Results of water samples taken on 18 March indicate the Knysna estuary is safe for recreational use in all sites except the Ashmead Channel, Queen Street, the Train Station and Bongani. The Ashmead Channel is not safe for swimming, bait collection, fishing or wading at present. This extends from the areas adjacent to Loerie Park, Cathy Park and up to the area next to Monk’s Caravan Park.

The Thesen Island waterway on the Ashmead side is also not safe for use at present. Users of the estuary are encouraged to use compliant sites with the Department of Water Affairs’ guidelines including the Heads, Bollard Bay, the Point, Salt River, Crabs Creek, the Waterfront, the main channel and Belvidere. SANParks’ deepwater samples indicate these areas are compliant and confirm that the deeper waters and main channel are safe for use. A Health Officer for the Garden Route District Municipality explains that sampling will be done weekly by the District Municipality and in line with tidal flow.

SANParks has erected signage at four spots around the Knysna estuary warning recreational users not to fish, collect bait or swim there. Notices have been issued to tourism establishments around the area of concern so that they can warn guests not to use the unsafe area of the estuary. SANParks has also sent out regular ranger patrols to the affected area to warn people about the dangers of using the water.

Investigations into the causes of oil and grease that have entered the Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTW), causing bacteria to die off and the WWTW to release high loads of E.coli into the estuary has led the Knysna Municipality and Garden Route District’s Health Division to sample and check all pump stations. James McCarthy of the District’s Health Division says “We physically checked all the pump stations to find the cause. We have also sent notices to establishments closest to the stations which were found to have high levels of oil and grease for proof of proper disposal of oil stores.” Apart from this joint investigation, Knysna Municipality has tackled the problem at the WWTW by introducing an oil-eating enzyme into the system while regularly dosing the WWTW with beneficial bacteria from the Brenton-on-Sea waste water works.

A pre-directive was issued by the Breede-Gouritz Catchment Management Agency (BGCMA) to the Knysna Municipality subsequent to the spill from the WWTW. The Municipality will be given an opportunity to provide further action plans to rectify the situation. According to the Knysna Municipality, the good news is that oil and grease counts in the WWTW are a lot lower since the investigation into the matter two weeks earlier.

The BGCMA has also undertaken to conduct more regular chemical tests including pH levels, ammonia, nitrates, phosphates levels in the water and others. SANParks has also committed to continue with deepwater samples. Knysna Park Manager, Megan Taplin says “SANParks has committed to reviving and chairing the Knysna Estuary Pollution Committee and meet on a weekly basis to tackle this and any future incidents so that we protect the Knysna estuary’s unique biodiversity and tourism value.”

SANParks’ deepwater samples and results look positive - animal and plant life in those areas were not affected by the spikes. These include the Knysna seahorse, the Knysna Gobi and others. Independent researchers declared the Knysna estuary as number one in the country in terms of biodiversity significance in 2005.
Addo Elephant

- Andrew Mugford was doing his rounds this morning in the Langbos settlement when he came across this enormous tortoise, tied up and destined for the pot. The Park was contacted and a ranger, Clive Hendricks, was sent to meet Andrew. We are happy to report that the tortoise is now free ranging in the Park. Welcome home, Domkrag jnr. Happy days and well done to all the guys involved. A sterling effort.

Camdeboo

- People forget about Camdeboo - this is worth a visit. The outlay of the few tents and kitchen area is really beautiful. Worth a visit.

Garden Route

- Storms River Mouth of SANParks has one of the best campsites in the world.
- I truly love the Rondevlei hide. It’s the perfect spot to enjoy some birding in the #Gardenroute
- My favourite when visiting the Garden Route. Not expensive at all compared to what else is on offer in the area. Good service and tranquility on offer.

