

CHAPTER 2: THE CONTEXT OF THE WATERBERG DISTRICT AREA

2.1 GENERAL

The Waterberg District is the largest district in the Limpopo Province and is located in the western side of the Province. Map 2 illustrates the location of the Waterberg District Municipality within the Limpopo Province and includes the Waterberg Mountain Range from where its name originates. During the rainy season there is an abundance of running streams and rivulates in the veld, particularly in the mountainous areas, fed by water seeping freely from many sources and fountains. The sandstone rocks dominating the geology coupled with the mountainous terrain and the high rainfall cause this characteristic feature of the Waterberg. As such, it is an important water catchment area that has unique biodiversity features, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

The Waterberg District Municipality (previously known as the Bushveld District) consists of the following six municipalities: Mogalakwena, Bela-Bela, Modimolle, Mookgopong, Lephalale, and Thabazimbi. The district is rural in nature with the urban areas mostly described as dispersed and fragmented (Limpopo Province, Department of Local Government and Traditional Affairs, 2000).

In addition, the district has the lowest population figures in the Province in comparison to the other districts. The total population of the district is 623 354 with an estimated 117 659 households (Limpopo Province, Department of Finance, Economic Affairs and Tourism, 2001c). This report further states that the unemployment rate is 36,4% while the district has a youthful population of 42.1% (14 years and younger). Taking the percentage of the youth in the district, job opportunities are of vital importance for all future developments in the district.

The municipality within the Waterberg District that has the largest population is Mogalakwena with 281 358 people and 53 860 households. The majority of households in this municipality survive on an income below the poverty line of R800 per month

(Steyn, 2002). While a portion of the Mogalakwena Municipality forms part of the western transition zone of the Waterberg Biosphere Reserve and presents a challenge to the biosphere to improve economic conditions in these more densely populated areas. In Chapter 4 of this study specific tourism related projects that could enhance economic development in this area will be highlighted.

According to the Gross Geographic Product (GGP) of 1994, the five sectors within the Waterberg District that contribute to the economy are mining, electricity/water, services, trade/catering and agriculture. Mining is currently the largest contributor to the GGP (Limpopo Province, Department of Finance, Economic Affairs and Tourism, 2001c). Tourism, however, is not regarded as a separate sector in terms of the international classification. Tourism activities are found mainly in the trade, accommodation and catering sector, but also in transport and agriculture, which includes game farming, hunting and forestry. It is, therefore, not possible to determine at this stage what the contribution of tourism and the game industry is to the GGP of the Province. However, when one assesses the current land use in the Waterberg District, illustrated in Map 3 and 4, it is clear that the game farming/tourism industry is playing an enormous role in the district's economy.

Map 3 illustrates all the current exemption game farms¹ and protected areas in the Limpopo Province, thereby clearly indicating the majority land use in the Waterberg District area.

2.2 SPATIAL CONFIGURATION OF THE LAND USE PATTERNS IN THE DISTRICT

The broad spatial configuration of the Waterberg District with specific reference to the current land uses, indicates a fairly natural zonation pattern with the mining sector/industry mainly concentrated on the periphery of the district and the central area

¹ Exemption Farm – A landowner receives an exemption permit from the Department responsible for Environmental Affairs in the Province to hunt, capture or sell game without a permit, if the farm meets certain specifications as set by the department.

dominated by the tourism and game industry. Commercial agricultural activities mainly occur within the transition areas of the biosphere reserve or areas adjacent to the biosphere reserve. Map 4 clearly indicates the above mentioned land use pattern.

2.2.1 Natural Environment

Since the availability of water is the most crucially limiting resource for the Limpopo Province, the natural environment and the human population suffer as a result of the rather serious shortage of water. As such, this resource is constantly under pressure. The catchment areas of the main rivers flowing through the Waterberg District include the:

- a) the Lower Crocodile River sub-catchment, Crocodile River downstream of the Vaalkop, Rooikoppies and Klipvoor dam including the Matlabas Rivier;
- b) the Mokolo River catchment;
- c) the Laphalala River catchment;
- d) the Mogalakwena River catchment; and
- e) a portion of the Olifants River catchment.

