

Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Park Joint Management: Sehlabathebe National Park (Lesotho) and the uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site (South Africa)

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Abstract—On 8 April 2005, the first Joint Management Committee meeting was held at Qacha's Nek, Lesotho. This was to ensure co-operative management through joint management. The formation of a Joint Management Committee was part of the Bilateral Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Project agreement and consisted of officials from the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture (Lesotho), Ezemvelo KwaZulu Natal Wildlife (South Africa) and assisted by the Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Project and the Peace Parks Foundation. The formation of a Transfrontier Park (TFP) could possibly pave the way for the establishment of a Transfrontier World Heritage Site (WHS), which would be invaluable when sourcing external sources of funding for projects. The principal challenge that faces the TFP is that, historically, insufficient financial and human resources have been allocated to the individual parks, thereby reducing the level of management effectiveness. The joint declaration of the TFP brings in an era of bilateral governance in support of this initiative. This initiative should progressively capacitate the TFP to a point where its globally significant natural and cultural heritage is effectively managed, its integrity secured, and a flow of benefits to surrounding communities optimized. There were many challenges that presented themselves to both Park Management authorities. Issues that are currently being addressed are the development of a Fire Management Plan for Sehlabathebe National Park (SNP), and the lack of staff, finances, and assets. On the South African side, all of the above are in place, and as such, we can help SNP to develop and become an extension of a Transfrontier WHS. Issues relating to wilderness both in South Africa and Lesotho needed to be addressed through Joint Management. The uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park (UDP) WHS has developed a Wilderness Management Plan that is an appendix to the UDP WHS Integrated Management Plan. Lesotho has only zoned potential wilderness and requires assistance to help management realize the importance of wilderness in SNP and manage it accordingly. The UDP WHS is busy developing a Buffer Zone Policy for its eastern boundary. At present, no Buffer

Zone Policy is being developed for the western boundary, which includes SNP. Because SNP is a small park (6,500 ha), activities outside SNP could heavily impact management initiatives and zoned wilderness areas, in particular.

Introduction

The Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Park (MDTP) (fig. 1) is the largest (249,313 ha) and most significant protected area within the Protected Area Network of the Maloti Transfrontier Conservation Area. It is an asset of international significance due to its unique natural and cultural values already recognized by the listing of the uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park (UDP) as a World Heritage Site and a Ramsar Site. The addition of Sehlabathebe National Park (SNP) broadens the spectrum of natural and cultural heritage protected by this Transfrontier Park and, therefore, it is envisaged that with time the entire Transfrontier Park will be listed as a World Heritage and Ramsar Site.

The Transfrontier Park is dominated by the Maloti Drakensberg, a mountain range of unique origins, and as such, has a diverse range of ecological niches with rich biodiversity and high numbers of endemic species (Derwent and others 2001; Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife 2005a). In addition, it is home to thousands of rock art paintings, a product of the San's long historical relationship with this mountainous environment as well as an interesting historical cultural heritage. Furthermore, the Transfrontier Park contributes significantly to the economy of the Southern African sub-region. Through the protection of a vast portion of this mountain range it secures the supply of high quality water from its dense network of wetlands (hence the Ramsar Site designation), the sustainable use of natural resources, and the development of appropriate forms of tourism (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife 2005a). The UDP WHS has 109,530 ha of proclaimed wilderness. Overall, almost half (48.5%) of the total area of the UDP WHS has been designated as wilderness (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife 2005b).

On 14 September 1997, there was a unanimous resolution by participants representing Lesotho, South Africa, the World Bank and interested non-governmental organizations to endorse the concept of a Transfrontier Conservation and Development Area encompassing the Lesotho Maloti Highlands and the KwaZulu Natal Drakensberg mountains in South Africa. Known as the Giants Castle Declaration, it also recognized that a joint declaration of a Transfrontier

