SANParks teams met in Knysna earlier this month to revisit risks, threats and vulnerabilities to the Garden Route National Park (GRNP) and its visitors. Dubbed ‘Operation Reboot’, input from the meeting will be fed into a national safety and security strategy led by Major General Jooste.

Speaking to media during a site visit, Major General Jooste said equipping rangers with fresher skills and strengthening alliances with other law enforcement authorities forms part of the short-to-medium term interventions. There are other planned operational interventions as well. “We are making wildlife crime our core focus and we take it seriously,” said the Major General.

Although suspects in a recent incident were apprehended by the South African Police Service (SAPS), SANParks continues to roll out security plans for its Wilderness, Knysna and Tsitsikamma sections of the GRNP. The Park spans across over 155 000 hectares including water bodies, forests and fynbos areas. Park Manager, Paddy Gordon, says “The open-access nature of the Park could make us vulnerable but we’re moving ahead with operational systems internally as well as externally. The Park is also fragmented with pockets of private land in between.” In addition, SANParks continues to form part of the local policing forums in each town and works very closely with SAPS and rescue teams’ (Mountain Rescue and Sea Rescue) efforts.

With the Easter Weekend approaching, teams are preparing to co-host the third Garden Route walking festival expected to kick off on Easter Friday. South Africans are encouraged to take up the offer to explore the Garden Route National Park on foot. The Park has 14 Green flag status hiking trails, 12 in Tsitsikamma and two in Knysna. It continues to implement the certification programme for the rest of its trails.

There are four multiple-day hiking trails across the Park not part of the Garden Route Walking Festival - the Harkerville Coastal hiking trail rerouted after the Knysna fires, the Outeniqua hiking trail, the Otter trail and the Dolphin trail in Tsitsikamma.

There are 10 day routes in Wilderness, eight in Knysna and 12 in Tsitsikamma open for the upcoming Garden Route walking festival: http://walkingfestival.co.za/

A conservation fee is payable at reception areas prior to walking on trails (Wilderness, Ebb & Flow, Knysna and Tsitsikamma). For more information on trails, please see descriptions for each trail: https://www.sanparks.org/parks/garden_route/tourism/activities/hiking_nature_walks.php
Message from Dries Engelbrecht, Regional General Manager

We at SANParks pride ourselves in customer service and customer satisfaction, which is why this month’s two “Compliments of the month” are so heart-warming. I read with pride the ways in which the staff concerned cared for our guests and went above and far beyond the call of duty to provide assistance where they could. It is in caring for others when one’s true humanity comes to light and for this, we all thank them. Our heartfelt condolences go out to the Hayes family on their loss – dear friends of the organisation and many of its staff members. We are happy to read that you have wonderful memories of Brian and SANParks and look forward to welcoming you back again soon.

With a number of public holidays and long weekends upon us, please rest assured that we have put a number of measures in place to ensure the safety of our visitors during these times. Especially in the Garden Route National Park, our staff continue to work closely with law enforcement agencies and other entities to make safety and security a top priority.

Healthy bodies and healthy minds also equate to a happy workforce, we believe. This is why staff wellness in SANParks is receiving more and more attention. Working towards this, staff from Wilderness and Mokala National Parks travelled to the home of Karoo National Park, Beaufort West, earlier this month for a weekend of sport. Have a read on pg 5 of all the happenings from what looks like a fun, fun weekend.

Compliments received

Garden Route National Park - Wilderness

Dear Mr Grootboom and Staff

I write to you all to say thank you for the special treatment we as a family received in December 2017. It has taken me a little while to write to you as you will understand that I have had a lot on my mind and had to deal with.

I requested a site close to the ablution block as my husband Brian was very ill and we were hoping still to go on holiday this trip to the Wilderness from Cape Town on the 19th December. On the 12th and 13th December it was still touch and go whether we would still be there but Brian held out and made the journey with us.

On arrival I quickly went to see if there were open sites available by the ablution block and there was so on returning to the parked cars and joining my daughter who had been into the office, she told me that we have a special area to park next to at the top ablution block where the park rangers camp. I was a bit concerned as this would make us very isolated but she said no, this site you allocated us was perfect and special.

