

## WESTERN HEADS GOUKAMMA CONSERVANCY (WHGC)

Minutes of the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of the Conservancy, held at 10h30 on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2022, at the Brenton Community Hall.

### Present

Dave Edge (DE)	Chairperson of WHGC; Brenton Blue butterfly reserve
Johan Labuschagne (JL)	Deputy Chairperson WHGC; Owner Uitzicht 216 Ptn 46
Andre Kruger	Resident, Brenton-on-Sea
Amanda Louw	Resident, Brenton-on-Sea
Chris Gow	Exco member WHGC – Belvidere Estate
Christa le Roux	Exco member WHGC – biodiversity; Owner Uitzicht 216 Ptn 77
Guy Thesen	Exco member WHGC – Old Belvidere
Hanna Edge	Exco member WHGC – website and membership
Henk Meyer	Lake Brenton RPA
JH v d Westhuizen	Owner – Uitzicht 216 Ptn 16
Judy Harrison (JH)	Exco member WHGC – Secretary
Maretha Alant (MA)	SANParks
Niekie Lamprecht	Belvidere Estate
Peter Rimbault (PR)	Proxy for Investec – Owner of Uitzicht 216 Ptn 71 & 72
Susan Campbell	Exco member WHGC; Owner Uitzicht 216 Ptn 39 & 75
Tony Rischbieter (TR)	Chairperson Brenton Ratepayers Association & Brenton Owls
Vera Carstens	Buffalo Bay RPA

### Apologies

Angie Mitchell	Owner of Uitzicht 216 Ptn 48
Candace Myers	Eden Resilience Initiative NPC
Carlo van Tonder	CapeNature
Dirk Smit	Southern Cape Fire Protection Association
Henrico Knoersen	Exco member WHGC – Buffelsbaai
Hilton Stroebel	Knysna Municipality Councillor, Ward 5
Jacques Malan	Buffelsbaai Inwoners Vereniging
Makkie Scheepers	Knysna Alien Busters, Brenton on Sea
Megan Taplin	CEO Garden Route National Park, SANParks
Nicky Van Berkel	Botanical expert, Brenton-on-Sea
Pam Booth	Knysna Municipality Manager Environmental Planning
Peter Unite	Old Belvidere
Stephan Pienaar	Southern Right Estate – Uitzicht 216 Ptn 65
Steve Norton	Southern Right Estate

### 1. Welcome & apologies

The AGM was declared open at 10h30.

### 2. Confirmation of minutes of the 2020 AGM

Minutes of the previous AGM held on 12 August 2020 were approved by Chris Gow and seconded by Tony Rischbieter. It was noted that no AGM was held during 2021 because of COVID restrictions.

### 3. Matters arising

#### 3.1 Brenton–Goukamma Coastal Conservation Corridor (report by MA)

- The concept is to link the Goukamma Reserve and the Western Heads, by establishing contract national parks or nature reserves
- Some landowners have already committed and agreements are being drawn up.
- Biodiversity assessment are being done on the target properties.
- The nationally important Critically Endangered Knysna Sand Fynbos continues to recover after the 2017 fire.

- 3.2 Linking Security, Disaster Mitigation and Conservation Actions (report by TR)
- The committees of the WHGC and the Disaster Mitigation Committee of the Western Heads have linked up
  - A project has been established for the clearing and beautification of the White Bridge area to change the focus in this area to one of Conservation importance.
- 3.3 Alien Plant Task Team update (report by JH)
- Letters of non-compliance have been sent by the Knysna Municipality (Pam Booth – PB) to owners of Uitzicht properties overgrown with alien plants.
  - Some urban properties also need attention and to this end, TR is meeting with PB to assist identifying such properties. Follow up by **TR** and **PB**.
  - Niekie Lamprecht reported that Belvidere Estate is almost 95% clear of alien vegetation, but the stacks of vegetation still need to be removed.
- 3.4 Firebreaks update
- Report submitted by Dirk Smit – attached to these minutes. It is important that firebreaks are cut where there is alien vegetation, but avoid indigenous vegetation such as fynbos.
- 3.5 Butterfly Conservation and Brenton Blue Butterfly Reserve (BBBR) (report by DE)
- The Brenton Blue has not been seen at the BBBR since November 2017, and searches for the host plant *Indigofera erecta* at suitable sites between Wilderness and Nature’s Valley continue every September.
  - The host ant *Camponotus baynei* has not been recorded at the BBBR during regular surveys by Melanie de Mornay.
  - The Brenton Copper is doing well on several Uitzicht properties, but the Brenton Opal last seen in 1990, and appears to be extinct.
- 3.6 Property development proposals and projects (report by DE)
- Uitzicht 216 Ptn 78 – nothing further has been heard except that the property has recently been sold. **DE** to follow up.
  - Uitzicht 216 Ptns 71 and 72. PR reported that Investec are still evaluating development options. Follow up alien removal is required and **PR** will chase up Investec.
  - Uitzicht 216 Ptn 45 – still a huge problem although owner claims that he is implementing a medium term alien removal plan. **PB** to follow up and report back.
  - Uitzicht 216 Ptns 61 and 63 – SANParks and Cape Nature are evaluating a rezoning application for and the potential to establish a contract nature reserve (**MA**).
  - Uitzicht 216 Ptn – owned by Vernon Rice. Illegal vineyards with no permission obtained. Vernon Rice owns the vineyards, its next to the horse trails. The entire property was cleared of all vegetation, and the fynbos slashing continues. Follow up by **SC**.
  - Uitzicht 216 Ptn Huge house on the Western Head: SANParks and the Knysna Municipality Environmental Planning Department are pressuring the owner to comply with the development approval. Follow up by **PB** and **MA**.

