

Project Update: March 2011

On 9th February 2011, Renu-Karoo Veld Restoration cc opened its main road retail outlet for plants and seeds. Our hopes that more public exposure will assist the nursery component of the business to become economically viable seem to be realised because we doubled turnover in indigenous plant sales in March 2011. Excellent rains in early February led to seeding of grasses giving us the opportunity to provide 54 days temporary work to local women who gathered 60 kg of indigenous grass seed.

The process of formalising the conservation status of Wolwekraal Nature Reserve is now underway. A legal agreement between the Western Cape Conservation authority (CapeNature) and the owner (Sue Dean of Renu-Karoo) has been drawn up that makes the property a declared Nature Reserve for perpetuity in terms of section 23(3) and 35(3) of the National Environmental Management: protected Areas Act 57 of 2003. The advantages of this status are many fold. The property will be protected from mining exploration, will be eligible to benefit from government-funded invasive alien vegetation clearing programmes, and will have a better chance of receiving NPO support for activities such as fencing and erosion control.

Renu-Karoo contributed to conservation awareness in a number of ways in the first quarter of 2011. On 23rd February 2011, Sue and Richard Dean presented a talk entitled "Managing Roadside Biodiversity: Proposed training for Eden District Municipality" to the road maintenance division of a neighbouring municipality. Renu-Karoo ran two training sessions with Eden Municipality road workers to sensitise them to roadside biodiversity management issues including minimising damage to indigenous plants and recognition and removal of invasive alien plants. Follow-up monitoring was carried out to ascertain whether management had improved. Simple guidelines for use by team managers were prepared for the Municipality and posters illustrating indigenous and alien plants prepared and printed for display in Municipal employee tearooms.

As part of its environmental education outreach, Renu-Karoo presented a plant identification course for grade 11 students at Albert College on 9th February 2011. On 23rd March Renu-Karoo led an excursion for 30 school learners and their parent to generate awareness of the role of ecosystem services in water provision, and other issues concerning water use and riparian conservation in a desert environment. We also took 28 tourists and 13 University of Cape Town botany honours on guided nature walks in the first quarter of 2011. Our environmental activism included contribution of a biodiversity component to a critique of the proposal by Shell Exploration Company to evaluate potential for using hydraulic fracturing to obtain shale gas from sedimentary rock found throughout the Karoo, and representation of the local Karoo farmers association at shale gas exploration information meetings.

Summary of Renu-Karoo activities January-April 2011

- 01.03 New experiential trainee Nature Conservation students start at Renu-Karoo
- 01.25 Anita Wheeler CapeNature surveys boundary for Nature Reserve
- 02.08 Lawyers register deeds of Wolwekraal (Part 2) in terms of section 23 of Environmental Management Act as a Nature Reserve

- 02.09 Open Renu-Karoo Nursery Shop for business on 9 Feb 2011
- 02.11 TALK: Milton, S.J. & Dean, W.R.J. 2011. Managing Roadside Biodiversity: Proposed training for Eden District Municipality. Presented at Monthly Progress Report and Quality Assurance Meeting Technical Services Dept., Eden District Municipality, George. 2011.02.11.
- 02.15 Plant identification lesson Prince Albert College
January-end March 28 members of public, 13 university students and 30 school learners taken on nature walks
- 03.16 Town water use walk for 30 learners Albert College
- 03.16 Road-verge vegetation management talk and training on roadside near Herold
- 03.23 Contribute to discussions on Renosterveld restoration in the Table Mountain National Park at a meeting in Cape Town
- 03.24 Talk at Farmers Association congress on challenges of ecologically sustainable game farming
- 04.01 Talk on roadside vegetation management to Eden Municipality and members of the at the Garden Route Conservation Initiative
- 04.06 Roadside vegetation management training and monitoring for Eden Municipality
- 04.08 Attend a workshop on planning Payments for Environmental Services research project on a private nature reserve near Middelburg in the Eastern Karoo

Jan-April Attend four information meetings on Shale Gas hydraulic fracturing. Represent local farmer's anti-fracking lobby and prepare memo for them. Contribute a critical review of biodiversity aspects of fracking to the Havemann et al 2011 "A critical review of the application for a Karoo gas exploration right by Shell Exploration Company" (see <http://cer.org.za/hot-topics/karoo-fracking/> or <http://treasurethekaroo.blogspot.com/2011/04/critical-review-of-application-for.html>)



