



## Wilderness Ratepayers and Residents Association

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Established 1971

### **Chair Report for AGM 21 February 2024**

Simon Jamieson, Chair from September 2023

The WRRRA had an active 2023 with many positive changes and several challenges still to deal with. Our 2023 Chairman, John Miller, had to undertake emergency surgery in 2023 and, although he is on the road to full recovery, he had to immediately resign from all duties with WRRRA and I took over the position as WRRRA Chair in September. At this writing, we have about 330 member households down from about 340 at this time last year.

This report is intended to summarise the main activities since the 2023 AGM and outline future plans which are available for discussion with the membership at the AGM and future meetings and events.

**The WRRRA Constitution.** After several meetings and a great deal of behind-the-scenes administration, a Special General Meeting was held on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2023 when members attending agreed constitutional amendments that were essential to enable the WRRRA to apply for non-profit status. Minutes of the meetings can be found elsewhere but, after some minor, final amendments based on legal advice received in December, the process is now in motion to register the association with SARS which could facilitate more and larger potential funding from donations and the provision of tax certificates to donors. This, in turn, should mean that larger projects can be undertaken in future.

**Bus Shelter, Heights Village.** At the 2022 AGM, it was agreed that funds remaining from member donations for Covid relief should be used to provide the Heights Village community with a much-needed bus shelter. After a large amount of effort by the WRRRA committee and members over more than 18 months, it was deemed that WRRRA no longer had the manpower or resources to negotiate with the Provincial, District or Municipal authorities in order to bring a positive outcome. The project was abandoned and all monies returned to donors or re-allocated.

**Road Action Group.** At the 2023 AGM, the leader of this group, Greg Mayne, gave a presentation. Throughout 2023 the group has remained active although far less so due to their ongoing success. There have hardly been any overweight vehicles using the Heights and Whites Roads but there continues to be issues around Rondevlei.

**Treasurer's Report and Adoption of the Reviewed Accounts.** Our finances are in good shape as will be seen on the reviewed financial statement when this is available next week. Our decisions about income (such as the rand amount of annual subs, finding other sources, soliciting donations, etc.) and expenditures (such as for maintenance, Fire Forum items, environmental projects) have been made at our ExCo meetings. We will now take these discussions and decisions as much as possible to the general membership. To this end, we will be convening meetings with members from time to time devoted to reviewing income and project funding ideas. We have instituted a process for preparation of annual budgets and we will prepare policy guidance for this purpose which will be made available on the website.

**Secretary/Administrative.** Work on the revised WRRRA constitution was exacting at times but the importance of getting this right was paramount and all those involved went the extra mile. In conjunction with this, we now have completed our final drafts for seven WRRRA policies and procedures that are in line with the provisions of

the revised constitution. Work on role descriptions for committee members has also continued with the majority now complete. The content of the website was reviewed, updated and improved as were the online information packs for new residents to the area and local estate agents.

**Communications.** After the previous year's communication events, the aim was to maintain a two-way exchange of views between the members and the executive committee. There have been some communications from members and these are to be encouraged. The newsletters are intended to keep members informed and the website and Facebook pages have been revised and updated with regular news also being disseminated on the WRRRA WhatsApp group.

**Development Diligence.** This portfolio was led by me prior to taking over the role of Chair. After reviewing and commenting on many municipal planning applications during the previous 12 months I took an extended vacation in May 2023 resulting in a 6 week period where no comments were submitted. With subsequent personal commitments and since taking over chairmanship of WRRRA unexpectedly in early September, no other reviews or comments have effectively been made regarding development in Wilderness since May 2023.

Balvindra Walter has continued to represent WRRRA at site visits to many properties to attempt to oversee due process and influence positive outcomes.