Well, say no more, we had the most beautiful camp sites ever, for our needs. We were next to the ablutions, wash house, near to the sand pit and the park for the little ones and the open space for us to manage wheelchair easy chair and place to braai and play.

Brian was in a quiet area where he could go and sleep as much as he needed and we were able to care for him in private. He had a nasal tube in permanently and did not have everyone looking at him when he was up and about. This made it so much easier for all of us to be able to have a very special holiday with him and will never be forgotten.

My daughter, Margaret Monk, called your office to let you know that he passed away on the 11th January, four days after we returned home, and she also wanted to thank you all.

The two months prior to us coming on holiday he had broken his leg and had to work hard to mobilise, and all that was on his mind was that he wanted to go to the Wilderness one more time. This the hospital staff knew very well and this motivated him to work hard.

His cancer started in 2014, had major surgery, battled with all the treatments, then prostate cancer which again was treated for and then October last year was re-diagnosed with now cancer in the throat, then a broken leg because of being so weak.

This man really battled, but going on holiday with the family to his favourite place for 40 years was everything to him and you guys helped to make this the most memorable holiday for all of us.

Thank you once again for helping us to have this special time with him and fulfilling our request. May you help many more families have special times together like we had. I will see you again when we are there for Christmas as a family.

Yours sincerely
Rita Hayes

Mountain Zebra National Park

Good Day Mr Januarie

As a returning visitor to Mountain Zebra National Park, I was glad to meet with you last Sunday and to be able to thank you personally for the very good and considerate help my wife and I received from your staff.

As I explained, on Saturday we had the misfortune of having our car break down (luckily right in camp, at Reception) with a leaking cooling system header tank.

Ordinarily, we would have probably had huge difficulty, expense and loss of holiday time, not to mention the forfeit of later reservations. However, we enjoyed truly exceptional help from Emlyn Faro, who astonished us by sealing the leak perfectly – with an epoxy product (Steenvas) of which we’d never even heard. So we were able to continue our journey safely on schedule and trouble-free. Together with Wilsam Hlophe, whom I also commend for his co-operation, Emlyn made time during a difficult geyser maintenance period in camp to solve our problem and went out of his way to ensure that we could drive out safely and without risk.

During our visit we also enjoyed an excellent meal and good service at your restaurant, for which Sherele Faro deserves praise. Also, throughout our stay we had cheerful and helpful service from Ayela Willibald at Reception.

Altogether it was a heart-warming experience to have been so kindly rescued from what might have been a most unhappy time for us and we are most grateful for your staff are a credit to you.

Kind regards,
Peter Chubb

Compliments received

Tourism Minister stops in Knysna

The Minister of Tourism, Derek Hanekom, visited Knysna recently as part of the Knysna Literary Festival. He made a stop in Knysna (Thesen Island offices) as part of a few visits during his tour. He is seen here posing in front of the Knysna estuary.

Addo Cycle Charge

If you’ve got fire in your belly and adventure in your heart, SANParks Honorary Rangers in the Addo Region invites you to participate in the Addo Cycle Charge between 7 and 12 October.

This 230 kilometre ride from Darlington Dam via the Bedrogfontein Mountain Pass to Addo Main Camp is five days and five nights of trail-blazing through Big Five country on Jeep and single track routes, with spectacular scenery and amazing sightings guaranteed. The price of R15 000 per person for this epic adventure includes all meals, tented accommodation and transport from Addo to Darlington.

For further information, contact: Clive Gibson on cagibson@global.co.za or Rob Henderson on henwoodglass@iafrica.com.

All proceeds from this event will go towards projects identified by SANParks.
Some of the management team of the Frontier Region paid whistle-stop visits to the Tsitsikamma entrance gate and Big Tree construction sites at the beginning of March. The entrance gate is expected to be complete by the end of June this year after a new contractor was appointed to complete the project. Meanwhile, a new contractor for the Big Tree project will be appointed in May and it is expected that it will take about eight months to complete.

Eight Garden Route National Park rangers are now well-versed in all things related to radio communication. The rangers, from the Tsitsikamma section of the Park, attended the day-long training, which was presented by Head to Head Boating, in Knysna during March.
Landowners proceed with gabion structures on the beach along the Garden Route

Landowners close to Myoli beach recently proceeded to put up gabions without consulting SANParks. Gabions were suggested by the property owners’ legal teams when they feared their properties would be affected by the sea.

