



## **Handbook: How to establish a WESSA Friends Group**

### **INTRODUCTION**

WESSA Friends Groups are volunteer groups affiliated to the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA) that encourage public participation in caring for the Earth. They are comprised of volunteers who band together to conserve, rehabilitate or prevent destruction of a natural area/environment or place of special interest. These areas need not be large formalised nature areas, but can be small non-formalised pockets of the terrestrial and/or aquatic environment in various states of degradation.

Friends Groups encourage local communities to become more involved with their local environment and take responsibility for its continued well-being. Friends Groups understand and are guided by the Mission Statement, Policies and Position Statements of WESSA.

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#### **WESSA's MISSION:**

To promote public participation in caring for the Earth.

#### **WESSA's VISION:**

WESSA is a membership-based environmental organisation that promotes public participation in caring for the Earth. We embrace professionalism and sound corporate governance, fostering collaborative partnerships to succeed in our Mission. With enthusiasm and a spirit of unity, we work to achieve a South Africa that is wisely managed by all to ensure environmental sustainability.

#### **WESSA's AIM ...**

is to contribute to conserving the Earth's vitality and diversity by:-

- promoting sound environmental values and sustainable living
- integrating conservation and development
- encouraging individual and community action
- securing the protection and wise use of natural resources
- acting as an environmental watchdog
- promoting and participating in environmental education
- influencing policy and decision-making
- responding to changing needs.

#### **WESSA's VALUES and STYLE:**

We operate democratically.

We are firm, but restrained, in the pursuit of our aims, seeking collaboration and consensus whenever possible and accepting accountability for our actions.

We strive for innovation and excellence, lead by example, and act with integrity in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

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### **A BRIEF HISTORY**

The concept of Friends Groups was the brain-child of Ann Bean, a Committee member of the Western Cape branch of the Wildlife Society, in the early 1980s, and in 1985 the Wildlife Society's Project "Friends of Nature Areas" was born. Ann was concerned that lack of money, manpower and interest on the part of provincial and local nature conservation authorities was leading to the degradation, and in some cases even deproclamation, of important nature reserves. It was her belief that the public had to become involved in safeguarding these resources and work with the owning or managing authorities. The scheme was initially only for nature reserves, in an endeavour to protect their integrity.

However, as we entered the 1990s, with South Africa moving rapidly towards a democracy, there came about a new wave of public awareness regarding environmental concerns, and an awareness that people had the democratic right to be consulted and to get involved in decision-making regarding the environment on their own doorstep. The Friends Scheme transformed to include any natural or semi-natural area – from pristine through to degraded – where there was a group of concerned local people prepared to do something about it.

Legislation, such as the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA), has also provided a steep change in the democratic rights of individuals to participate as interested and affected parties (I&APs) in planning and development proposals that impact on their local environment.

## **BASIC PRINCIPLES OF FRIENDS GROUPS**

- Friends Groups understand and are guided by the Mission Statement, Policies and Position Statements of WESSA.
- Friends Groups need to become affiliate members of WESSA to use the WESSA logo. (See [www.wessa.org.za](http://www.wessa.org.za) for the latest membership fees.)
- Friends Groups shall have a constitution, approved by WESSA, giving the Friends Group a legal identity.
- Friends Groups may raise funds from the public in their own name if they comply with the Nonprofit Organisations (NPO) Act. They may only raise funds in WESSA's name with prior permission from WESSA. (However affiliation to WESSA and use of the WESSA logo does, by association, increase credibility of the Friends fundraising drive.)
- Friends Groups are involved in their chosen natural environment (or subject, e.g. butterflies) voluntarily and at their own risk.
- Friends Groups work under the guidance and with the agreement of the landowners/managing authorities of the particular area.
- Friends Groups should work towards the conservation of their natural environment and actively encourage the involvement of local communities in their work.
- Friends Groups welcome membership from any concerned member of the public.
- Friends Groups function using standard Committee procedures.
- Friends Groups are financially independent. They must keep a set of books/financial records. These books, and their financial statements, must be available for public scrutiny.
- Friends Groups may not institute or defend legal action in the name of WESSA.
- By arrangement, the resources and personnel of WESSA are available to WESSA-affiliated Friends Groups.
- Friends Groups should remain in regular contact with WESSA.
- Friends Groups, in order to report back to each other, share ideas and successes, as well as learn new skills, undertake to attend WESSA Regional/Branch Friends Group events whenever possible.
- Friends Groups are encouraged to keep a log book of events and happenings.
- Friends Groups shall abide by the conditions as contained in the Nonprofit Organisations Act (No. 71 of 1997).