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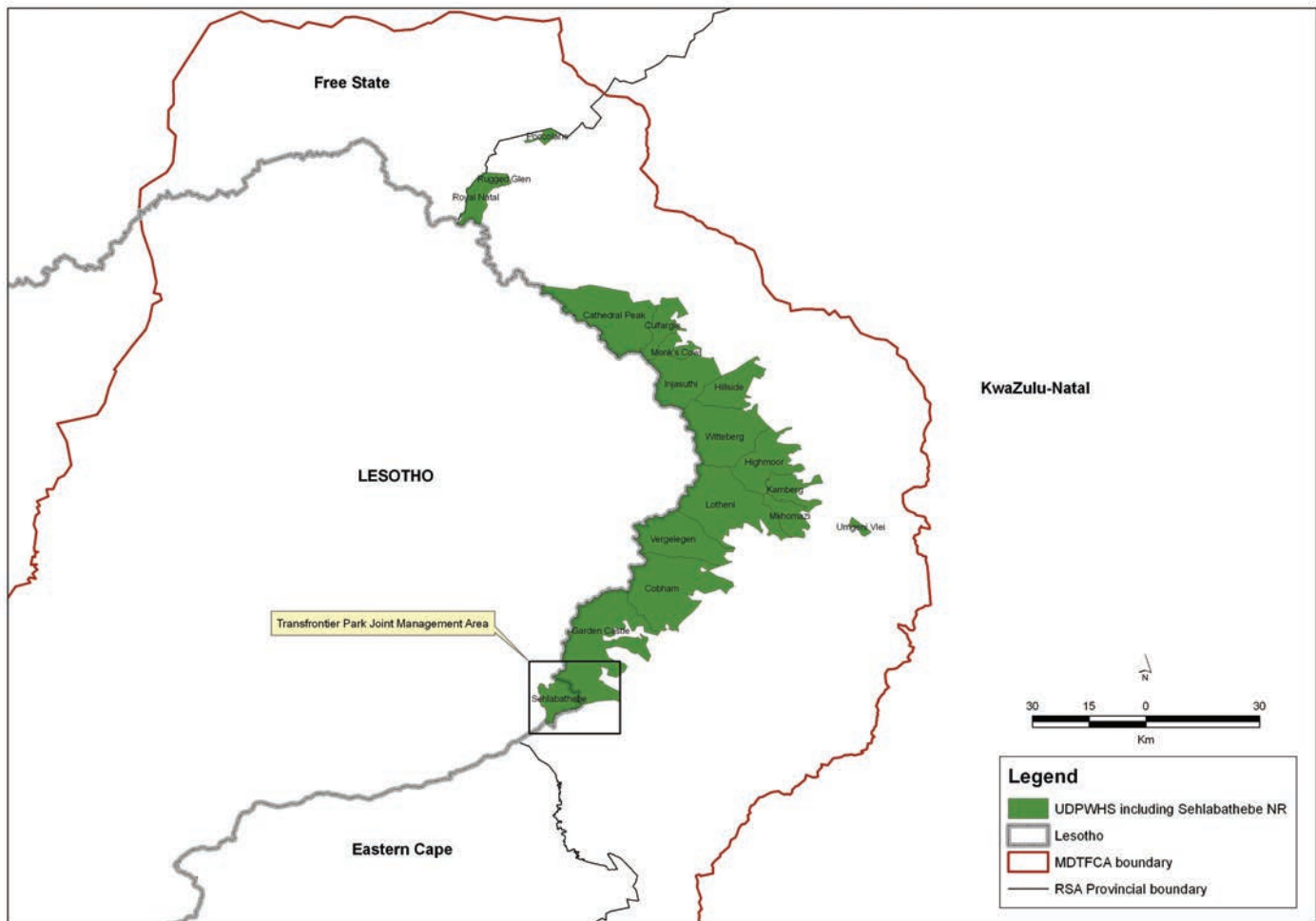


Figure 1—Location of the Transfrontier Park Joint Management Area.

Park between Sehlabathebe National Park and the then KwaZulu Natal Drakensberg Park would be an important achievement of that process.

Management Issues

As far back as the 1970s, staff from the former Department of Forestry and SNP worked together on law enforcement issues, especially stock theft, and the preparation of firebreaks on the international boundary. In the late 1990s, staff from Ezemvelo KwaZulu Natal Wildlife held a field visit to Sehlabathebe National Park. Informal training was given to park management staff on the use of Global Positioning Systems. The field visit highlighted the need to assist Sehlabathebe staff with firefighting equipment and advance planning with regard to the preparation of firebreaks between both parks. Radio communication at SNP did not exist due to the allocated radio being under repair. On 8 April 2005, the first Joint Management Committee meeting was held at Qacha's Nek, Lesotho, to ensure co-operative management through joint management. The first meeting set the Terms

of Reference for the Joint Management Committee and the way forward for the formation of a Transfrontier Park.

The lack of radio communication at SNP was an urgent issue to address. A proposal to donate radios programmed on the Ezemvelo KwaZulu Natal Wildlife's radio frequency was agreed to by senior management. This enabled both parks' staffs to communicate with one another on issues of security, fire management, and other management issues.