The rivers flowing in the district drain in a north-westerly direction to the Limpopo River that in turn has a direct influence on South Africa's neighbouring countries.

The Waterberg area is unique due to its geological formations (predominantly sandstone). Further the Waterberg District has a fairly complex geology with a relative high degree of minerals (Limpopo Province, Department of Local Government and Traditional Affairs, 2000). The most important intrusive rock formation is the Bushveld Igneous Complex that holds large reserves of platinum (South Africa, Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, 1997a).

The area contains a rich diversity of species with numerous endemic forms as well as scarce and/or threatened species. The broad diversity of species covers a full representative range of the mammalian, reptilian, avian, and aquatic species with

sufficient area of habitat still largely intact (Limpopo Province, Department of Finance, Economic Affairs and Tourism, 2002b).

Environmental sensitive areas within the district are mainly the wetland habitats that include rivers and riverine vegetation. The Nyl floodplain which covers an area of 16 000 hectares is situated in the district with the Nylsvley Nature Reserve, which encompasses only 10% of the floodplain, and was registered in February 1998, as a Ramsar site (Limpopo Province, Department of Finance, Economic Affairs and Tourism, 2001b).

Makapansgat near Potgietersus constitutes an important archaeological site in the district. It received National Heritage Status in November 2001, and is nominated for World Heritage status (South Africa, Department of Arts and Culture, 2002). Various examples of rock art (Van de Ryst, 1996) and archaeological sites occur on private properties, for example the Melora Mountain on Laphalala (Boeyens *et al.*, 2002).

The district further more has eight Provincial Nature Reserves and one National Park named Marakele. A more detailed discussion in Chapter 3 will deal with these reserves that were zoned as core areas in the Waterberg Biosphere Reserve. Various other private nature reserves also occur in the area while their number is rapidly increasing.

2.2.2 Mining

The Waterberg Municipal area has significant mineral zones. The following are the most important mining activities nearest to the biosphere reserve:

- a) Granite mining operations in Bakenberg.
- b) A number of tin fields occur in the Waterberg District of which the Potgietersus Tin field deposits in Bakenberg and Rooiberg near Marakele National Park have an influence on the future zonation of the Waterberg Biosphere Reserve.
- c) The Waterberg coal field that has about 45% of the total in situ coal reserves of South Africa. However, it should be noted that only a fraction of this coal could be considered recoverable because the bulk is too deep to mine

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economically (Limpopo Province, Department of Local Government and Traditional Affairs, 2000).

- d) Platinum. The western sectors of the Bushveld Complex are located in the Limpopo Province. The complex has significant reserves and these two sections are currently exploited by three mines, namely Northam Platinum (Goldfields), Amandelbult (AMPLATS) and the Union section (AMPLATS).
- e) The Thabazimbi Iron mine has been in operation since 1934 with a remaining life span estimated at about 10 -12 years (Limpopo Province, Department of Local Government and Traditional Affairs, 2000).

Since mining is currently the largest contributor to the GGP in the Waterberg District as already mentioned (Limpopo Province, Department of Finance, Economic Affairs and Tourism, 2001c), it is a factor to consider when planning land use activities, especially tourism related activities.

2.2.3 Agriculture

The area contributes significantly towards the activity of agriculture on the provincial level. As the district proportionally has the largest area of land utilized for dryland production. Tobacco, Cotton, Sunflower, Sorghum, and Maize contribute about 25% of the total farm income earned in field crop commodities, while about 41% of the tobacco crop of the Province is produced in the district (Limpopo Province, Department of Finance, Economic Affairs and Tourism, 2001c). The southern part of the district falls on the so-called Springbuck flats, on which nearly 50% of the domestic cotton crop is produced. However, Although, due to the acute water shortage in some areas, the optimization of the agricultural potential in the region will be difficult. Because the Waterberg proportionally has the largest area that can be used for grazing in the Province, it makes an extremely significant contribution to the production of red meat and the game industry (Limpopo Province, Department of Finance, Economic Affairs and Tourism, 2001c).

