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## LOOKING BACK – HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE GRASSLANDS PROGRAMME

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As the UNDP-GEF's catalytic investment in mainstreaming biodiversity into production sectors in South Africa's grasslands biome draws to a close, we pay tribute to the significant work, partnership and dedication over the last five years of implementation. The Grasslands Programme was made possible with an \$8 million investment from the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) through the United Nations Development Programme, but it has been made successful through the passion and commitment of the people and partners involved – a mix of practitioners, regulators and specialists.

Through their hard work and know how, the Programme has been able to drive successes forward and adaptively manage risk and opportunities. Highlights of some of the Programme's achievements include...

Since its inception in 2008, the Grasslands Programme has worked hard to influence policy and practice through the development of user-friendly products and tools for different production sectors. It has contributed towards several books, articles and stories with notable achievements this year with the release of the [Mining and Biodiversity Guideline](#) (launched on Biodiversity Day, 22 May 2013) and the [Grassland Ecosystem Guidelines](#) (available now). The first Guideline received unprecedented support, with joint endorsement from the Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs, the Minister of Mineral Resources, and the Chief Executive Officer of the Chamber of Mines. The second has just been released, and is an essential resource providing planners and managers with easy-to-use, practical guidelines on how to take better account of biodiversity in land-use planning and decision-making. Also nearing completion is the Biodiversity Mainstreaming Toolbox for land-use planning and development in Gauteng and the Biodiversity-Friendly Grazing and Burning Guidelines for South Africa's Grasslands, which will be available early next year.

Convening of focused platforms that bring conservation and production stakeholders together has been an important aspect of the Programme, promoting constructive engagement, strengthening partnerships, sharing knowledge and deepening understanding. The Programme's national level dialogues, Biodiversity: Powering a Green Economy in 2011 evolving into a Dialogue on Ecological Infrastructure and Water Security in 2013, have mainstreamed the concept of investing in ecological infrastructure into national policy and planning, and have catalysed a partnership - the [Umgeni Ecological Infrastructure Partnership \(UEIP\)](#). The significance of these Dialogues and the importance of making the case for biodiversity, as well as other achievements and lessons learnt, were reflected on during an international workshop of the [Global Environmental Facility \(GEF\) Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel \(STAP\)](#) and captured in a booklet on [Mainstreaming biodiversity: Key principles from the Grasslands Programme](#).

Over the years, the Programme has implemented mainstreaming biodiversity interventions that have directly affected approximately 1 372 000 ha (3.8%) of the Grasslands Biome. This includes the more than 60,000 ha increase in extent of protected areas in production landscapes in the Biome that the Programme and its partners have achieved. Several new nature reserves and protected environments proclaimed in 2013 have contributed to this dramatic increase in the extent of protected areas and biodiversity stewardship has been vital to this protected area expansion.

Providing science-based advice into policies that influence the impact of production sector activities and secures biodiversity is one of the most systemic strategies of the Grasslands Programme. Amongst this work has been supporting the development of biodiversity sector plans or bioregional plans, which have been completed or are in the process of being developed for 17 municipalities (covering 28.6% of the Biome and 10% more than was covered last year). Gauteng became the first province to have biodiversity sector plans completed for all of its municipalities, and with the assistance of the MEC, these are awaiting the final steps before formal adoption. Many biodiversity sector plans are already being used to the benefit of biodiversity, despite the wait for formal ratification.

In bringing this phase of our mainstreaming journey to a close, we have so much to celebrate! But above all we must thank our funders, mainstreaming partners and colleagues in the biodiversity sector. Without you this

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- ▶ Autumn 2013
- ▶ Summer 2012
- ▶ Spring 2012
- ▶ April 2012

reflection would be very different today. With 2013 being the last year of implementation, we will be holding a close out conference in 2014 to celebrate the achievements and reflect on lessons learnt in this pioneering initiative. The date of this event will be announced shortly.

Until then, wishing you happy holidays and a prosperous new year!

Thank you,

Anthea Stephens,

Director: Grasslands Programme

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