

PROTECTED AREAS

Wilderness falls within a unique biodiversity area with many parks, reserves and protected areas.

Managed by SANParks, the Garden Route National Park is divided into a number of Control Areas located between Wilderness and Tsitsikamma.

The Wilderness National Park Control Area runs from Wilderness to Groenvlei and directly buffers many developed private properties in the area.

Garden Route National Park

Along the South Coast of South Africa's stunning coastline, lies the Garden Route National Park, renowned worldwide for its natural beauty.

Encompassing Tsitsikamma, Wilderness, and Knysna areas, as well as mountain catchments, indigenous forests, and fynbos, it boasts diverse natural and cultural heritage.



Conservation History

The **Garden Route National Park** was established on 6 March 2009 by merging Tsitsikamma and Wilderness National Parks, Knysna National Lake Area, and other state-owned land.

Wilderness National Park, once part of the Kleinkranz farm, transitioned to public use with significant historical ownership changes. Management by the George Divisional Council evolved from camping grounds to the Ebb and Flow Nature Reserve, now split into **Ebb-and-Flow North** and **South Camps**.

Preservation efforts began in 1968, leading to the park's formation in the 1980s, with ongoing expansion and management transitions.

The **Swartvlei**, **Langvlei**, and **Rondevlei Lakes** were integrated into the park. In overseeing a region facing significant development pressure, one of the key tasks of the Park is to control the water flow to safeguard residents in low-lying areas from floods, while also preserving the natural balance of the ecosystem.



The Wilderness area of the Garden Route National Park encompasses the **coastal town of Wilderness**, extending from the mouth of the Touw River to the Swartvlei estuary and connecting with the Goukamma Nature Reserve.

This region safeguards **five lakes** and the **Serpentine**, a meandering waterway linking Island Lake to the Touw River at the Ebb and Flow Rest Camp

The lakes are home to **diverse aquatic species** and recognized as a Ramsar site (wetlands of international importance).

Managed by **South African National Parks**, the park offers various accommodation choices, and unique wildlife and plant species. Recreational activities in the park range from **canoeing, cycling, and hiking to boating and fishing**.

Nature trails meander through dense forests and alongside peaceful rivers, providing opportunities to spot the vibrant Knysna Turaco (Loerie) and the five kingfisher species found in this area. In spring, a blanket of flowers adds to the lush beauty of the national park.

Within the park, three significant areas of **indigenous forest** are preserved, along with four types of **fynbos**. Additionally, visitors can explore **historical sites** such as the Woodville Big Tree, estimated to be over 800 years old, and Goudveld, an ancient mining town nestled within the forest.



Birdlife

A series of three interconnected saltwater lakes—Rondevlei, Langvlei, and Island Lake— form part of a RAMSAR site, attracting numerous bird species visible from bird hides like the **Rondevlei Bird Hide**, **Malachite Kingfisher Bird Hide** at Langvlei, and **Gallinule Bird Hide** along the Touw River.

Rondevlei and Langvlei are home to significant populations of **Great Crested Grebe** and other birds like **Red-knobbed Coot**, **Little Grebe**, **Cape Shoveler**, **Yellow-billed Duck**, and **Reed Cormorant**, with wading and shorebirds often spotted from Rondevlei Bird Hide. The nearby Swartvlei Estuary is ideal for observing waders and hosts summer visitors like Caspian Terns and Kelp Gulls.

The forest-covered hillsides guiding water to the ocean are habitats for various raptor species, including **Cuckoo Hawk**, **Crowned Eagle**, **Forest Buzzard**, **Black and Red-breasted Sparrowhawk**, and **African Goshawks**, frequently seen during their daily activities.

Vegetation

The vegetation of the Wilderness area can be divided into three major components: **Terrestrial** vegetation (indigenous forests, plantations and coastal fynbos), **Semi-aquatic flora** (reeds, sedges and bulrushes) and **submerged Aquatic vegetation** (pondweed, seagrass and epiphytic algae)

TERRESTRIAL VEGETATION

Three main zones of indigenous forest: wet mountain forest, plateau forest, and dry forest, with notable sections along the Karatara, Duiwe, and Touw Rivers. Pine and eucalypt plantations dominate some river catchments.

The park also encompasses four types of fynbos, including short Asteraceae fynbos, Tall fynbos, Passerina or annual herbs and Restoid or grassy dunes.

SEMI-AQUATIC FLORA

Semi-aquatic flora in low-lying areas near lakes and channels, typically flooded during high water levels, include reeds, sedges, bulrushes, and rushes. Grasses like paspalum vaginatum and pennisetum clandestinum are present, along with saltmarsh species like Sarcocornia natalensis and Salicornia meyerana.

AQUATIC PLANTS OF CHANNELS AND LAKES

Extensive submerged aquatic plants are prominent in the waterbodies of the park, featuring species like Characeae, pondweed, seagrass, and epiphytic algae in monospecific and mixed stands.



Mammals

The **diverse habitats** of the park provide homes for approximately 85 mammal species, including forest-dwelling **Bushbuck** and **Bushpig**, elusive predators like the **Cape Leopard** and **Caracal**, wetland species, and marine mammals such as **Humpback Whales** and **Bottle-nosed Dolphins**.

Endemic to South Africa, the **Cape Dune Molerat** inhabits sandy shorelines and riverbanks.

The **Cape Clawless Otter**, the second-largest freshwater otter species, thrives in permanent water bodies within lowland forest areas.

The Garden Route is renowned for **whale watching**, boasting sightings of 15 whale and dolphin species. Humpback Whales, Indian Ocean Bottle-nosed Dolphins, and Long-beaked Common Dolphins are frequently observed along the coastline. Southern Right Whales also make seasonal appearances between May and December, **birthing their young** in sheltered bays along the coast.

