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## TOURISM IN THE MAGALIESBERG BIOSPHERE

Biosphere Reserves are "Living laboratories" (Mousli, 2008) to develop integrated management of land, water and biodiversity. They are solutions to reconcile the conservation of biodiversity and its sustainable use by following the UNESCO Man and Biosphere (MAB) programme. Their goals are –

- the conservation of biodiversity, and
- Sustainable development.

A socio-economic evaluation of the Magaliesberg Biosphere (Magaliesberg Biosphere Situational Analysis Report, 2011), recognises the growing importance of the tourism sector in the provincial and local economies of the Magaliesberg Biosphere

Region. The report further notes the limited education levels of the regional population, and the high unemployment rates, especially in areas to the north.

It is therefore envisaged in the Magaliesberg Biosphere Management Plan (2013), that the Magaliesberg Biosphere will, in partnership with government, the private sector and NGO partners, and in line with its conservation and socio-economic objectives, be a catalyst for:

- Stimulating sustainable and responsible tourism development; while
- Promoting and supporting responsible and sustainable economic utilisation of resources;
- Developing a strong brand identity which is effectively projected to the market; and
- In all of the above seek economic opportunities and facilitate capacity building programmes that would benefit its people.

To achieve this, the biosphere concept as a conservation priority, and a prime regional tourism destination, should be capitalised upon to attract appropriate development and investments for the area, through the development and implementation of a comprehensive and integrated branding, marketing and communication strategy.

In addition, the Management Plan states that "the Magaliesberg Biosphere should be recognised amongst potential investors and

partners as a secure investment area where the natural beauty of the Magaliesberg is protected, where appropriate developments are encouraged, where the rights of land owners and investors are protected, and where collaborative branding and marketing creates and maintains a vibrant tourism interest.

Through this recognition, substantial commitments are made by government and the private sector in the Magaliesberg's significant investment and partnering opportunities in the fields of conservation, tourism development, scientific research, education and social upliftment."

**The desired state is that the Magaliesberg Biosphere is recognised as a prominent...**

- **Responsible tourism destination**
- **Nature-based , eco-tourism destination**
- **Sport and Adventure based tourism destination**
- **Culture and heritage based tourism destination**
- **Recreation and retail based tourism destination**

**... that contributes substantially and sustainably towards the socio-economic development and well-being of the region, by attracting an array of local, regional, national and international visitors.**

## Tourism Development Strategy

To achieve the desired state just described, the MB Management Plan envisions a **Tourism development strategy** – focussing tourism around these **themed destinations** and **routes**, which would also open opportunities for smaller role players.

In summary the Tourism Development strategy suggests –

- The existing Magaliesberg brand should be capitalised upon to establish the Magaliesberg Biosphere as a significant regional tourism destination. This should underpin the development of a strong brand and utilise the full potential of the variety of nature and adventure tourism products already on offer.
- A spatial tourism development plan for the Magaliesberg Biosphere, based on the zonation of the Magaliesberg Biosphere and the associated spatial development guidelines, which organise the density and nature of tourism developments to be of a 'very low' intensity within the Core Areas and of a 'low to moderate' intensity in the Buffer Zones. New tourism developments in the transition zone should mitigate negative impacts to the Core and Buffer areas.

- The Magaliesberg Biosphere caters for the full spectrum of permanent to occasional residents, through day visitors to overnight tourists. Due to its locality immediately adjacent to South Africa's major metropolis day trips should become a significant part of its market focus, and spatial tourism development plan.
- Day trippers create substantial business prospects and provide opportunities for employment and skills development amongst host communities.
- Visitor circulation, key to the spatial tourism development plan, provides visitors with a memorable tourism experience with visible "point of arrival" on each of the access routes, through signage, so that visitors can experience a transition from travelling "to" to travelling "within" the area.
- The visitor circulation framework of staging posts, gateways, hubs and distribution points provides opportunities for the establishment of tourism routes, themed meanders, visitor's centres and dedicated or themed smart applications.
- Routes, Rambles and Meanders focus on a flow of visitors, rather than a large concentration of people at one anchor

attraction. If they obtain buy-in from participants and local communities they are sustainable and low-impact tourism options, where small operators can participate, and shared marketing costs and participation on websites reduces the cost for each participant.