## **SOME IDEAS OF WHAT FRIENDS GROUPS DO**

- Under the guidance of the relevant landowner or authority, Friends Groups do physical work such as eradication of alien plants and control of alien problem animals, erosion control, signage development, construction and repair of hides, walkways, jetties, bridges, pathways and fences, plant surveys, animal and bird censuses, and all sorts of other tasks.
- Friends Groups learn all they can about the natural history, archaeology, cultural history and past land uses of their area.
- Friends Groups produce resource materials with information about the natural environment, such as brochures, booklets, field guides, posters, maps, as well as lists of animal and plant species.
- Friends Groups are encouraged to lobby for the formal conservation of their natural environment

- or place of special interest.
- Friends Groups are encouraged to comment on development proposals and participate in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) processes relating directly or indirectly to their area.
- Friends Groups are encouraged to make input into emerging environmental legislation and policies.
- Friends Groups are encouraged to communicate with each other, the general public and with other interest groups by producing a regular newsletter, email newsflashes or by running a website.
- Friends Groups share their knowledge of the area.
- Friends Groups raise funds for the direct benefit of their natural environment by conducting walks, outings, courses, camps and other events for the general public/visitors. Making indigenous plants available through running a nursery and selling relevant local arts and crafts, are some other suggestions.
- Friends Groups may seek sponsorship and donations from local businesses and benefactors for specific public-private partnership projects.

### **FRIENDS GROUPS DISASSOCIATE THEMSELVES FROM THESE ACTIVITIES**

- Friends Groups avoid becoming involved in unsustainable, exploitative activities in their natural environment or place of special interest.
- Friends Groups avoid becoming involved in activities that are not supported by sound scientific knowledge and research.
- Friends Groups should not be associated with the introduction of species of genetic origin outside the specific area or other unwise management practices.

### **BENEFITS OF AFFILIATION TO WESSA**

- WESSA is the oldest (established in 1926) environmental Non-Government Organization (NGO) in South Africa, with years of environmental action behind it.
- WESSA has immense experience in lobbying decision-makers and, as a large NGO, has considerable lobbying power.
- WESSA has a great deal of experience in contributing to environmental policies and legislation.
- WESSA can offer professional advice and support, based on sound scientific knowledge.
- WESSA can provide access to a range of resources and support materials.
- If WESSA Friends Groups wish to raise funds, they can establish and enhance their credentials through their affiliation with WESSA.
- Taking out Affiliate Membership with WESSA enables Friends Groups to use WESSA's logo on letterheads, brochures, signboards and other materials.
- WESSA can offer exposure to Friends Groups through channels such as Regional newsletters and the WESSA website.
- WESSA can provide capacity building and networking opportunities for Friends Groups.

### **RELATIONSHIP WITH WESSA**

Friends Groups may call upon the expertise of WESSA to help them to facilitate their relationship with the landowners or to provide environmental or legal expertise and other help or guidance at any stage from startup onwards. WESSA shall keep a watching brief on Friends Groups' activities and if necessary intervene tactfully where WESSA policies are not being adhered to. WESSA shall also encourage and recognise successful or innovative Friends Groups' projects and look to maturing Friends Groups as valuable sources of information and expertise on environmental matters.

### **NETWORKING**

Value can be gained by Friends Groups networking with other local environmental organisations, such as BirdLife SA and the Botanical Society. A Friends Group may be affiliated to more than one

organisation.

