

Report warns SA on mining impact on resources

The World Wildlife Fund South Africa (WWF-SA) has urged government to monitor and better manage the impact of mining on the country's water, soil and biodiversity resources, Mining Weekly reports. WWF-SA is also calling on government to define and declare mining-sensitive or no-go areas.

"WWF-SA understands the key role that coal and coal mining plays in the South African economy, as well as the country's energy generation," said WWF-SA freshwater programme senior manager Christine Colvin, "[h]owever, the organisation urges government to implement better coal mining practices, which entail planning mining activities in strategic areas that do not compromise critical water resources and the country's water security," she said.

In its latest report, "Coal and Water Futures in South Africa: the case for conserving headwaters in the Enkangala grasslands" WWF-SA points out that South Africa's heavy dependence on coal for electricity has a "devastating" effect on the country's water resources. Because only 12% of South Africa's land area generates 50% of the country's river flow, the country needs to plan the development of landscapes to protect the most important resources. According to Enkangala grasslands programme coordinator Angus Burns, South Africa, a water-scarce country, should prioritise catchment conservation, particularly for the river-systems that feed the Durban and Gauteng metropolises. Instead, prospecting rights are being granted, which, if converted into mining rights, will threaten water security, food production and agricultural jobs.

Almost 25% of the 1.6-million hectare Enkangala grasslands project is under threat with the ever-increasing demand for prospecting and mining rights in the area. The report recommends that, where mining is unavoidable, best practice guidelines be prescribed, as well as the practices recommended in the "Mining and biodiversity guideline" currently being drafted by the South African National Biodiversity Institute. "The report identifies a number of shortcomings around mining that pose risks to South African water security. These include weaknesses in the legislative process and cooperative governance, the application process, enforcement of regulation and the environmental management plans, as well as the decommissioning processes," said Colvin.

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