

Friends of Moreletaspruit - Lynnwood Road to N4

Chairman's Report to 5th AGM - 22rd November 2005

Members and Guests,

I am pleased to welcome you to this 5th AGM and report briefly on the year past and some thoughts for the future.

I have quoted Chief Seattle in my previous reports to our AGM. I make no apology for doing so again this year. In 1855 in a letter to the US president he said:

"We know the sap which comes through the trees as we know the blood that courses through our veins. Every part of the earth is sacred to my people, every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every meadow, every humming insect. The rivers are our brothers. They quench our thirst. They carry our canoes and they feed our children. So you must give to the river the kindness you would give to any brother."

The above quote is also contained in a book by Ian McCallum - Ecological Intelligence - in which he postulates that that man is a lot closer to trees, fishes, reptiles, birds and animals that constitute our ecology than we are prepared to admit. More than 90% of our DNA is replicated in every other mammal.

No, it is possibly the other way around. In the evolution of the species we have evolved out of the other species that preceded us in the past 500 million years commencing with the Palaeozoic age of the Earth's evolution with perhaps some "Intelligent Design" thrown in. An origin which of course is still hotly debated.

We hear lots of talk about repairing the damage to the denuded forests, the damage to the ozone layer, global warming etc. All necessary but he suggests:

"First of all, we need to stop talking about the the Earth being in need of healing. The Earth doesn't need healing. We do. Utterly indifferent to

human existence, the Earth will thrive - when we are gone. We are the ones who need to redefine our relationship with it."

Last year I said that all the talk at the various conferences around the world will eventually get through to us and our children. McCullam writes ".....it is important that we accept the great indifference of Nature. It does not exist to punish or to bless us; it is neither cruel nor loving, but we, the human animal, can choose not to be indifferent. We can choose to reach out, to take care and to love."

Our Mission Statement "To encourage public participation in caring for the Moreletaspruit in order to promote the conservation and sustainable utilisation of the area by the public..." is the yardstick by which we need to measure our performance. Are we reaching out to take care and to love? Perhaps we need to develop a score card which should be presented at each AGM as a measure of our achievements during the past year.

In the absence of a score card let us look at the past year.

Membership

While membership is not the only measure of "public participation" the willingness of the public to join the Friends is a guide to how well we are "encouraging" the public. It distresses me and my committee, though, that 10% of the approximately 200 members of the public living alongside our section of the spruit are paid up members. Some might feel that a 10% strike rate is not bad. I believe most of the residents living alongside the spruit are not there by chance - they have chosen to live next to an open area. If that is true we should have a better representation than 10%.

We are mostly well received by members of the public that we "accost", in a friendly manner of course, during our Saturday Membership Drive in Glenfair Shopping Centre. So there is a willingness, if we can get to the people. We signed up 7 new members this year - not as many as in previous years. People rarely respond to a pamphlet dropped in their mail box. Nowadays people also do not take too kindly to strangers knocking on their door.

Perhaps we need to ask the public what they require of us or what they would like to see done to the Spruit area - aside from the perennial security

issue. To this end I have approached a company, Puisano Business Development Group, who are involved in doing opinion surveys. They will assist in the development of a suitable questionnaire and in the analysis of the results at no cost to us - it is their contribution to our Friends Group. Based on their recommendation a random selection of residents adjacent to the spruit as well as some more distant will be targeted in the telephonic survey. If our new committee is in agreement the survey will be carried out early next year.

We have a total of 43 paid up members out of a total of 150 past and present members. As has been found in the past renewing membership does not come high on the list of "to do things" in most peoples lives.

Do we rate a score for our score card? Perhaps not. We could probably do better.

Fire Control and Grass Cutting

We have been very fortunate that fires have been limited to the vlei area adjacent Lynnwood Road. Whether this is as a result of the fire breaks we do not know but there has certainly been plenty of grass to burn - we have deliberately left large areas of grass to promote bird and mammal life. The Birders all tell me that there has most definitely been an increase in bird life this year.

We intend next year to improve the fire breaks as we are not too confident that under windy conditions they will be totally successful. We have also to be cognisant of the possible security risk presented by large areas of uncut tall grass. That need has to be balanced with the ecological needs.

This year the pathways have been kept clear and have made walking a lot less intimidating and possibly safer.

We purchased a Brushcutter for use by our Warden whom some of you may have seen in the Spruit. The Brushcutter is maintained by the Parks Department who also pay the Wardens salary. We are indebted to Puisano Business Solutions for allowing the Warden to make use of their ablution facilities.