## **INDEPENDENT ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS OR ORGANISATIONS**

Independent environment-based organisations with the same or similar aims as those of the Friends Groups are welcome to become affiliate members of WESSA, thus strengthening the conservation movement. Groups caring for, for example, ancient monuments or historical sites, with or without an environmental component, are also welcome to become affiliate members of WESSA.

## **HOW TO START A FRIENDS GROUP**

As it is very often concerned members of the public who identify natural or degraded environments that need improved management and ongoing monitoring, everything possible should be done by WESSA to encourage them to become a Friends Group.

One of two things usually happens:

1. Local people notice a problem and ask WESSA for help, or:
2. A WESSA environmentalist / knowledgeable WESSA members notice a problem and ask local people for help.

The first step is for an event to be held at the proposed site, commencing with a work party and followed by a short social event at which the need is discussed and formulated informally. This needs to be advertised locally first. The landowners/authority need to be supportive of the initiative.

Once the need for help has been established and sanctioned, this is the process:

1. Inform the landowners/managers of the help being offered. Obtain approval.
2. Register your interest with WESSA as a hatching Friends Group.
3. Arrange a visit by a representative of WESSA to assess the area's problems/needs.
4. Obtain a copy of the Friends Group Handbook from WESSA.
5. Call a public meeting to ascertain levels of interest and support.
6. At the public meeting explain the problems/needs and elect volunteers to a preliminary Steering Committee to prepare a draft constitution and carry the initiative forward.
7. Ask every attendee at the first public meeting to register his or her contact details.
8. The preliminary Steering Committee develops the draft constitution (an example is given in this handbook) to suit the area's needs and submits it to WESSA for preliminary ratification. The Regional Manager or his designate will give help with the process hereafter.
9. A second public (inaugural) meeting is called. The now WESSA-ratified constitution is presented for discussion and finalisation. Permission to affiliate to WESSA is given and a permanent Committee is elected.
10. The finalised constitution and action plan is submitted to WESSA for final ratification.

Good luck! Your group has now joined the growing band of people who are doing everything they can to help us all conserve South Africa's incredible biodiversity.

\*See Addendum 1 for an example of the detailed procedures that a fledgling group may want to follow in conjunction with the WESSA handbook principles.

## **CONSTITUTION**

Friends Groups undertake to draw up a constitution.

1. The constitution will stipulate the group's objectives, number of office bearers, their duties and the length of their terms of office.
2. The size of a quorum for all meetings must be stipulated in the constitution.
3. The portfolios will include chairman, secretary, treasurer, and possibly liaison officers with WESSA, publicity, the managing authority (ex officio), as well as project leaders.

4. Once this constitution has been accepted by WESSA and confirmed in writing, and affiliate membership entered into, the group is established.

## **GUIDELINE CONSTITUTION FOR THE USE OF INDIVIDUAL FRIENDS GROUPS**

It is intended that this guideline constitution can be readily adapted by any community anywhere, in the interest of improving their local environment.

## **CONSTITUTION OF THE FRIENDS OF XYZ**

### **1. NAME AND GENERAL**

- 1.1. A Friends Group is advised to choose its name in relation to the area in which it works, preferably using one of these forms: "Friends of XYZ ", "The XYZ Friends", "The XYZ Environmental Group", "The XYZ Working Group", "The XYZ Action Group" etc. Note that the word "Friends" is not essential, but is preferred.
- 1.2. The XYZ Friends Group acts as a support group for the XYZ natural environment.
- 1.3. The XYZ Friends Group acknowledges and agrees that it will work in accordance with the *Basic Principles of Friends Groups* statements.
- 1.4. The XYZ Friends Group undertakes to consider becoming an Affiliate Member of WESSA (registered as a member of WESSA's Friends Scheme) and to renew its membership annually.
- 1.5. The XYZ Friends Group undertakes to maintain regular contact with WESSA and to send copies of any written reports to WESSA.
- 1.6. Friends undertake to hold their own regular work parties, meetings, and other events. They undertake to attend general Friends Groups events (normally organised by WESSA), to share skills and ideas.
- 1.7. Friends undertake to hold an ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM) soon after the end of the financial year. (WESSA's financial year ends 31 March. Although a Friends Group may set its own financial year-end, groups are encouraged to synchronise with WESSA.) Notice of the AGM shall be given to each member not less than 14 days beforehand, and shall include a reminder about nominations for office bearers. The Chairman or his appointee shall preside.
- 1.8. Nominations of office-bearers should be submitted in writing to the Secretary at least ten days before the AGM, giving proposer, seconder and the written agreement of the nominee.
- 1.9. The following business shall be transacted at the AGM:
  - Presentation of the Chairman's Annual Report.
  - Presentation of the financial statements.
  - Discussion and formal acceptance of these reports.
  - Election of office bearers.
  - Any other business that the Chairman, at his/her discretion, may allow.
- 1.10. Each member in good standing shall have one vote and a quorum shall be stipulated in the constitution. By prior arrangement a proxy vote is acceptable.
- 1.11. Through the Secretary, Special General meetings may be called for, in writing, stating the purpose of the meeting. A proposer and seconder and at least 4 other members of good standing shall sign the notice, issued at least 14 days in advance.