The Garden Route Biosphere Reserve is one of ten recognised UNESCO sites in South Africa.

Spanning approximately 700 000 hectares this reserve focuses on conservation, sustainable development and education.

The reserve encompasses the Garden Route National Park, the Wilderness Lakes RAMSAR Sites, and Cape Nature’s Protected Areas and Stewardship Sites falling within the Greater Wilderness Area.

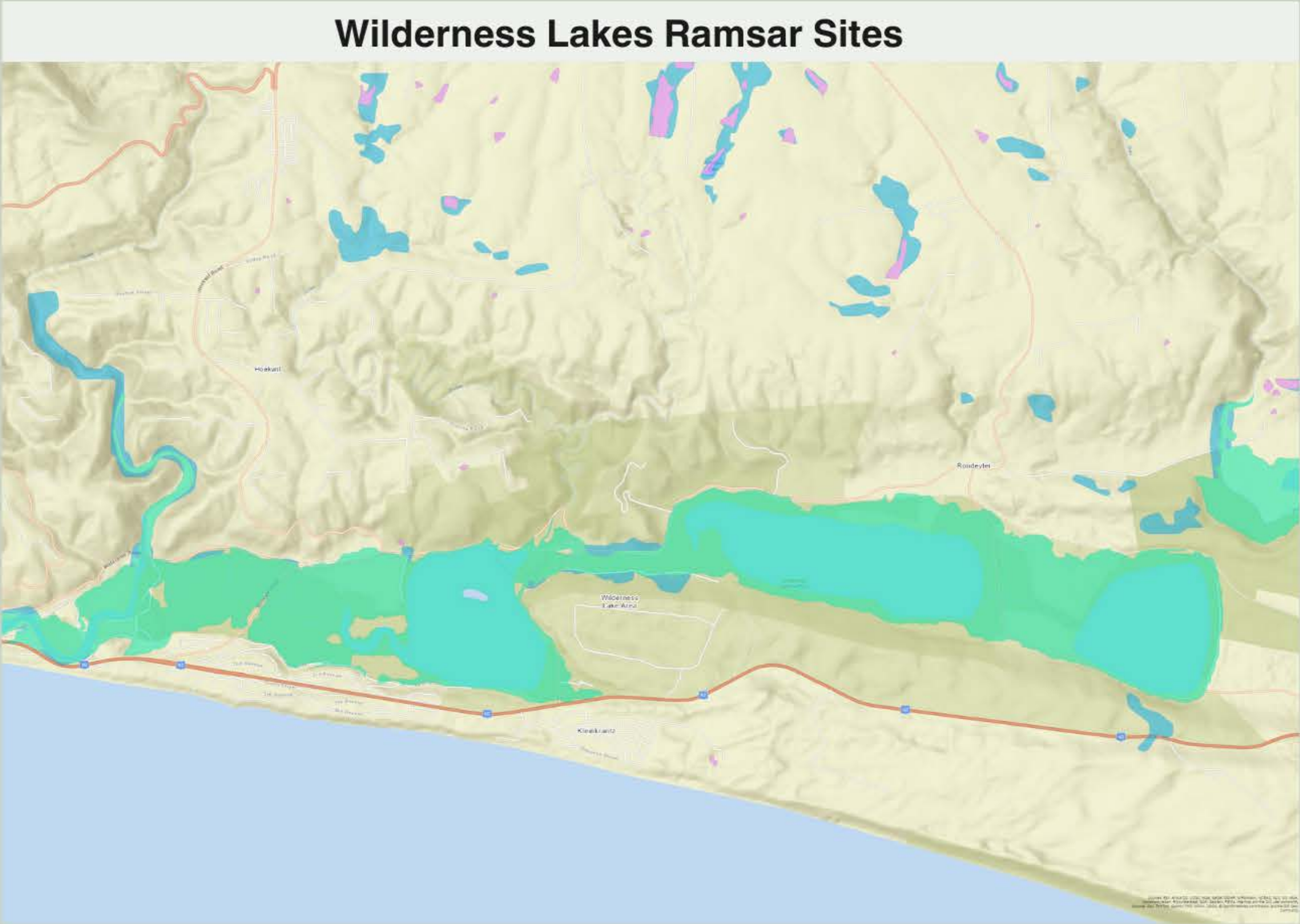


Wilderness Lakes RAMSAR Sites

Managed by SANParks, these lakes are protected by the UN Convention on Wetlands (RAMSAR) for their high ecological value.

These lakes are important for birds and support many native plant and fish species and other marine animals.

These sites are included in the Garden Route Biosphere Reserve.



Cape Nature Critical Biodiversity & Ecological Support Areas

Cape Nature

Critical Biodiversity Areas

CBA’s are terrestrial land and aquatic features (rivers, wetlands, estuaries) that are critical in conserving biodiversity and maintaining ecosystem functioning (animal migration, pollination, etc).

These areas fall into the Western Cape Biodiversity Spatial Plan (2017) that delineated the safeguarding of CBA’s in order to ensure the continued existence and functioning of species and ecosystems.

Ecological Support Areas

ESA’s are regions that need to sustain at least a fair ecological condition* to support the ecological functioning of a CBA or a protected area, meeting biodiversity targets when natural or near-natural areas are unattainable, as outlined by the Western Cape Biodiversity Spatial Plan (2017).

**moderately modified state in which ecological function is maintained even though composition and structure have been compromised*



Protected Areas & Stewardship Sites

Includes all the conservation areas in the Greater Wilderness Area for which CapeNature is the managing authority (such as Witfontein and Groenvlei Nature Reserves)

Includes private conservation areas (Stewardship Sites) for which Cape Nature has a management agreement with the private landowner.

