

SANBI

Biodiversity for Life

South African National Biodiversity Institute



Biodiversity Stewardship

Partnerships for securing biodiversity

What is biodiversity stewardship?

Biodiversity stewardship is an approach to entering into agreements with private and communal landowners to protect and manage land in biodiversity priority areas, led by conservation authorities in South Africa. It recognises **landowners as the custodians of biodiversity** on their land. Biodiversity stewardship is based on voluntary commitments from landowners, with a range of different types of Biodiversity Stewardship Agreements available to support conservation and sustainable resource use. Some types of Biodiversity Stewardship Agreements are formally declared as protected areas in terms of the Protected Areas Act, providing long-term security for the sites involved.

Biodiversity stewardship contributes to landscape management and protected area expansion

Biodiversity stewardship is implemented on sites that have been identified as important for biodiversity and ecosystem services, based on best available science. Biodiversity stewardship is a **highly cost-effective mechanism for expanding protected areas**. Both the processes to negotiate and declare a protected area through the biodiversity stewardship model, as well as the ongoing cost of supporting the landowners to manage the biodiversity stewardship sites once they are declared, are many times less costly to the conservation authority than the cost to purchase land and manage protected areas themselves.

Under biodiversity stewardship, the land remains the property of the landowner. Biodiversity stewardship is particularly **effective in multiple-use landscapes** where biodiversity priority areas are embedded in a matrix of other land uses. A flexible range of biodiversity stewardship agreements is available that can combine biodiversity protection and sustainable agricultural production. This makes biodiversity stewardship appropriate for a wide variety of landscapes, including agricultural and communal areas.

Biodiversity stewardship began as a pilot in one province in 2003. Within ten years, biodiversity stewardship programmes had been initiated in all nine provinces in South Africa. By October 2014, provincial biodiversity stewardship programmes had secured over 450 000 ha through the creation of 74 protected areas, making substantial contributions towards meeting national protected area targets. An additional 550 000 ha are in negotiation, creating a potential further 145 protected areas across the country with long-term security.

Defining Protected Areas and Conservation Areas

Protected Areas are defined as geographic areas that are formally protected by the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act (Act 57 of 2003). They are managed mainly for biodiversity conservation, and contribute to the protected area estate.

Conservation Areas are areas that are not formally protected by the Protected Areas Act but are nevertheless managed at least partly for biodiversity conservation. They contribute to the broader conservation estate.





Types of Biodiversity Stewardship Agreements

There are **five different types of biodiversity stewardship agreements**, ranging from non-binding to long-term, formally declared protected areas. Each successive level of agreement provides more protection for biodiversity and involves more land-use restrictions. In line with this, increased support is provided to the landowner at higher levels of commitment. In addition, the relative importance of biodiversity is taken into consideration for eligibility at each level. In order to qualify for the higher levels of agreement, the property must have sufficient biodiversity importance.

The Protected Areas Act provides the legal framework for the two highest levels of biodiversity stewardship: **Nature Reserves** and **Protected Environments**. These are established by a formal declaration by the national Minister or provincial Member of the Executive Council. Nature Reserves and Protected Environments that are declared through the biodiversity stewardship programme have the same legal standing as state-owned and managed protected areas, and contribute to South Africa's protected

area estate. Nature Reserves are declared on property with high biodiversity importance and have long-term title deed restrictions, which mean that even if the land changes hands its status as a protected area remains in place. Protected Environments are slightly more flexible than Nature Reserves and can be declared across multiple properties. Protected Environments can allow for some forms of production on the land, as long as this is integrated into an approved management plan.

Biodiversity Management Agreements are made possible under the Biodiversity Act. They are based on the development of a biodiversity management plan under this legislation. **Biodiversity Agreements** are based on contracts between landowners and the provincial conservation authority. They include an agreed management plan. These agreements are not considered protected areas, but do contribute to the conservation area estate. Both are intended to be shorter term agreements than Nature Reserves or Protected Environments.

Biodiversity Partnership Areas are informal agreements between the landowner and conservation authority, and do not legally bind either party to any obligations.

	Agreement type	Legal mechanism	Typical contract length	Binding on the property	Binding on the landowner
Biodiversity importance ↑ Site security ↑ Landowner commitment ↑ State support ↑	Nature Reserve	National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act 57 of 2003	30–99 years or in perpetuity	Protected area declaration and title deed restriction	Contract agreement
	Protected Environment	National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act 57 of 2003	A minimum of 30 years	Protected area declaration and title deed note	Contract agreement
	Biodiversity Management Agreement	National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act 10 of 2004	5–10 years	Not binding	Agreement governed by the Biodiversity Act
	Biodiversity Agreement	Contract law	5–10 years	Not binding	Contract agreement
	Biodiversity Partnership Areas	Informal agreement		Not binding	Not binding

Key role players in biodiversity stewardship

Landowners are the most important participants in biodiversity stewardship. Landowners can be individuals, communities, companies or municipalities. Biodiversity stewardship is a voluntary commitment and has proven to be a popular way for willing landowners to play a part in conservation. A management plan is developed between the provincial conservation authority and the landowner. Landowners retain ownership and management of their land. A number of incentives become available to landowners once a biodiversity stewardship agreement is signed.

Provincial conservation authorities are responsible for biodiversity conservation in each province of South Africa. They negotiate biodiversity stewardship agreements with landowners, provide ongoing support for biodiversity stewardship sites and conduct annual audits to ensure that landowners are complying with the agreements. Provincial conservation authorities are supported at national level by the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) and the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI).

Biodiversity stewardship benefits greatly from the support of **non-governmental organisations** (NGOs). NGOs played a key role in piloting the biodiversity stewardship approach and enabling the establishment of the first biodiversity stewardship programmes in the mid-2000s, and they continue to support biodiversity stewardship in several provinces. NGOs provide financial support and assistance from expert staff. They can play the role of a trusted mediator during negotiations between landowners and the provincial conservation authorities, and can contribute to site assessments and the development of management plans.

Incentives for biodiversity stewardship

The provincial biodiversity stewardship programmes aim to provide incentives to participating landowners, in relation to the level of commitment from the landowner. Incentives **include technical advice and support on biodiversity management**, such as invasive alien control and burning of firebreaks; game donations of founder populations by conservation authorities to the landowners; and **recognition and marketing opportunities**.



At a national level, **fiscal incentives** have been created for landowners. Those portions of Nature Reserves that are used solely for conservation are excluded from being charged property rates. Income tax deductions for management expenses are available for Nature Reserves, Protected Environments and Biodiversity Management Agreements. In addition, an income tax deduction based on the value of the property is afforded to landowners with Nature Reserves declared for at least 99 years.

Biodiversity stewardship, rural development and land reform

Biodiversity stewardship can be important to realising the **ecological, economic and social benefits** that healthy ecosystems can deliver over the long term. Biodiversity stewardship can stimulate rural economic development by creating a focus for nature-based tourism and sustainable natural resource use. This assists in the diversification of rural livelihoods, especially in agriculturally marginal areas. Biodiversity stewardship sites can also support job creation and skills development through direct land management and restoration, or indirectly through compatible commercial activities. In South Africa, land reform often results in new communal landownership. In these areas, biodiversity stewardship can help to ensure access to the economic opportunities associated with protected areas. The Land Reform Biodiversity Stewardship Initiative was established in 2009 and is demonstrating that conservation and land reform can work hand in hand.

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