In-house training on path, fence, and road maintenance was put on hold until the time that SNP employed a full complement of staff. During 2008, five field rangers were employed by SNP and have undergone training at the South African Wildlife College in Hoedspruit. During October 2009, in-house training was given to the park manager and his staff on game monitoring and the completion of biological returns. Four pairs of binoculars were donated to the management staff so that effective game and vulture monitoring could be carried out. Further basic field ranger training has been offered by Ezemvelo KwaZulu Natal Wildlife Training Centre so that levels of competency could be on par with Ezemvelo KwaZulu Natal Wildlife field rangers. A draft translocation policy for game was submitted to the director

of Lesotho National Parks for consideration. The policy laid down guidelines for future introductions of game into SNP and other national parks in Lesotho.

Ezemvelo KwaZulu Natal Wildlife management and ecological staff met with senior park management staff and formulated a draft fire management plan for SNP, which is scheduled to be finalized early in 2010. With a finalized fire management plan, Lesotho will be in a position to secure adequate funds on an annual basis and institute a formal burning program for SNP. SNP staff and senior management from the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture are invited to attend the uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site annual fire workshop and are invited to participate by reporting on the previous year's burning season and planned burning for the following year.

Management Plans

Both parks have produced their own management plans that remain the guiding documents for the management of their protected areas. In accordance with the World Heritage Convention Act no. 49 of 1999, an integrated management plan had to be developed. In addition to this requirement, a concept development plan, business plan, and wilderness management plan have been developed for the UDP WHS. The integrated management plan for the UDP WHS was completed and published in 2006. This plan forms the framework within which the UDP WHS is to be developed toward the achievement of its management objectives. The Sehlabathebe National Park management plan was completed in June 2008 (National Environmental Secretariat 2008).

The joint management plan for the Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Park was based on the framework of the UDP WHS Integrated Management Plan. The main purpose of this plan is to provide the necessary policy statements and guidelines for the joint management committee to address common management issues. The joint management plan is reviewed annually for any minor corrections or alterations and the document is formally reviewed on a 5-year cycle. Joint management policies and guidelines listed in the plan are (Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Project 2008):

- Vision, mission and management objectives
- Zonation
- Management effectiveness
- Financial and human resources
- Security and safety
- Biodiversity conservation management
- Cultural heritage management
- Eco-cultural tourism, marketing and concessions
- Environmental interpretation and education
- Research
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Infrastructure

Both management plans went through an extensive public participation process. Relevant stakeholders and local community groups were consulted on the mission, management objectives, and content of both plans.

Challenges

One of the principal challenges that face park managers in Lesotho and South Africa is that insufficient funding and human resources allocated to individual parks have negatively impacted the level of management effectiveness. The development of a fire management plan, joint management plan, translocation policy, and the proposed formal and informal training of staff add credibility to the Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Park. This will help to secure long-term funding so that the park's goals and objectives can be achieved.

Within the uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site, resources have been secured over the years through provincial government funding. Annual budgets are set and submitted to the provincial government for approval. Budgeting includes funding for staff, fixed and moveable assets, and operational requirements. Copies of all plans have been submitted to the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture to encourage them to develop such plans for SNP. This will assist the Ministry in its nomination of the Transfrontier Park as a World Heritage Site.

In the development of the SNP management plan, discussions were held with regard to the zonation of wilderness. The proposed zonation did not align with those areas designated in the UDP WHS. The UDP WHS used the Recreational Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) while SNP used a slightly different zoning system, which was introduced in 1990. Several meetings were held and both countries agreed to adopt the same zoning system for SNP as that of the UDP WHS. The joint declaration of the Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Park will enforce bilateral government support for this Transfrontier Park.

Conclusions

The concept of establishing a Transfrontier Park has been in place for the past 40 years with informal transboundary co-operation between SNP and Garden Castle, which was managed by the Department of Forestry. Transfrontier Park Declaration is currently being planned for both countries in order that relevant Ministries officiate the declaration of the Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Park. The completion of the joint management plan and the SNP management plan will be a great step forward in the co-management of the Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Park.

The enthusiasm of the committee and park management staff has initiated seven of the 18 action plans listed in the joint management plan within the first year of its adoption. An annual review of the MD TFP Joint Management Plan will take place during December 2009. This meeting will evaluate progress and, where necessary, re-prioritize activities for the future. The MD TFP is viewed positively by all committee members, conservation managers, park managers, and will succeed with their positive input.

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The content of this paper reflects the views of the authors, who are responsible for the facts and accuracy of the information presented herein.