#### 4. Chairman’s overview 2020–2022

##### a. Historical review

- WHGC was registered with CapeNature in October 2004.
- Constitution finalised July 2006
  - Defined area – coastline W Heads to Goukamma; river to N2; N2 to Knysna river; shoreline to W Heads
  - Members – “anyone residing in area or who wishes to support the conservancy”
  - Committee – Chair, Treasurer, Secretary elected by members
- Chairpersons
  - Susan Campbell 2006–2008
  - Chris Gow 2009–2018
  - Nicci Mander 2019–2020
  - Dave Edge 2020–2022
- Natural features & biodiversity

- Knysna Sand Fynbos is in the top 10 Critically Endangered vegetation types in South Africa.
- Endangered butterflies, including the Brenton Blue
- Coast – lagoon (N-S) corridor
- Coastal (E-W) corridor
- Western boundary with Goukamma Nature Reserve
- Properties
  - Uitzicht farms – agricultural (2 dwellings per erf)
  - Townships – Belvidere; Lake Brenton; Brenton-on Sea; Buffalo Bay
  - Plantations
- Challenges
  - Alien plants
  - Fire risk (e.g. June 2017)
  - Preserving biodiversity (plants & animals)
  - What development is appropriate?

**b. Executive Committee**

Established in September 2020 with 13 members, each responsible for a zone within the WHGC and a functional role.

- Alien plants – Judy Harrison
- Fauna & flora – Christa Le Roux
- Fire (risk) management – Dirk Smit
- Hiking/ biking trails – Johan Labuschagne
- Contract nature reserves – Johan Labuschagne
- Marketing & Public relations – Guy Thesen
- Fundraising & finances – Dave Edge
- Website – Hanna Edge

**c. Alien plants: Judy Harrison**

- 2017 fires presented an opportunity for land owners to clear their properties of alien vegetation.
- Landowners who have not kept up with alien clearing are now sitting with a very costly exercise and a massive fire risk.
- Knysna Alien Busters was established by Eden Resilience NPO with a group of 6 workers that clearing who have worked every week day since Feb 2018. Properties with willing landowners have been cleared very cost effectively.
- The remaining work in the WHGC does not keep them fully occupied and they have done much important clearing work in Eastford and along the Red Bridge Road.
- Many of the remaining problem properties in the WHGC are owned by parastatals or corporates (e.g. Transnet, Barloworld) and need massive alien vegetation removal costing millions. Johan Labuschagne is working on these problems.

**d. Fauna and Flora: Christa Le Roux**

- An important way to record our endangered fynbos plants is the iNaturalist App, which is easy to download and to use. Training in the use of the App can be given – contact Christa.
- The insect life in the WHGC includes important pollinators such as the Cape Honeybee.

**e. Fire Management: Dirk Smit**

See section 3.4 above.

**f. Trails: Johan Labuschagne**

- Trails were initiated in 2020. A lot of progress has been made with the trail between Belvidere to Buffalo Bay along the railway line and the Buffalo Bay road.

- Trails are an important way of sharing this special area in an environmentally responsible way with local communities, to foster an appreciation and love for this habitat and to creating support for conservation efforts.
- Trails **boost the Eco Tourism value** of the area and **support conservation efforts** whilst increasing the property value
- They create a deeper understanding, and support for the challenges that the owners and communities are facing

#### Aspects to consider

- **Terrain** as the conservancy area is comprising a series of wind-blown sand dunes running parallel to the coast which makes it exceedingly difficult terrain for hiking, trail running and mountain biking
- **Landowner permission:** The conservancy land ownership is fragmented, and many desirable trails cross over various properties that require permission from the owners
- **Environmental impact:** the first priority is the usage of existing roads and trails. These options must be exhausted before new trails could be considered to prevent damage to this sensitive environment. Any new trails will either require an OSCAE or BAR.
- **Fire risk & public liability mitigation**
- **Desirability from an Eco-tourism perspective:** Showcasing the endangered habitat without disturbing the natural processes, e.g. breeding or seed distribution
- Cost and funding model (ideally a **user pay model**)
- Any special **landowner requirements**
- **Interconnectivity** that creates short, medium, and long trails that caters for all abilities
- **Infrastructure** e.g. parking for users
- **Invasive aliens removal** and **reduction of fire risk** (access for fire suppression and fire break support)

