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THE NORTHERN DRAKENSBERG COLLABORATIVE

THE NORTHERN BERG – FOR WATER, LAND AND PEOPLE

The high mountains, big rivers and lush landscapes of the Northern Drakensberg are breathtaking. Hikes, recreational activities and relaxing holidays are a drawcard, often in contrast to the rural communities who live in this water-rich fertile landscape where their daily existence is reliant on subsistence farming and water from natural springs.

The Northern Drakensberg Collaborative (NDC) was formed to coordinate activities towards addressing water insecurity and unequal access to water in the area.

THE LINK BETWEEN GRASSLANDS, BIODIVERSITY AND WATER

Just over 80% of the water source area is in a natural condition, where the steep Drakensberg mountains protect rolling grasslands – one of South Africa's priority biomes. Grasslands are home to many endemic species and act as giant sponges to absorb and retain water in this eastern region of high rainfall.

The highly biodiverse grassland ecosystem supports subsistence farming (crops and livestock), communal livestock farming and private commercial agriculture. The area is also widely valued for recreation and tourism.

WHO BENEFITS FROM THE WATER?

The Northern Drakensberg Water Source Area occurs across four district municipalities: uThukela (56%), Amajuba (16,9%) and uMzinyathi (14,4%) in KwaZulu-Natal, and Thabo Mofutsanyane (12,7%) in the Free State. In 2011, StatsSA, estimated the total population of the South African portion of the Northern Drakensberg Water Source Area to 369 370.

The healthy intact grasslands of the Northern Drakensberg are critical for water supply to four provinces. At approximately 10 000 km² in size, the Northern Drakensberg Water Source Area supplies up to 30% of the water used in Gauteng, as well as supplying the Free State, part of the North West province (Orkney, Potchefstroom and Rustenburg) and part of KwaZulu-Natal (Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Port Shepstone).

WATER SECURITY

Covering 8% of our country, South Africa has 22 strategic water source areas – our critical water-rich catchments – which provide 50% of the water in our rivers and dams.

The Northern Drakensberg Strategic Water Source Area, one of seven transboundary water source areas, is located mostly in KwaZulu-Natal. Some parts also occur in the Free State and Lesotho. The main rivers are the Caledon, Orange, uThukela and Vaal. Dams within the Northern Drakensberg include Spioenkop, Sterkfontein and Woodstock. There is also the uThukela-Vaal inter basin transfer scheme.

South Africa's strategic water source areas are vital for not only water security, but food, energy and economic security. Despite this, they are not yet receiving the level of protection that is needed to ensure a climate-adapted, water-and-food-secure future.



APPROXIMATELY 10%
of the Northern Drakensberg Strategic Water Source Area is protected





WHAT MAKES THE NORTHERN BERG UNIQUE?

For many, the majestic Northern Drakensberg is the headline act within the 1 000 km mighty Drakensberg range. Meaning “dragon mountains” in Afrikaans, the Drakensberg is an inland escarpment formation with the highest peaks in southern Africa. The Northern Drakensberg is unique for a number of reasons which contribute to its eco-tourism value, such as:

- An iconic element in the Northern Drakensberg is the Amphitheatre, a 5-km wall of rock over 1 200 m high.
- The uThukela River flows 900 m down the escarpment of the Northern Drakensberg Strategic Water Source Area, creating the world’s second-highest waterfall.
- The Northern Drakensberg is home to the uKhahlamba Drakensberg National Park which includes South Africa’s largest Ramsar site (a wetland of international importance), designated in 1997. Due to its exceptional natural beauty, rich plant biodiversity and rock art paintings, uKhahlamba was declared as a world heritage site in 2000. The highest portion of the escarpment is known as uKhahlamba in Zulu (barrier of spears) and Maloti in Sotho (mountains). Combined with a national park in neighbouring Lesotho, this area is referred to as the transboundary Maloti-Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site.

PARTNERSHIPS TO PROTECT THE NORTHERN DRAKENSBERG STRATEGIC WATER SOURCE AREA

In 2020/2021, a process started to gather like-minded local, regional and national organisations and individuals towards establishing a water source partnership in the Northern Drakensberg. The first multistakeholder workshop was held in May 2021, in Bergville, for the Living Catchment Project that was coordinated by the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and funded by the Water Research Commission and the DSI. This workshop was to convene stakeholders towards ensuring water security in the upper uThukela catchment.

Since 2022, WWF South Africa – with initial funding from the Pepsico Foundation – has played a key role in taking the partnership forward. This has included supporting a number of multistakeholder meetings to bring a diversity of organisations together, enabling knowledge sharing, developing a shared vision and encouraging collaboration towards establishing a catchment partnership: the Northern Drakensberg Collaborative (NDC).

