

National Biodiversity Planning Forum

Background

Established in 2004, the National Biodiversity Planning Forum is an annual event providing an opportunity for individuals, agencies and departments involved in spatial biodiversity planning to share and synthesise valuable lessons from biodiversity planning projects across South Africa. The Forum is intended primarily for those involved in the technical aspects of biodiversity planning and the production of biodiversity planning products. Although the core focus of the Forum is on systematic biodiversity planning a key theme is planning for implementation. Much of the biodiversity planning done in South Africa underpins strategic interventions and supports improved environmental decision-making.

The Forum attracts practitioners, scientists and managers from a range of institutions and organisations including national, provincial and local government, conservation NGOs, universities and research institutes and independent biodiversity planning consultants. The Forum has seen huge growth in numbers over the last 9 years, from 45 participants to over 180 participants at the 2012 Forum. The Forum also encourages students and interns to attend and offers funding, when possible, to support student involvement.

Each year the Forum identifies key issues that are presented, discussed and debated in plenary and parallel sessions.

Forum objectives

The Forum has a number of key objectives including:

- Sharing of lessons learnt from systematic biodiversity planning initiatives including review of implementation effectiveness
- Introducing aspects of advanced biodiversity planning
- Providing case studies that highlight the challenges of planning for implementation
- Contributing to guidelines and standards for systematic biodiversity planning
- Building networks for better communication among the various projects and agencies in the country
- Developing capacity in the biodiversity planning sector through sharing of experiences and the introduction to new innovations
- Investigating training needs

National Biodiversity Planning Forum 2005-2013



Didema, 2005



Blyde, 2006



Pilanesburg, 2007



Mpekweni, 2008



Pumula, 2009



Bela-Bela, 2010



Wilderness, 2011



Skukuza 2012



Golden Gate, 2013



10th Biodiversity Planning Forum

7–10 May 2013, Golden Gate Highlands National Park

A ten year evolution of biodiversity planning

By Marilyn Martin-Vermark

The Golden Gate Hotel in the Golden Gate Highlands National Park was abuzz in May 2013, as representatives from across the country made their way to the annual National Biodiversity Planning Forum. This year the Forum celebrated its 10th year, since its inception in 2004. The Biodiversity Planning Forum was established to provide an opportunity for individuals, agencies and departments involved in spatial biodiversity planning to share and synthesize valuable lessons from biodiversity planning projects across South Africa. The core focus of the Forum is on systematic biodiversity planning, with a key theme being planning for implementation. Much of the biodiversity planning done in South Africa underpins strategic interventions and supports improved environmental decision-making.

After the official welcome and opening address by SANBI's CEO, Tanya Abrahamse, the Forum was in full swing with a suite of interesting and informative presentations that focused on key issues that were discussed and debated in plenary and parallel sessions from 7 – 10 May 2013. Dee Fischer from the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) delivered the keynote address on 'Streamlining environmental planning in Strategic Integrated Projects (SIPs). Government recently adopted the National Infrastructure Plan, which intends to improve the delivery of basic services by addressing the infrastructure backlog, as well as strengthening the economy through the development of infrastructure to supply the country's future needs. Eighteen (18) SIPs have been developed and will spearhead this infrastructure investment. DEA has embarked on a process to look at the environmental impacts of these SIPs in a more strategic and coordinated fashion, as the SIPs are likely to trigger a many EIAs. Biodiversity planning is being seen as one of the key tools for informing the Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) that DEA plan to undertake, as well as to identify areas of high sensitivity that it should be screened out as development options (i.e. no-go areas).

As this was the 10th National Biodiversity Planning Forum, Fahiema Daniels presented on 'The evolution of biodiversity planning in South Africa' and provided a clear snapshot of a suite of work in biodiversity planning spanning three decades but specifically highlighting the last 10 years. Although biodiversity planning for terrestrial and freshwater (rivers) dates back to the seventies, most of this work was done in silos. Biodiversity planning has moved to become more integrated and holistic, especially with the inclusion of the marine component through the work done in the National Spatial Biodiversity Assessment, 2004 (NSBA). Milestones and highlights included the adoption of the use of systematic conservation planning techniques; the development of consistent terminology for critical biodiversity areas; enabling user friendly products; and the use of a common set of tools that is useful for planning and decision making.

"Over the past 10 years, the Biodiversity Planning Forum has facilitated a community of practice which has allowed for innovation in biodiversity planning and biodiversity plans now have more of an impact because they are designed more cognisant of the target audience", said Daniels.

The Forum' programme coordinator, Tammy Smith, presented on 'Ten years of the National Biodiversity Planning Forum'. Smith highlighted several policy products that were enabled and or influenced by the Biodiversity Planning Forum including the NSBA 2004, and the National Biodiversity Assessment (NBA) 2011. The list of products also includes the National Protected Area Expansion Strategy (NPAES), the Provincial Protected Area Expansion Plans, the listing of threatened terrestrial ecosystems, guidelines for Offshore Marine Protected Area (OMPA), an Atlas of Freshwater Ecosystem Priority Areas in South Africa, and the development and or initiation of provincial and sub-provincial biodiversity plans for all 9 provinces.

Attendees indulged in active discussions in the various sessions, specifically the discussion on 'Developing metrics for biodiversity offsets – why biodiversity plans are fundamental to getting offsets right', where offset approaches used overseas were discussed and contrasted with the biodiversity planning-based approach that is being proposed for South Africa. SANBI, at the request of DEA, is in the process of developing a National Policy Framework for Biodiversity Offsets aimed at regularizing the interpretation and implementation of biodiversity offsets throughout the country. The 'Mining and biodiversity' session– two sectors historically perceived as competing – allowed for a panel discussions on different approaches to getting the biodiversity message across, understood and used in this key production sector; and debated proactive spatial and land use planning, reactive EIA and regulatory approaches, utilizing market mechanisms, offsets, training, mainstreaming into industry practice, as well as advocacy. Although the panel discussion focused on mining, lessons and conclusions were relevant for all production sectors. A brief introduction on the recently launched 'Mining and Biodiversity Guidelines: Mainstreaming biodiversity into the mining sector' was offered; with specific focus on the spatial data, how they should and shouldn't be used, and how to link them to planning and assessments, what the guidelines mean for biodiversity planners, biodiversity specialists, environmental consultants, and conservation agencies or NGO staff members.

For more information on the 2013 or future BPFs please contact Tammy Smith (t.smith[at]sanbi.org.za)