#### WHGC Trail Network Committee:

- Johan Labuschagne, Owner of Uitzicht 46/216
- Richard Muller, Corrie Muller, Jacques Malan, Pieter Carstens – **Buffelsbaai Ratepayers**
- Niekie Lambrecht & Chris Slabbert – **Belvidere Homeowners Association (BHOA)**
- Judy Harrison and Tony Rischbieter – **Brenton Ratepayers**
- Andre Reb – Belvidere

#### Other key role players

- Barloworld
- PG Bison
- SANPARKS & Cape Nature, Knysna Municipality, Eden District Municipality and Transnet

#### Long term goals

- Improved the access criteria and method that will enable access agreements
- If needed - Establish “user pay” principles and method

#### Expand trail network

- prioritized by WHGC member needs and key criteria
- Route markings (that market WHGC)
- Integrate with any SANPARKS and Cape Nature trails
- Eco-Tourism Product establishment
- Establish financial and other support from Trail Users, Knysna Municipality, Knysna Tourism, Communities, etc.
- Guided Eco tours on the trails for educational purposes
- Establish a strong “Tourism Product” of integrated hiking, running and cycling trails that will raise awareness of the WHG fauna and flora conservation.
- Presentation attached.

#### **g. Contract Nature Reserves:**

- Johan Labuschagne is busy contacting the land owners to discuss this option with them.
- There is a “basket of incentives” for the landowner when they enter contract agreements with Cape Nature / SANParks.

- The owner has full use of the land, but part of it it becomes a nature reserve. There are tax rebates, tax breaks, alien vegetation control, security (?), firebreaks cut, etc.
- No mining, expropriation, or property development allowed, but the benefits are considerable.
- Creates a link with the Garden Route Biosphere Reserve.

#### **h. Marketing and PR: Guy Thesen**

- Linking Goukamma, Buffalo Bay and Brenton allows for a continuous crossing of wildlife, plants and humans.
- The mission is to preserve this area without breaking it into small pieces
- Ensuring no mass development.
- Strive to restore the area ecologically.
- It has a Maritime Reserve
- It has the sand dune fynbos protected area
- Investec may play a key role moving forward, looking at a visionary development in an environmental area.
- Future values in this area: space, birds, fynbos, animals and insects.
- Estate Agents need to be educated

#### **i. Fundraising and finances: Dave Edge**

- Bank account to be opened
- Non-profit organisation to be registered
- Official membership of the WHGC to be confirmed by payment of a subscription fee (R 50 per individual member) to cover the administration overheads (e.g. website hosting, printing, stationery, etc)

#### **j. Website and Membership:**

- Website: [westernheadsgoukamma.co.za](http://westernheadsgoukamma.co.za)
- Facebook page
- Link the ratepayers associations and large land owners on these pages.
- Our constitution makes provisions for there to be **members**, whose roles are to:
  - Elect and hold accountable the committee
  - Raise any issues of concern with the committee
  - Volunteer to assist the committee when they are able and willing
  - Promote the aims and objectives of the conservancy
  - If they so wish, to be elected to any position on the committee
  - Pay an annual subscription to the WHGC

### **5. Regional Issues:**

#### **a. Buffalo Bay**

- Fire breaks cleared
- Road verges cleared
- Alien Busters have quoted
- International Spring Beach Clean-up participant
- Beachfront beautified with murals and mosaics

#### **b. Brenton on Sea**

- Pavement Proud and Municipal area clean up
- Mosaic Project
- Wildlife WhatsApp group

#### **c. Lake Brenton**

- Alien vegetation still a problem on a number of properties
- Stormwater issues: urgent repairs needed

**d. Belvidere**

- Firebreaks needed and Transnet areas infested with aliens
- Informing residents about conservation
- Old Belvidere and Belvidere working together

**6. Election of new Chairperson**

Dave Edge tendered his resignation as Chairperson

**a. Nominations and elections**

- Johan Labuschagne was nominated and unanimously accepted as the 2022 Chairperson.
- Dave Edge was nominated and elected as the Vice Chairperson and Treasurer
- Judy Harrison was nominated and accepted as Secretary

**7. Objectives for the coming year: Johan Labuschagne:**

- Thank you for electing me. It will be a privilege and a responsibility
- Hoping to bring new energy and ideas but Dave Edge restructured the Committee and it worked well.
- The Committee will continue with streams and add projects.
- Members will hopefully support the focus areas.
- Membership list to be formalised to comply with the constitution
- Incentivise large land owners to conserve their properties
- Sharing of information and communication
- Biggest risk is not development but alien vegetation. Education of land owners regarding alien vegetation is required
- New owners and old residents are not aware of the biodiversity value of the area and what environmental damage has already been done, and continue to create, on some properties.

**8. General issues**

Peter Rimbault explained the example of Umhlanga, which is being improved through “Private/ Public Partnerships” and the implementation of “Special Rating Area” policies. This could have application in the WHGC, where some agricultural properties set aside for conservation could enjoy lower municipal rates.

**9. Closure of meeting**

The meeting was closed at 12h30 with thanks to all those who had attended and contributed.

---

**Johan Labuschagne – Chairperson**

---

**Judy Harrison – Honorary Secretary**