**Wilderness Action Group + Village Maintenance.** The Wilderness Action Group (WAG), financed by member contributions, continues to be active outside of the central village area with verge clearing and general improvement and maintenance projects. At the same time, the Village Maintenance work, financed mainly through business donations to the Wilderness Improvement Program (WIP) as well as general WRRRA funding, remains an active force in keeping the central village area attractive, clean and tidy. Both initiatives continue to be successful with visible results that benefit residents and visitors. We thank our members and businesses for their ongoing support that enables us to keep Wilderness special and will continue to encourage commitment from residents, existing and new businesses to keep this work dynamic.

**Environment Portfolio.** Various projects have commenced and made small progress throughout 2023. A team of local unemployed young workers has been employed for two days a week for most of the year to clear alien invasives from private and municipal land. Meetings have been held with potential suppliers and landowners regarding further removal of aliens and the subsequent biomass.

A local artist is on standby to create example artworks and to teach local artisans in producing art from waste. This would also act as a waste collection and recycling facility in the area.

A small team of WRRRA members has made huge progress on organising and creating an "Eco-Centre" which is planned to be opened at the end of March 2024. This will display relevant information on the ecology of our area whilst informing residents and visitors of natural facilities and also the regulations and by-laws of developing property.

WRRRA has also supported other initiatives such as the Re-Wilding Revival event on the Touw River Estuary and the SaveWild campaign initiated by a member to publicise the natural habitat that we live in.

**Security.** Security continues to be a complicated matter. We are fortunate that there is not a great deal of criminal activity in Wilderness but we are not immune and this can change. The main difference in the last year has been the introduction of WDF as a new private security organisation in the area. The evident difference is the reduction in visibility of vagrants, beggars and informal car-guards and the increase in visibility of other private security companies who recognise they now have competition. We have continued to engage with all local security providers to encourage an integrated approach for the benefit of the Wilderness community. There appears to be some disarray regarding manning of the Wilderness Police Station and any provision of services from SAPS. We continue to approach SAPS to motivate the rejuvenation of our monthly community police forum including the provision of statistics and trends within the area.

**Fire Forum.** The WRRRA Fire Forum has been functioning since 2017. Fire Management Units have been established in each of seven neighbourhoods. Having said that, the activities of WRRRA in fire prevention have been somewhat limited in the last 12 months but liaison with both the staff at our own Wilderness Fire Station and the George and Garden Route Fire Departments is ongoing with the intention of gaining more recognition for the work of the Fire Forum and greater collaboration and a joined up common approach to fire management.

**Talks and Events.** “WRRRA Talks” presented five events over the past 12 months:

Heritage	– Natie De Swart
Communicating with Wildlife	– Wynter Worsthorne
Dung Beetles as Canaries	– Dr Marcus Byrne
Protecting the Gannets	– Dr Zanri Strydom
The last Shark	– Dr Frankie Chipparoni

Suggestions for new topics/speakers are always appreciated and a volunteer to assist in arranging the talks would be wonderful to find.

One of the major events of the year was the placing and unveiling of the statue of Leentjie at Leentjiesklip. Originally intended to be unveiled on 19<sup>th</sup> September, a huge tide ensued resulting in a massive wave crashing across the beach and tragedy unfolded with the death of one visitor to the area. After much soul-searching and subsequent re-arrangements, a successful unveiling and commemoration ceremony was held on 1<sup>st</sup> November.

**Hoekwil Residents and Ratepayers Association.** The HRRRA may be a separate organization but as Hoekwil itself is a part of the greater Wilderness area, we share many of the same issues and objectives. As a consequence, the HRRRA Chair, currently Chris Kritzinger, is an integral part of our ExCo.

HRRRA has been working with WAG and did a lot of sidewalk maintenance in Hoekwil, Touwsrante, the Viewpoint on Hoekwil Pass and Hoekwil Pass itself.

With ward funds from the George Municipality, HRRRA supplied a skip for large rubbish items at Touwsrante all year. This led to a huge decrease in dumping on Seven Passes Road and it is hoped that the municipality will take over the permanent provision of the skip later this year.