Map 4 illustrates that commercial irrigation is mostly found in the Alma Valley near Vaalwater and Sterkriver in the western side near Entabeni and Doorndraai Dam with degraded areas (overgrazing) mainly occurring in the western side of the district.

2.2.4 Tourism

The Limpopo Province's natural and cultural features have unequalled potential for tourism. One of the Province's main assets is its large areas which are relatively unspoilt, particularly the Waterberg, Soutpansberg, and Drakensberg mountain ranges. The splendour and beauty of these mountains, coupled with their wilderness atmosphere and rich habitat diversity, provide unmatched opportunities for ecotourism development (Henning, 2002).

The Waterberg area is well known for being a very scenic environment. Since the Waterberg and its surrounding areas are vast and are rapidly becoming one of the best known tourist destinations in the country, especially so in the Limpopo Province (Steyn, 2002). Since prospective buyers of land have become increasingly aware of the value of land in this area, land is being reverted rapidly into game farms. This has led to a remarkable expansion of game farming and tourism in the area.

Notwithstanding the absence of precise tourism statistics for the district, game farming and ecotourism related activities are reckoned to be the backbone of the Waterberg District's economy. In the survey conducted for the completion of this study, 1240 exemption farms were recorded for the year 2001 from information obtained from the provincial Environment Division while eight hundred and ninety nine hunting licenses were issued in 2001, which indicates that hunting still constitutes a major part of tourism in the Waterberg.

Map 3 clearly reflects that the number of exemption farms proves that the hunting industry is well developed. Four thousand and twenty hunting clients registered in the 1999/2000 financial year with the Limpopo Province and the Eastern Cape obtaining the largest number of hunting tourists (PHASA, 2000). PHASA (2000) further more

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estimates that the hunting industry generated R238 million from daily rates and trophy fees from foreign and domestic hunters in South Africa during the 1999/2000 financial year. This is a substantial increase from 1997, when the professional hunting industry generated R175 million (PHASA, 1998). Kessel Feinstein (2001) roughly estimated the hunting industry in the Limpopo Province at R71 million. This does not include income from related activities such as taxidermy, transportation, personnel expenses, as well as pre and post tour income generated by these hunters.

The ability to offer a large diversity of game species makes South Africa and particularly the Limpopo Province a popular tourist destination. Various forms of hunting are also performed in the Province e.g. trophy hunting, meat hunting, bird hunting and bow hunting. The real impact of the hunting industry on the economy of the Limpopo Province has, unfortunately, not yet been determined, which is a real shortcoming in the economic strategy of the Province when one considers the number of game farms in the Limpopo Province.

The fact that the Waterberg area is malaria free and has a rather mild climate, further contributes to its tourism appeal. As a tourist destination, the Waterberg is suitably located with a two to three hours' drive by tarred road from the large city centre of Gauteng, which is one of the reasons why it has become so popular not only amongst tourists, but also amongst people interested in buying developed game farms as well as land that could be converted into game farms (Walker, 1998).

A wide variety of game related tourist activities are available in not only the Waterberg Biosphere Reserve, but also in areas in close proximity. Not only Bela-Bela (Warmbaths) in the south with its well-known Spa resort with hot springs, are hotel, chalets and bungalows as well as a caravan park and camping facilities, Modimole (Nylstroom), Mookgopong (Naboomspruit), Vaalwater, Thabazimbi and Lephalale (Ellisras) have become well-known tourist destinations in the Limpopo Province (Steyn, 2002). Mookgopong too have hot spring resorts, the provincial Nature Reserve Nylsvley, which

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is internationally known due to the ecosystem (wetland) research (Huntley *et al.*, 1978) undertaken there, as well as the Marakele National Park near Thabazimbi.

As already mentioned, the real impact of the Waterberg District on the tourist market has not yet been established, especially the impact of the hunting industry of the district. However, this study will contribute in giving more information that was assimilated with specific reference to the biosphere reserve area.