Perhaps we can put down a positive score on our scorecard for making the Spruit less intimidating to the hikers!

Vagrants and Muggers

A perennial issue this. Again as in the past we are fortunate to be able to report no cases of intimidation of members of the public while waiking our section of the spruit. We are aware that vagrants use both Brookside Drive and Lynnwood Road Bridges as places to sleep. We are trying to curtail this by locking the gates at Lynnwood Road and soon to be installed gate at Brookside Drive. Fortunately though, the vagrants are not around during daylight hours.

I am not sure that we are getting the message through to the public that we have not had any attacks for the past 4 years. Without fail the standard response to a suggestion that someone should walk the spruit is - "but is it safe?". Events elsewhere tinge peoples perception of the safety of the spruit. We certainly cannot guarantee safety but we need to get a better message through to the public.

It is an old refrain but the more of us that use the spruit the less likely we will have illegitimate use of the spruit by others. It is better that we start using it now, while we apparently don't have a problem, than to try and win it back later on.

Tshwane Friends Forum

This year the floating trophy for the best managed area was awarded to Friends of Ecoglen - the section of the spruit between Lynnwood Road and General Louis Botha Avenue.

The Tshwane Conservation Fund has at last been registered. At present the Directors of the Section 21 Company are the Committee members tasked with establishing the Fund. They will be replaced by elected Directors at an AGM to be held early next year. Each Nature Friends

Group will appoint one representative to become a member of the company. Once the formalities are over the business of raising serious money from Corporate South Africa on behalf of all the Friends Groups will begin. To this end each Friends Group must compile its business plan indicating their funding needs. Your new committee will have to revisit our business plan and upgrade as necessary.

Taxation

I was in touch with SARS recently and they confirmed that our application for PBO (Public Benefit Organisation) status was being attended to. Any organisation that receives public funds is required In terms of the Income Tax Act to register as a PBO . Following this registration we will then have to register as a Non Profit Organisation (NPO) otherwise it is illegal to do any fund raising. Quite a process but all designed to curb some illegal practices.

Activities

This has been a relatively low key year with not a great deal happening. But then the spruit is a nature reserve set aside for the public to experience among other aspects the quietness of nature. I don't believe we really want to have high activity events with attendant noise taking place in the spruit. It is essentially for nature recreation.

In keeping with the above a tree identification walk was attended by 7 interested members of the public. Our thanks to Irene Coetzee for identifying the various trees to us.

A bird walk took place very early last Saturday morning. I am sure some were put off by the 5.00 am. start! But I can appreciate the need to start early to have a better chance of seeing the birds before they disappear to their feeding grounds. The beauty about the early start is that it does not intrude too much into the rest of the day. Some of us thought that maybe we should organise a breakfast in the spruit as part of the walk. It is quite pleasant early in the morning. So watch out for the next notice. Thank you to Pat Kelly for helping identify the Birds.

I think the general concern about safety may put off some people about these walks.

Development

Except for the fire breaks our development programme stood still this past year. This may not be a bad thing as I believe we need to critically review our development plan. Is it too ambitious, are we targeting the right things to receive our attention. Perhaps the proposed opinion survey may give us input which we can apply to our plan. It would then be something the residents have asked for rather than only the committees ideas. It is important that the residents along the spruit buy into any plan that is put forward.

Conclusion

During the year one of our stallwarts, Wally Louw, resigned from the committee due to business commitments. We coopted Leon Louw to take over the membership portfolio but when he received an unsolicited offer for his house that was too good to refuse we lost him also. Jurie Bosch has taken over the portfolio and kept all members informed of events and developments. Thank you.

Peter Howard allows the use of his office for our bi-monthly meetings on the second Tuesday of the second month. He also ably manages the minutes of our meetings. Thank you.

As before Pat Kelly allows us to use his company trust fund as our bank. Once registered with the Receiver we will have to open our own account. In the meantime Thank You, Pat.

To the remainder of my committee who have ad-hoc tasks, Thank You for your support.

It would be inappropriate not to mention the role played by the media. We have had good coverage from the local media and rely on them to get the message to a wider audience than we are able to.

The Tshwane Nature Conservation Department, and in particular Adelene Looock and Richard Ndlovo, are always willing to provide assistance and advice. We realise that their budget is somewhat constrained and appreciate their assistance.

Well, how did we do? Do we rate an A+ or do we go back to the drawing board. You be the judge.

Thank You,

Barry Puttergill.