

# Garden Route declared a biosphere reserve

The Garden Route has been approved as a Unesco Biosphere Reserve. Biosphere reserves are learning places for sustainable development whose aim is to reconcile biodiversity conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources.



“The positive response to the application to declare the Garden Route a biosphere reserve is most encouraging, not just for us, as a country, but also for the people of the region,” said Environmental Affairs Minister Edna Molewa.

According to the department, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) members voted in favour of the inclusion of the Garden Route as a Biosphere reserve at a meeting in Paris, France, on Wednesday, 14 June.

“The Garden Route, one of South Africa’s prime tourism regions, is an area rich in terrestrial, coastal and marine ecosystems where conservation of the rich biodiverse region is ably reconciled with sustainable use practices,” she said.

The Unesco states that biosphere reserves are nominated by national governments and remain under the sovereign jurisdiction of the states where they are located. Their status is internationally recognised. The Garden Route Biosphere Reserve (GRBR) is the ninth such reserve to be declared in South Africa.

“The Garden Route Biosphere Reserve is located within the Cape Floristic biodiversity hotspot region along the southern coast of part of the country.

“With a total area of 698,363ha (212,375ha core, 288,032ha buffer, 197,956ha transition) and a population of 450,624 people, the area includes the Tsitsikamma, Goukamma and Robberg Marine protected areas, Wilderness Lake Ramsar site, Garden Route National Park and two components of the Cape Floral Region Protected Areas World Heritage site: the Nelson Bay Cave and the Langkloof Valley, the latter being critically endangered,” the department said.

The municipalities included in the biosphere reserve are Eden and Sarah Baartman District municipalities, as well as George, Knysna, Bitou, Kouga, and Koukamma local municipalities.

The department said all of these municipalities have been consulted in the establishment process and engagements are underway to include the biosphere reserve initiative in their Integrated Development Plans.

“Linked to the conservation related activities, the development objectives of the GRBR are to promote growth in employment, training and entrepreneurial endeavours, contribute to poverty alleviation and the development of sustainable livelihood options for disadvantaged communities, and to encourage sustainable biodiversity-based businesses and their contribution to the green economy on the Garden Route.

“Several development opportunities have arisen from the desire to conserve the natural environment within the GRBR,” the department said.

The clearing of alien vegetation has substantial socio-economic benefits for the region in the form of several government-sponsored and endorsed initiatives such as Working for Water, Working for Wetlands, and Working on Fire, all of which are involved in alien vegetation eradication and fire management in the GRBR.

“These initiatives provide employment and facilitate skills development and the exchange of ideas between the different stakeholder groups. For example, the vegetation cleared can be made available to small businesses or entrepreneurs for making furniture, crafting, making charcoal, sold as fire wood,” the department said.

The official launch of the Garden Route Biosphere Reserve will take place later in the year.

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