The NDC was formed to focus on improving stewardship of water and natural resources in the region, as well as dealing with lack of water access and to improve food security and livelihoods for local impoverished communities. There is also an overarching need for a considered response to climate change.



WHAT IS THE NORTHERN DRAKENSBERG COLLABORATIVE?

The NDC is a multistakeholder partnership that was formalised in May 2023. United around a common set of goals and consensus on the need to work together, the NDC broadly represents stakeholders working, living and having an interest in the strategic water source area, with a focus on the upper uThukela catchment.

NORTHERN DRAKENSBERG COLLABORATIVE

NDC principles:

Inclusivity
Equity
Respect
Diversity



VISION

Collaboration among different entities to conserve and sustainably utilise the landscape and its water fairly, including cultural and other natural resources, as well as to empower its people, build resilience and achieve sustainable socio-economic growth.

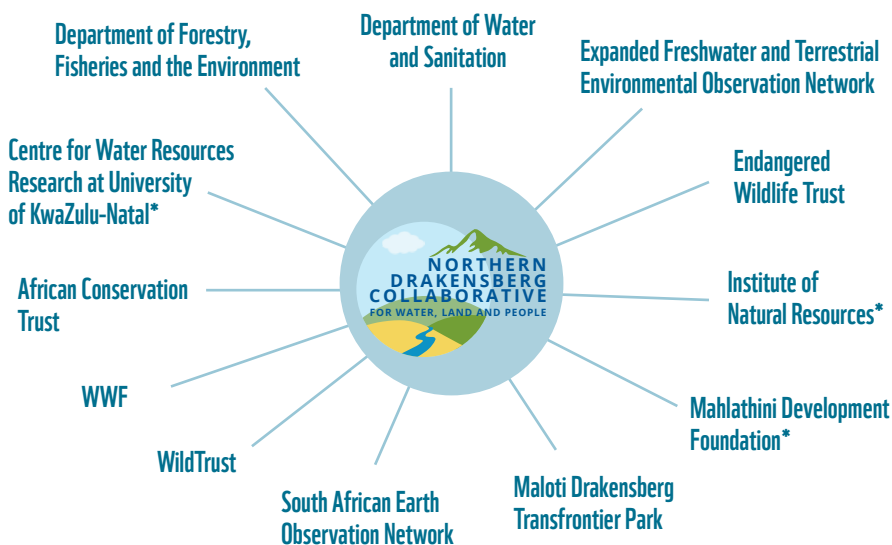
The vision for the NDC goes beyond the partnership and towards having positive impacts on the natural resources but also on people who depend on them. The NDC aims to provide the benefits to its members through the following:

- **Networking:** Providing a platform for different stakeholders to engage and exchange.
- **Monitoring:** A vehicle for monitoring the implementation of activities.
- **Co-learning:** A mechanism for co-learning between stakeholders within and beyond.
- **Fundraising:** Stakeholders can work collectively to raise funds.
- **Sharing:** The platform allows for sharing of information through different channels.
- **Co-implementation:** Members can implement activities collectively.
- **Lobbying:** The platform provides a voice for its members.
- **Supporting research:** The platform can support research and share research outcomes.



WHO IS THE NDC CORE TEAM?

During the early stages of establishing and strengthening the NDC, there has been an intermediate arrangement that has comprised a convening team, guided by a core team (marked with *) representing key members of the NDC:



WHO CAN JOIN THE NDC?

Membership of the NDC is open to all organisations with a presence and interest in the Northern Drakensberg Water Source Area and with a focus on fresh water, livelihoods and biodiversity.

The NDC membership involves traditional authorities, community-based organisations, research institutions and NGOs, as well as the private sector including commercial farmers and tourism companies. The first step to joining is the signing of the NDC commitment statement.

www.ndrakcollab.org

1 unifying water source partnership

The Northern Drakensberg Collaborative

2 government-mandated water management areas

Orange-Vaal and Pongola-Mtamvuna

3 dams in the Northern Drakensberg Water Source Area

Spioenkop, Sterkfontein and Woodstock

4 main rivers in the Northern Drakensberg Water Source Area

Caledon, Orange, uThukela and Vaal

5 NDC strategic pillars and intended outcomes

Pillar	Anticipated outcomes
Governance & strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effective governance of the NDC partnership - Effective governance within the SWSA; integrated catchment management
Networking & communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhanced sharing between partners and stakeholders
Research, learning & sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sharing of information and knowledge leads to enhanced impact - A shared research agenda for the catchment
Action, implementation & feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Solutions to address challenges are co-developed, tested and assessed
Resourcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partnership resourced for good governance, to network, learn, share and implement



mahlathini
development foundation



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