In tandem with the tourism strategy:

**The Empowerment Strategy** – facilitates the empowerment and beneficitation of rural communities by proactively identifying opportunities for them to integrate into conservation, environmental management and **tourism projects, programmes and ventures** and where feasible to proactively facilitate partnerships that will give access to business opportunities and employment.

## Responsible Tourism

**Responsible Tourism** refers to tourist developments and operations that subscribe to the principles of environmental and social responsibility and sustainability.

It is a tourism management strategy to bring about positive environmental, cultural, social and economic, impacts to a region.

Tourists are becoming increasingly vigilant consumers. Market research shows more international tourists want to learn about the host country, reduce environmental impact and meet local people.

Destinations promoting good practice undoubtedly have a market advantage. For tourism operators, supporting local economic growth is therefore key to long-term success.

“South Africa needs more bona fide responsible tourism products – more certified products – to meet demand by international tour operators and to cater to the growing numbers of independent travellers actively seeking responsible tourism options. South Africa has helped to pioneer Responsible Tourism on the worldwide stage – our job now is to mainstream it.” (Jennifer Seif -Chairperson of the Technical Working Group - National Minimum Standard on Responsible Tourism).

## Biosphere Management and Organisational Structure for Tourism

Working committees or technical committees should be formed for each of the primary Functional Groupings of the Magaliesberg biosphere. The proposed committee for tourism is:

### **Socio-economic and Tourism Development**

The tourism working committee will comprise voluntary members from the various interest groups and key stakeholder groupings, jointly making up a functional committee. Within each committee a convener will be appointed by the Management Agency that will automatically be represented on the Executive Management board.

## Responsibility of the Tourism Sector in the Magaliesberg Biosphere

For tourism development and activities to remain within the Biosphere Management Plan guidelines for zones, and that their scope and scale remain at sustainable levels for the environment. Strive towards Responsible and Sustainable tourism guided by reports such as:

- World Charter for sustainable tourism
- UNEP/CBD International guidelines for sustainable tourism.
- South African Responsible tourism Guidelines

## UNEP/CBD International Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism.

<https://www.cbd.int/tourism/guidelines>

The scope of these guidelines is for stakeholders to manage tourism activities in an ecological, economic and socially sustainable manner. The guidelines can be flexibly applied to suit different circumstances and domestic institutional and legal settings.

These guidelines were developed to inform the policy making, development planning and the management process for sustainable tourism. They rely on the collaboration of stakeholders including different tiers of government, those responsible for management of protected areas, indigenous and local communities and tourism institutions to integrate tourism and biodiversity conservation.

Drafting a sustainable tourism framework, for policy making, development planning and management, is very involved. The CBD international guidelines follow these steps:

Baseline information and review; Vision and goals; Objectives; Review of legislation and control measures; Impact assessment; Impact management and mitigation; Decision-making; Implementation; Monitoring and reporting and finally, Adaptive management.

## South African Responsible tourism Guidelines Handbook

This handbook uses South Africa's National Responsible Tourism Guidelines as a basis to strive towards more sustainable tourism practice, and provides examples and tips on how to operate more responsibly. It also provides steps on how to develop a responsible tourism plan, and a self evaluation form.

It divides responsible tourism guidelines into:

### **1. Economic responsibility**

Assess economic impacts before developing tourism, Ensure communities are involved in and benefit from tourism, Assist with local marketing and product development, Promote equitable business and pay fair prices.

### **2. Social responsibility**

Assess social impacts of tourism activities, Involve local communities in planning and decision making, Respect social and cultural diversity; Be sensitive to the host culture, Improve staff living standards and quality of life.

