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GENERAL NOTICES • ALGEMENE KENNISGEWINGS

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

NOTICE 889 OF 2017

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT: BIODIVERSITY ACT, 2004 (ACT NO. 10 OF 2004) BIODIVERSITY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR BONTEBOK (*DAMALISCUS PYGARGUS PYGARGUS*) IN SOUTH AFRICA

I, Bomo Edith Edna Molewa, Minister of Environmental Affairs, hereby give notice of my intention to approve the Biodiversity Management Plan for the Bontebok (*Damaliscus pygargus pygargus*) in South Africa, under section 43 read with section 100 of the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, 2004 (Act No. 10 of 2004), set out in the Schedule hereto.

Members of the public are invited to submit to the Minister, within 30 (thirty) working days after the publication of the notice in a Gazette, written representations on, or objections to the following addresses:

By post to:	The Director General: Department of Environmental Affairs Attention: Ms Humbulani Mafumo Private Bag X447 PRETORIA 0001
By hand at:	Environment House, 473 Steve Biko Street, Arcadia, PRETORIA, 0083
By fax to:	0865411102; or 012 399 9586
By e-mail to:	hmafumo@environment.gov.za or by fax to: 0865411102 or 012 399 9586

An electronic copy of the draft BMP can be downloaded from the link: http://www.environment.gov.za//Documents/. Comments received after the closing date may not be considered.

BOMO EDITH EDNA MOLEWA
MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bontebok (*Damaliscus pygargus pygargus*) is endemic to the East Coast Renosterveld bioregion within the Cape Floristic Region (CFR) of the Western Cape. Evidence from fossil records indicate that past climatic and habitat change promoted the splitting of *D. pygargus* into the two separately classified subspecies known today; blesbok (*Damaliscus pygargus phillipsi*) and bontebok (*Damaliscus pygargus pygargus*). Each subspecies exhibits different behavioural and morphological traits including body markings and hide colours. Historically, the natural ranges of the two subspecies did not overlap, with blesbok occurring widely on the grasslands of Gauteng, Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and Free State and bontebok restricted to the coastal plains in the southern CRF. Here the numbers of bontebok declined to near extinction due to hunting and human settlement, in the 1800s, to a known population of 20 animals in the Bredasdorp area. As a result a national park was proclaimed to protect the remaining bontebok and their numbers increased. Worldwide, habitat loss and the loss of genetic integrity by anthropogenic hybridization currently threaten many species. Wildlife species are extensively translocated outside of their historic distribution ranges onto private land as a part of wildlife management and commercial breeding practices in South Africa. This has at times led to multiple species on the same property outside their natural ranges. Thus, the two subspecies (bontebok and blesbok) have come into contact and hybridized, a case which would not have happened naturally as they historically had largely non-overlapping ranges with different ecosystems.

Bontebok now occur in a number of small isolated populations across the country and are threatened by low genetic diversity, population fragmentation , habitat fragmentation and hybridization with blesbok and blesbok/bontebok hybrids. In order to mitigate the historic and current threats to bontebok and conserve this iconic species an integrated management strategy, applied through collaborative partnerships between stakeholders, is urgently required. This would encourage public support, ensure genetic diversity within the metapopulation and sustainable utilisation of the species by the private sector.

Conservation of the species within the Natural Distribution Range (and Extended Distribution Range) in the Western Cape is about 1650 individuals. A further 7500 individuals survive on properties outside the native range of the species throughout South Africa. Bontebok are tolerant of human activities and adapt to changes in the landscape and readily utilise transformed landscapes with old fields of short grass areas. The bontebok is listed as Vulnerable (D1, B2a) on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species, as a Protected Species under the Threatened or Protected Species (TOPS) regulations in terms of Section 56(1)d and on Appendix II under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). A non-detriment finding (NDF) conducted by SANBI found that bontebok required a BMP-S to mitigate for the detrimental effects of harvest of this species.

