths and viewing areas (e.g. ottergat) through liaison with RESA, ASK, SAPS and DAFF. The primary safety concern for reserve users is the presence of poachers

Maintain the legal status of the Rooiels Nature Reserve and secure and conserve its biodiversity