

## Areas In Eastern Cape

The Kromensee Nature Reserve and The Sand River Private Nature Reserve were officially opened yesterday at an event held at St Francis Links in the Eastern Cape.

Wind farms in the Eastern Cape have become excellent sources of renewable energy with over 15 such operations having been erected in the province over the last five years. According to consulting firm Frost & Sullivan in its report, titled 'The renewable energy services market and its potential in South Africa, renewable energy is expected to account for 20% nameplate capacity in South Africa's total power generation capacity by 2030.

But while these working wind farms play their part in the growth of South Africa's renewable energy resources, they could also cause a threat to local conservation, particularly where the bird and bat populations are concerned.

Because of this, an initiative called the Greater Kromme Stewardship (GKS) has been started near St. Francis Bay in the Eastern Cape by two groups of environmentally-minded people:

The Kromme Enviro-Trust, St Francis, is an environmentalist organisation started by a group of volunteers as far back as 1981. Its supporters have a deep interest in the welfare of the animals and plants that make this area their home.

The Wind Energy Collective is a group of like-minded wind farm developers. These developers are not just green energy producers; they are committed to environmental responsibility. Wind Energy Collective includes:

Gibson Bay Wind Farm

Jeffrey's Bay Wind Farm

Kouga Wind Farm

Oyster Bay Wind Farm

Tsitsikamma Community Wind Farm

Together, these groups formed the Greater Kromme Stewardship, a pioneering conservation project that will endeavour to make sure that the new wind farms have a positive impact on the local environment.

These partners are using an approach called Biodiversity Stewardship – an exciting new process that can declare nature reserves on private land and help ordinary people become responsible stewards of the natural spaces that they own

Conservation Outcomes, experts in Biodiversity Stewardship, have been brought in to manage the project, including the appointment of a full time stewardship facilitator and an intern to operate in the area. The project also has the full support of the Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency.

As proponents of 'green' power, the Greater Kromme Stewardship is committed to conservation, not just of the bird and bat life by creating a safe refuge for them, but of all threatened biodiversity in the district.

Maggie Langlands from Kromme Enviro-Trust says, "We didn't know we were doing something extraordinary when we came together on this project. An independent assessor tells us that this initiative has secured more priority land for conservation in the Kouga region than any other initiative in the last fifty years."

The first two protected areas, namely the Kromensee Nature Reserve and The Sand River Private Nature Reserve, were officially opened today at an event held at St Francis Links Golf Estate and attended by local media, GKS members, the public sector, government, local landowners and farmers, conservationists and various other stakeholders.

Speaking at this morning's event, Conservation Outcomes' Kevin McCann says "These are only the first two of ten sites in line for declaration as protected areas, and after that there are a number of other sites we are actively assessing for protection. This is an area with exceptional biodiversity and unique species – this initiative by the wind farms is doing remarkable things for conservation in the landscape."

More about the first two protected areas:

The Kromensee Nature Reserve is a very diverse area that includes sensitive ecological features such as a network of primary coastal sand dunes, a perennial dune stream, and a pristine coastline that extends all the way from Paradise Beach to the Kromme river estuary. The Kromensee Nature Reserve contains a fynbos-thicket mosaic, known as St Francis Strandveld, which is a critically endangered vegetation type which is unique to the coastal areas around St Francis Bay and Cape St Francis. The Kromensee Nature Reserve is also home to a number of endangered and rare plant species that are known to be endemic to the area (meaning that they only occur in the particular area). Besides being a beautiful coastal reserve, the Kromensee Nature Reserve also plays an important ecological role by helping to regulate coastal processes that are essential for maintaining beaches in the region.

The Sand River Private Nature Reserve contains part of the dynamic Sand River system, as well as one of the finest examples of a Headland Bypass Dune-field. Together, these ecological features create a unique combination of mobile sand dunes, wetland systems and dune streams and pools which creates a diverse range of terrestrial and aquatic habitats. The Sand River Private Nature Reserve also contains endangered and critically endangered vegetation types that form a natural fynbos-thicket mosaic. As a result, the Sand River Private Nature Reserve sustains an extraordinary diversity of threatened species, many of which are unique to the Sand River system and its surrounding areas. Extremely rare species have also been

recorded on the Sand River Private Nature Reserve, like the Salt Marsh Gecko (*Cryptactites peringueyi*) which is only found around the Kromme river area. Furthermore, the dune-fields found on the Sand River Private Nature Reserve also contain a number of ancient Khoisan middens and artefacts that are of great archaeological value.

## Sand River Private Nature Reserve

In summary, the aims of The Greater Kromme Stewardship initiative going forward are:

Knowledge – Improve people's understanding of why it is important to conserve biodiversity.

Protection – Create new protected areas, through Biodiversity Stewardship, that will conserve natural habitats.

Land management – Properly manage the land to keep it functioning in a healthy way.

Funding – Access new sources of funding for land management.

Sustainability – Reduce poverty by supporting entrepreneurs in sustainable green businesses.

Birds – Develop projects to help protect bird species that are threatened.

For more information go to [www.gksinitiative.co.za](http://www.gksinitiative.co.za)

Photographs: Sacha Park Photography

Press Release

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