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## STRONG SUPPORT FOR DECLARATION OF PONGOLA BUSH PROTECTED ENVIRONMENT

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Dr B.M. Radebe, the KwaZulu-Natal Member of the Executive Council for Agriculture and Environmental Affairs, has gazetted the intent to declare Pongola Bush as a Protected Environment under Protected Areas Act. Pongola Bush, which includes valuable highveld **grasslands** and associated forests, is located in Northern KwaZulu-Natal, between Wakkerstroom and Paulpietersberg, on the border between KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga. The stewardship project is a partnership of ten committed landowners, the WWF Enkangala Project, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, and the SANBI Grasslands Programme.

The site covers a total of 9258 ha characterized by relatively intact **grasslands** containing a wealth of plant, bird and mammal species, many of which are endemic and some of which are Red Listed (and thus in need of protection). Protection of this site will contribute towards achieving national grassland conservation objectives through conserving (and rehabilitating where necessary), a representative sample of Wakkerstroom/Luneberg Grasslands and Paulpietersberg Moist Grassland, including the **ecological** processes that are responsible for generating and maintaining this grassland and its diversity. If this was not enough, the site is also particularly important for freshwater systems in the area, as well as for climate change adaptation as it improves connectivity between existing provincial nature reserves and KwaMandlangampisi Protected Environment in Mpumalanga. Although the area is well managed, Pongola Bush is nevertheless still at risk from emerging alien plant infestations, fires spreading in from outside, poaching, and the likely impact of mining and prospecting. Protected Environment status will assure effective management and protection of this area under its current sustainable agriculture land use.

Strong support has been shown for the declaration of Pongola Bush as a Protected Environment – thank you to all those who wrote letters of support for this declaration to the CEO of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife by the 21st of March 2013. If you have questions please contact Angus Burns of the WWF Enkangala Project ( [egtproject@mweb.co.za](mailto:egtproject@mweb.co.za) ) or Stephen Holness, the Mining Coordinator for SANBI's Grasslands Programme ( [sholness@nmmu.ac.za](mailto:sholness@nmmu.ac.za) ).

Watch the press for more articles on the important grassland biodiversity of Pongola Bush.

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