Karoo

- I would like to congratulate you personally on the excellent way your Park is managed and presented. What a pleasure! Extremely well organised and presented. Again our camping accommodation was excellent. Everything from the caravan stand to the ablution and kitchen area clean and functional. Your staff are friendly, professional, knowledgeable and helpful at all times. From the first gate and at reception and rangers right through to the shop assistant and restaurant staff. This is also true for the times we have stayed in your chalets.
- We spent Saturday and Sunday nights at the Park in a chalet. Very impressed with the facilities and service. A good role model for other state-owned enterprises on how things should be done.
- Our national parks are incredibly well maintained, and each park is unique and special.

Mountain Zebra

- The restaurant is great, one of my favourite restaurants in town. The Park is super safe and has very friendly staff.
- My favourite Park!

West Rand Honorary Rangers supports the Frontier Region

Garden Route and Addo Elephant National Parks received goods from the West Rand Honorary Rangers recently. They drove all the way from Johannesburg to drop off equipment, tents, torches and other goods to be used by field rangers and scientists while out in the field. The equipment is for use by Wilderness and Knysna sections of Garden Route as well as Addo Elephant National Park.

Receiving the support from the Honorary Rangers allows SANParks to save and channel funds into other operations.

Speaking at the hand-over event, Honorary Ranger liaison, Frank Louw explained how to use some of the gadgets. Present to receive the goods and to thank the Honorary Rangers were Paddy Gordon (Park Manager: Garden Route National Park), Dr Stef Freitag-Ronaldson (Scientific Services), Megan Taplin (Knysna Park Manager), Carel van der Merwe (representing Wilderness), Owen Govender (Senior marine ranger: Knysna) and Nandi Mgwadlamba (Communications).

Camdeboo plants 150 trees

Staff from Camdeboo National Park and its Biodiversity Social Projects (BSP) units could be seen planting trees throughout the town of Graaff-Reinet on 8 March.

The trees were part of a tree-planting initiative of the Department of Environmental Affairs, thanks to funding from The Chief Directorate: Environmental Protection and Infrastructure Programme. The project’s aim was to plant 10 000 across South Africa by 10 March. South African National Parks received 3 000 of these trees, of which 150 were allocated to Camdeboo National Park.

The Karee (Searsia lancea) trees were planted on the following properties throughout town: Thembalisizwe, Isibane, Kroonvale, Narsingstraat and Graaff-Reinet Primary Schools, Spandua Secondary School, Tinkerbell Kleuterskool, SAPS Academy, Vuyani Safe Haven House, Huis van de Graaff and at the Park’s Reception, Camp site and EE Centre.

Condolences

We extend our most heartfelt condolences to Matthew Mbatyazwa and Nico Oosthuizen (Garden Route) and their families on the passing of their fathers. In Addo, we also think of Gcobani Lamani with the passing of his mother as well as Esther Truter and family on the loss of her husband. Our thoughts and prayers are with you during this difficult time of bereavement.
Addo Elephant National Park's People & Conservation Officer, Zimkhitha Zungula joined Sundays River Valley Municipality officials in their Back to School campaign on 4 March, targeting both primary and high school learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. The municipality donated school shoes to 50 learners from four schools. The Park, meanwhile, donated dozens of sanitary towels collected from tourists and staff members. Thank you to all who donated sanitary towels to the initiative.

San Miguel Ladies' tea

Ten ladies from different departments in Addo attended the San Miguel Citrus Company's ladies tea on 1 March. The theme of the day was substance abuse with speakers focusing on educating the women about the warning signs of people suffering from substance abuse both at home and at work as well as ways in which one can get help.

San Miguel sports tournament

Addo’s Mighty Elephants soccer team finished as runners up in the San Miguel soccer tournament on 8 March.

Eight companies participated in the tournament which was supported by Kaizer Chiefs, one of the biggest soccer teams in the country. The Mighty Elephants outdid themselves in all six matches they participated in.

Congratulations to all.
Environmental education on the increase in Garden Route National Park

People and Conservation Officers (P&Cs) are on a drive to increase awareness in schools about the significance of national parks along the Garden Route. "They are hubs where nature is protected for the benefit of current and future generations." says P&C Officer for Knysna, Nondumiso Mgwenya.