### **3. Environmental responsibility**

Reduce environmental impacts when developing tourism, Sound waste management, Use natural resources sustainably, maintain biodiversity, introduce a land

management programme for fire, erosion control, and alien invasive removal and indigenous planting.

## The Road Ahead

A sustainable tourism development strategy, framework and spatial plan for the Magaliesberg Biosphere, as envisioned in the MB Management Plan will be site specific, and would best be informed by a regional spatial development framework RSDF, which has yet to be drafted. In the meantime, to establish the baseline, the following provides useful information -

- The new Bojanala Draft Environmental Management Framework (2018),
- The Magaliesberg Biosphere Situational Analysis (2011),
- The Magaliesberg Protected Environment EMF (2007),
- The Cradle of Humankind SDF (2011)
- Hartebeespoort Regional SDF (2009)

These may be read in conjunction with municipal, provincial, national and international tourism documents, such as –

- Bojanala Responsible Tourism Handbook (2011)
- South Africa's National Responsible Tourism Guidelines (2002)
- National Responsible Tourism Strategy (2011)

## Setting standards for responsible tourism in the Biosphere

The development of criteria for establishing standards and evaluation of responsible and sustainable tourism for the tourism sector in the Magaliesberg Biosphere, may adopt, or be guided by:

- South African National Minimum Standard for Responsible Tourism (SANMSRT)
- The Biosphere Responsible Tourism Certification (International certificate)

## Responsible Tourism Certification (South Africa)

An instrument used to reinforce the principle of responsible tourism is the SABS approved National Responsible Tourism Standard, SANS 1162 (2011), whose sole objective is establishing a common understanding of responsible tourism in South Africa. The National Department of Tourism has entered into an agreement with the South African National Accreditation System (SANAS), an agency of the Department of Trade & Industry for the implementation of the accreditation system.

The National Minimum Standard for Responsible Tourism gives people a more constructive platform for responsible tourism.

The standard consists of 41 criteria divided into the following four categories:

- Sustainable operations and management

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- Economic criteria
- Social and cultural criteria
- Environmental criteria

The standard offers a self assessment tool in tandem with certification by approved bodies, and incentives for accreditation.

<https://tkp.tourism.gov.za/rt/certification>

## Biosphere Responsible Tourism Certification (International)

The responsible Tourism institute, through an MOU with UNESCO promotes responsible and sustainable tourism through Biosphere Tourism standards and certification.

The Responsible Tourism System is developed through a system of rules as a private system of voluntary and independent Sustainable Tourism Certification. International standards for certification are tailored to different stakeholders in the tourism sector:

- Destinations
- Hotels and other accommodation
- Tour Operators
- Transport agencies
- Visitors centres, Museums, activity centres (e.g. bird park)

International standards for a destination, such as the Magaliesberg Biosphere are categorised into:

- Instruments for a responsible tourism policy
- Social and economic development of the destination and the local community
- Preservation and improvement of cultural heritage
- Environmental Conservation

<https://www.biospheretourism.com/en>

### Some Expected Benefits of the Magaliesberg Biosphere for Tourism

Socioeconomic benefits through the identification of business and employment opportunities in the green economy and ecotourism.

Biosphere's have global reach and access to international markets, with millions of international tourists seeking Biosphere destinations as travel options.

Conservation of the environment through international, national and local awareness that could bring funding, new projects and changed behaviour.

Combined effort by different role players to strive for a cleaner environment, and healthy eco-system.

That the core, buffer and protected areas be protected and managed through appropriate spatial and land use development tools to ensure that the scenic beauty is retained and that these areas are not adversely affected by other activities to the detriment of tourism.

The natural and eco-tourism value of individual landowners' properties is underpinned and enhanced through the protection of the Magaliesberg Biosphere's natural attributes, while enabling a broad range of tourism activities across the distinctive biosphere zones.