HRRRA has been supporting a Hoekwil/Touwsrante Community Dialogue and a craft market a couple of times a year in Touwsrante.

HRRRA are involved in development applications in the Hoekwil/Touwsrante area of which the most prominent last year was the flying school application at Mandalay Farm.

Hoekwil has an active Neighbourhood Watch that HRRRA supports, and together they have been working to address petty crime in the area.

**Community Liaison.** During 2023 the WRRRA has not maintained a head of this portfolio and so coordinated actions have not been achieved. Since my appointment, I have met with the leaders of Kleinkrantz Natures Valley and Wilderness Heights Village to better understand the communities but have so far had little communication with Touwsrante community. 2024 objectives will depend on a volunteer coming forward to take on this portfolio.

## **Plans for 2024**

### **Communication**

As a relatively new chairman, I have personal plans for WRRRA for 2024. But I am well aware that the emphasis must be more on what our members require and less on what I believe to be my own priorities. This can only happen through ongoing communication and, as it appears that members are not always spontaneous in coming forward with their views, we intend to hold more events to facilitate this. The ‘meet and greet’ component of

the 2024 AGM aims to start this process.

We are also grateful for the positive input from the Municipality in the last year. This has included their being supportive of the art installation at the building in the Wilderness Station area and the placing of the statue of Leentjie. It is our sincere desire to build a stronger bond with the Municipality and to work together as a team.

### **Fire**

The greater Wilderness area is fortunate not to have experienced a serious veld-fire since November 2018. Statistics therefore suggest that we are due a fire soon. As time passes, there is a greater tendency towards complacency and then huge interest again around the period of an outbreak. WRRRA intends to continue to raise awareness throughout 2024 to protect our environment, property and people. WRRRA also intends to lead initiatives to take actions resulting in positive outcomes in this area.

### **Places of Interest**

WRRRA has commenced putting together a database of potential places of interest to record and publicise those which contribute to the maintenance of our environment and heritage. Several members are leading this project and more will be shared throughout the year. The outcome could result in walking trails or lists of places which would inform residents and visitors.

### **Environment and Development Diligence Portfolios**

There are several organisations in our area that exist to conserve and protect the environment. Through constant liaison and communication, it is hoped to achieve results working with them rather than duplicating what they are doing. As examples, the environment could be better served by supporting alien clearing and tree-planting alongside agencies such as Touw River Conservancy, Precious Tree Project, Paradise Ridge Conservancy and Constantia Kloof Conservancy. The development diligence aspects of looking at planning and development applications could be more effective by supporting Waleaf and other interested and affected parties and continuing to build relationships with municipal authorities.

### **Community Liaison**

Through many communications workshops, the WRRRA members came up with a new Vision statement just over a year ago. It begins with the words “Wilderness is a diverse and caring community. It strives to be inclusive...” It is still an individual’s choice to participate in activities and initiatives but WRRRA intends to attempt to provide these. One of the new initiatives is the “Upliftment” project which is designed to be meaningful to everyone, and fun. Please get involved and keep an open mind.

Meanwhile, we have benefitted from quite a number of members who continue to help us, with appreciation to Arne Witt, Chris Burlock, Chris Gaigher, Clint Bartlett, Dee Marcus, Georgina Coppin, Greg Mayne, Jan Cox, Jan Heyneke, John Miller, Juanita Wilmans, Liesel Mayne, Lizanne Breet, Lorraine Horne, Monique Truter, Roy Marcus and Shelley Epstein.

Finally, I want to give my great thanks to my colleagues on the ExCo for their support and confidence in me – Andre Hacquebord, Balvindra Walter, Chris Kritzinger, Cornell Barnardt, Jackie Berry, Joletta Eichweber, Lydia De Waal, Susan Burger, Tammy Grobbelaar and Tracey Pretorius. Their devotion to and work on so many WRRRA activities make my role a lot easier.