They cast their nets wide in the hope of reaching as many schools as possible. In Knysna alone, approximately 6 038 people were reached by environmental education initiatives during the 2018/2019 financial year and this figure will increase by the end of March 2020. Of these, 4 083 of the total amount were learners and 1 955 were adults.

Approximately 5 090 youngsters and adults were reached by the Wilderness’ programmes.

In the weeks leading to the March school holidays, Nondumiso and her assistant, Thabiso Mokoena, sent an invitation to all public schools in Knysna to join the holiday programme. Knysna Secondary School (Hornlee), Sunridge Primary (Hornlee) and Bongani soccer club responded. SANParks staff children from the forest areas (Diepwalle and Harkerville) were added to the programme.

Themed ‘Think Blue’ learners were encouraged to think about water in a holistic manner, explained Thabiso. "We took the kids through how river health is monitored, they learned how water samples are taken and we also showed them micro-organisms in a river. This time we used the Kranshoek River."

He said taking 20 learners per group per day gave them the attention they deserve.

“We taught them about various pollutants and forest ecology - where they saw how the forest system works. By using a river that runs through the forest, we were able to show them how interdependent the system is and how water is the vital component for it. Then driving the message home to save water becomes easy after that.”

The holiday programme lasted for a week and the kids learnt about the forests, rivers, animals, plant life and connectivity in a forest environment.

Wilderness P&C Officer, Phumla Nyathikazi says it’s important to partner up with organisations reaching young people. "Recently we joined a career expo in George targeting young people. We transported youngsters from Sedgefield to the event organised by the Garden Route District Municipality. Most youngsters attending the event were from George, Thembalethu and Sedgefield." She presented careers in the conservation sector with a specific focus on SANParks.

Last month 500 learners were hosted in Natures Valley Rest Camp (de Vasselot) by People and Conservation Officer, Nobulumko Gantsho on a Kids in Parks Programme. Each group spent at least three days in the Park learning about nature from rangers, scientists and independent scientists such as the Natures Valley Trust.
National Water Week took place between 17-23 March but the Frontier Parks' People and Conservation Departments were busy with initiatives throughout the month.

Mountain Zebra National Park and the Department of Water and Sanitation celebrated between 12-14 March. Together they visited three local schools - Nxuba Primary, Kude Kwalapha Primary and Solomon Akena Schools in Cradock and reached 237 learners. The theme was “Leaving no one behind; water for all”. They educated learners about the importance of water and sustaining the important resource for future generations. The day started with an ice breaker and informative talk and ended with an outdoor group activity. The initiative was a huge success and an eye opener for the learners.

Meanwhile Camdeboo National Park’s People and Conservation Department created awareness among learners at Union pre- and primary schools. They formed part of the schools’ Eco-wise Day where the learners were encouraged to take cognisance about the importance of saving water, the seriousness of water scarcity and also to encourage them to take care of the environment. People and Conservation officers, Rosemary Scheepers and Dimitri Williams spearheaded the Park’s interactive campaign with the learners. Throughout the day, the different grades spent time engaged in activities centred around water conservation and recycling.

Among the activities was a trip to the Nqweba Dam where water and wetlands were discussed. Posters were made, desks refurbished, stationary was upcycled and water filters assembled. Corene Conradie, who started the Graaff-Reinet Water Crisis Project, also joined and spoke to the learners about the initiative. They also filled bottles with fresh rainwater from the schools’ water tanks, which were later delivered to the Margery Parks TB Hospital. Many thanks to the municipality who sent their water mascot, Sponsie, along to help motivate the learners!

People and Conservation in Wilderness together with the Municipality of Knysna and Breede-Gouritz Catchment Management Agency hosted three schools - Goudveld - Sunridge Primary, Thembelihle Primary and Knysna Primary to educate the learners about the importance of water.

The environmental education lessons focused on looking at water from source to tap and water saving tips that can be adopted at school and at home. An Amazing Hydrology Race game was played to teach learners about the water cycle.