

Garden Route women show their mettle

Two women in the Garden Route National Park, in pursuit of organisational objectives post tragedies, prove Eleanor Roosevelt right - *a woman is like a teabag, you can't tell how strong she is until you put her in hot water.*



Maretha Alant with Len du Plessis

Persuading to protect the environment

Meet Maretha Alant, the park's environmental planner whose challenging task is to ensure landowners including municipalities, farmers and others comply with environmental regulation. She works with areas neighbouring the park (buffer zones). Her day to day responsibility is to comment on regulations (Environmental Impact Assessment or EIA) and other actions in favour of sustainable corridors for refugia for nature.

She received a regional Innovative Award in 2015 for working diligently at finding creative means to improve the organisation's productivity. She had come up with the most creative ways to get landowners to buy into the protection of the buffer zones. In 2015, she planned an interesting excursion that would assist both farmers and researchers in the area to determine the course of the Knysna River.

So when Alant lost her homes and belongings during the Knysna fires, she took a few days to get to terms with her loss and was back at work chasing deadlines. The very next week, she had a seminar to attend to discuss the latest environmental laws affecting Protected Areas.

Alant's story and that of her other colleagues who also lost everything during the Knysna fires is that of perseverance against all odds.

Turning things around

Meet Bulelwa Msengi who manages the Tsitsikamma section of the Garden Route National Park and had worked in Tsitsikamma for exactly six months when three significant incidents tried to threaten the Tsitsikamma section of the Garden Route National Park's income and capacity. Not only did she manage the risky incidents well, she also executed plans to protect the park from disruptions to operations and tourism revenue.

When the Cattle Baron restaurant burnt down in November 2016, threatening loss of revenue for Tsitsikamma, Bulelwa was on site to manage the incident and led her staff and those of the concessions (Cattle Baron and Park Shop) through this



Bulelwa Msengi

incident. She detailed a turnaround plan for the park which included liaising with various support divisions (her own supervisors - park manager and regional manager, communications, and internal and external stakeholders). She was instrumental in leading her team through this amidst the absence of her management team who were mostly on leave to prepare to work throughout season. The burnt site was cordoned off and upon inspecting the park, could open day visitor activities and confirm the park was not affected.

In December 2016, the Minister made a decision to rezone part of the Tsitsikamma Marine Protected Area (MPA) to accommodate line fishing in 20% of the area, making up three zones. Bulelwa was instrumental in meeting with various stakeholders including communities, DEA, and scientists. She worked throughout the season, guiding her staff. She has become a treasure and an asset to Tsitsikamma.

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