

Farm-Level Management Plan Training

Marc Hardy and Michael Johnson recently attended a training workshop for the Sandveld Environmental Management Framework (EMF): Pilot Phase Project. The training workshop was hosted, on the 5th and 6th of March, by the Western Cape Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning (DEA&DP) at the Nortier Research Farm, near Lamberts Bay. The aim of the workshop was to inform and train environmental consultants on the process to be followed when implementing Farm Level Management Plans (FLMPS).

The workshop included presentations from:

- DEA&DP, Cape Nature and the Western Cape Department of Agriculture that provided an overview of the Sandveld EMF, the rationale behind farm-level management planning and the farm-level planning process, including the pre-inspection stage, inspection Stage and the post-inspection stage;
- Department of Water and Sanitation on the National Water Act requirements and the EWULA process; and
- DEA&DP rectification department on the Section 24G process.

This was followed by a practical farm inspection and a discussion around the implementation of an FLMP for that farm.

Background on the project

In 2011, the Western Cape Minister of Local Government, Environmental Affairs and Development planning approached DEA&DP out of concern regarding agricultural activities in the Sandveld region of the Western Cape. The main concerns included:

- An increasing prevalence of perceived illegal agricultural expansion (i.e. illegal clearing of indigenous vegetation);
- Growing dissatisfaction with the costs and timeframes associated with the EIA process; and
- A worsening ecological state of the region.

As a result of this, an approach which had a reactive component as well as a proactive component was adopted in an attempt to provide an effective solution. As part of the proactive component, an integrated landscape approach was adopted. This entailed providing a strategic context to agriculture and conservation trends in the Sandveld region. This strategic context is depicted in the Sandveld Environmental Management Framework (EMF) with the main objectives being to reduce the regulatory burden of the appropriate expansion of cultivated land through ensuring the continued protection of the natural resource base in which these activities are embedded.

However, one concern was that the regional scale at which the information in the EMF was generated was too coarse for implementation at a farm-level (i.e. one could not derive farm-level characteristics such as land use, species composition, ecological processes, etc.). This was a result of the large study area (approximately 9 350km²) which constrained the level of detail, as well as the fact that information used to generate the EMF was potentially outdated. It was thus suggested that to verify the findings of the Sandveld EMF, a team of skilled specialists (ecological, agricultural, GIS) familiar with the Sandveld EMF, would need to conduct a farm-level verification assessment to confirm the presence of recorded characteristics/land uses as well as delineate the boundaries of such characteristics/ land uses at a scale suitable for use at a farm-level.

To address the full objective of the Sandveld EMF, a Standard has been proposed as the regulatory mechanism with the aim of providing farmers regulatory relief when undertaking agricultural expansion. The standard outlines several specifications that a farmer must comply with to benefit from the regulatory relief. One such specification will be the farm-level verification assessment mentioned above which will feed into what is known as a farm-level management plan.

CES has over 30 consultants including ecological and GIS experts who are able to support clients requiring these services. CES has completed a number of these Farm-Level Management Plans in both the Western and Eastern Cape. Please contact us via our website for more information.