Garden Route National Park staff, Paddy Gordon, Maretha Alant, Jonathan Britton and Nandi Mgwebi headed to the hotspot site in March.

All information relating to the construction of the gabions is under close scrutiny by SANParks, the Knysna Municipality and Department of Environmental Affairs. By close of business on 16 March, a notice was issued by the Municipality to landowners to pause work because the operators did not have the necessary permit. SANParks has undertaken to conduct a further land survey to determine the exact location of the development, among other steps. Look out for a detailed article in next month’s issue.

Dredging in Wilderness

The Wilderness Lakes/Ramsar site (Serpentine - Sluices – Bridge), located between George and Knysna, forms part of the Garden Route National Park (GRNP). It covers an area of approximately 913ha, of which most follows the wetland boundary within the Park’s Wilderness section. The Wilderness Lakes is linked to the Touw Estuary, which opens periodically to the sea.

The Wilderness system consists of an estuary and a chain of three estuarine lakes, interconnected by narrow channels. Water exchange between lakes occurs continually as a result of freshwater inflow from fluvial systems, and marine and estuarine water exchanges when the estuary is open. The exchange of water between lakes can, however, be impeded by the deposition of sediments, particularly in narrow, interlinking channels. Depositions and resulting sandbars and shallow points are most prominent in areas where drainage lines discharge into the systems, where road causeways intersect channels and where channels enter lakes. Although there may be several reasons for such depositions, it is likely that in several instances it is directly caused by anthropogenic activities resulting in increased sediment inputs. Restrictions caused by such sediments could affect lake water levels, water chemistry and animal, particularly fish, movements between water bodies. This is the main reason for the dredging exercise in progress, in order to remove such sediments which have accumulated, as well as to catch up on flood mitigation measures.

The average depth of the material being removed is about 0.6m with a length of 300m, in a 5m wide channel and an estimated volume of about 900m³. The work is being done by Ullebe Jet Pump and Dredging t/a Coastal Jet Pump and Dredging Services.
Promotion

Royal Blues netball team

Wilderness and Karoo National Parks’ netball teams

Bioskraal soccer team

Wilderness and Mokala National Parks’ soccer teams

Work and play - Conserving both nature and body

South African National Parks recognises the benefit of investing in the wellbeing of their employees, hence the long-term organisational objective of promoting a healthy lifestyle at work and at home.

In this spirit, staff from Karoo, Wilderness and Mokala National Parks came together in Beaufort West over the weekend of 16 to 18 March to participate in a sporting weekend. To fulfil the organisation’s mandate of ‘connecting society’, three teams from the community were invited to participate. They were the Royal Blues and Hillside FC which were the female netball teams, while the male community soccer team, Bioskraal also took to the field.

Congratulations to Karoo National Park for winning the soccer tournament and the netball ladies of Wilderness for winning their tournament.

Obituary

Addo Elephant National Park Room Attendant, Mildred Ntombebhongo Thambo, passed away on 16 March 2018. She had been working for SANParks since 2004 and leaves behind three young children. She will be sorely missed by family, friends, colleagues and all the visitors who’s paths she’s crossed over the years.

Dept of Health

Promotion

Harkerville Field ranger, Quinton Solomons.

Quinton started his career in Tsitsikamma as an Environmental Monitor in 2012 and was appointed at Harkerville as a Field ranger in 2014. His passion is law enforcement and he has a few proud record cases to his name - including the confiscation of 14 cycads near the Garden of Eden, in which a nursery owner was fined for the illegal transportation of this protected species.

Quinton starts in his new position as Ranger corporal at Wilderness on 1 April. We wish him all the best.

Hillside FC netball team

Karoo National Park soccer team

SANParks understands that the key to a thriving workforce is dependent on adequate focus on proactivity and preventative measures to curb the impact of chronic lifestyle related diseases. In this regard, educating and empowering staff to maintain their own health and wellbeing is vital to the organisation. This is why Karoo National Park staff invited the Department of Health to attend the event. They conducted free HIV blood pressure, body mass index and HGT testing, as well as provided family planning to both staff and community members alike.

A big thank you to the local radio station Gamka FM, who broadcast the games live to the larger community who couldn’t be there on the day.