In 2011, an inter-agency collaboration between the South African National Parks, CapeNature and the National Department of Environmental Affairs was initiated to develop a bontebok BMP-S to ensure the long-term survival of the species in nature. Engagements with a variety of stakeholders took place and identified threats and challenges to the persistence of bontebok. These include human-mediated hybridization and loss of genetic diversity, habitat loss, disease and parasite problems and the risk of unintentional hybridisation as well as the lack of a metapopulation management plan. The selection of the bontebok for a BMP-S is based on the recommendations form the NDF, its threat status, the need for a metapopulation strategy and inter-agency collaboration on shared objectives for the conservation of the species, standardised monitoring, cooperative research, and increased participation by landowners.

Both internal and external stakeholder consultations developed the following desired state for the bontebok:
"The conservation of a secure and well managed bontebok population."*
** Well managed: an increase in Bontebok numbers especially in their indigenous range, sustainable use of habitat and species, securing genetic integrity, researched and regulated to inform decision making and planning.*

This desired state is aimed at creating a long term vision for successful conservation of this species and this is to be achieved by a set of associated objectives:

1. To conserve the genetic integrity and diversity of bontebok;
2. To prevent further habitat loss and habitat degradation , and establish and maintain historic habitat connectivity;
3. To establish and maintain effective communication and awareness between and among stakeholders; and
4. To investigate and conduct research aimed at supporting adaptive management and the implementation of bontebok conservation.

The implementation of the bontebok BMP-S will have the following benefits:

1. Ensuring the bontebok population inside the NDR increases and is resilient to threats faced;
2. Ensuring that harvesting and off-takes of bontebok are sustainable;
3. Scientific sound metapopulation management is implemented and through this the full extent of genetic diversity is represented throughout the population;
4. To facilitate the establishment and maintenance of a National Database to advise on the status of populations;
5. Identify priority conservation land for bontebok conservation within the NDR;
6. Promote collaboration and cooperation between government agencies as well as between government and the private sector;
7. Coordinated management actions; and
8. Identify accountable parties and clearly define roles and responsibilities.

The anticipated outcomes of the BMP-S are as follows:

1. The management of the bontebok population in the NDR to ensure the long term survival of this species;
2. A co-ordinated national approach to bontebok conservation in and outside of the NDR in terms of management, monitoring and research;
3. The halt of the loss of habitat and ultimately ensure a steady increase in conserved habitat and rehabilitation of degraded areas for re-introduction of bontebok within the NDR;
4. Highlight research and communication priorities and identify appropriate parties to implement actions;
5. A National Database of population distributions and national testing and profiling protocols for bontebok;
6. The identification and gradual elimination of hybrids of this species and maintained economic and conservation value; and
7. Promotion of bontebok as a flagship conservation species for Renosterveld vegetation, the CFR and the World Heritage Sites found there.

The Fynbos Biome comprises more than 120 different vegetation types, there are four different types of Renosterveld in the native range of the bontebok: Western-, Central- and Eastern-Rûens Shale Renosterveld and Rûens Silcrete Renosterveld. Today, this Renosterveld is highly fragmented with fewer than 50 fragments over 100 ha remaining. Before human settlement in the region, this vegetation type supported large numbers of big game, including black rhino, eland, the now extinct bluebuck and quagga and bontebok. This was a result of a more grassy system then fynbos and the diversity of game maintained the structure of this system. Sadly, the extirpation of the large herbivores and severe transformation of the landscape has allowed extensive areas to become degraded. The bontebok is recognised as an iconic flagship species for the protection and conservation of Renosterveld. The Biodiversity Management Plan for the bontebok provides the opportunity for the conservation of both the bontebok antelope and the critically endangered renosterveld vegetation type on which they naturally occurred. It serves as a reference to the management and development of the identified actions to enable stakeholders to contribute to the desired outcome of ensuring the long term survival of the subspecies in nature and thereby ensuring the sustainable use of the bontebok by private land owners participating in the meta-population strategy.

The bontebok BMP-S focusses on strategies to strengthen the effective implementation of conservation actions aimed at ensuring native populations are genetically diverse and overall population fitness and resilience within the natural distribution range (and including protected areas with populations outside the natural distribution range) is enhanced and maintained in the long-term.

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