### **2. FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- 2.1. The XYZ Friends Group shall open and operate an account in its own right with a commercial bank. All monies accruing to the XYZ Friends Group will be administered wholly by that group.
- 2.2. The XYZ Friends Group may levy an annual subscription to cover administration costs. Alterations to this amount must be ratified at the next AGM.
- 2.3. The XYZ Friends Group may collect monies from members and the general public.
- 2.4. The XYZ Friends Group shall keep a proper set of accounts and submit a financial statement at each AGM. If the income exceeds R50 000 the statement shall be audited, and if the group is affiliated to WESSA, a copy shall be submitted to WESSA within 30 days of the AGM.

### **3. LEGAL ACTIONS**

- 3.1. Friends Groups may not institute or defend legal action in the name of WESSA. Affiliated groups require WESSA sanction prior to any legal action being taken.

#### **4. WITHDRAWAL OF MEMBERSHIP**

- 4.1. The XYZ Friends Group Committee, with the knowledge of the appropriate WESSA Regional Chairman, may withdraw an individual membership, stating the reason for so doing.
- 4.2. A Friends Group may withdraw its membership from WESSA. The WESSA Regional Chairman/Committee should be made aware of the reasons for doing so.

#### **5. DISSOLUTION**

- 5.1. In the event of the cessation of the existence of the XYZ Friends Group, or the proposed dissolution of that group, all assets not already committed for use in the XYZ natural environment shall be entrusted to WESSA until the group is reconstituted. Should the decision be that the group not be reconstituted, such assets SHALL be used in the project/geographical area for which they were originally raised.

### **REGISTERING AS A NON-PROFIT ORGANISATION (NPO) UNDER THE NPO ACT**

The Nonprofit Organisations Act (No. 71 of 1997) came into operation on 1 September 1998 as a result of a lengthy process of policy and legislative reform negotiated between government and civil society organisations.

Primarily, the Nonprofit Organisations (NPO) Act hopes to achieve its objectives of creating an enabling environment for NPOs and setting and maintaining adequate standards of governance, accountability and transparency by creating a voluntary registration facility for NPOs.

Essentially, the Act provides a registration facility for the existing South African legal forms for NPOs, namely Section 21 Companies, Trusts and Voluntary and other Non-profit Associations, providing that certain minimum establishment requirements and annual reporting requirements are complied with.

The Minister may prescribe benefits or allowances for registered NPOs. If he/she should, only registered NPOs will be eligible for these benefits. It is anticipated that NPOs receiving any benefits or money from government will be required to be registered as an NPO.

**Taken from the "Guide to the Nonprofit Organisations (NPO) Act", Legal Resources Centre, Information Series No. 2, March 2002**

For more information and to download the Guide, you can visit [www.lrc.org.za/Publications/NPOLegalServices.asp](http://www.lrc.org.za/Publications/NPOLegalServices.asp)

#### **WESSA CONTACT DETAILS:**

##### **National Friends Groups co-ordinator**

Marion Dunkeld-Mengell

*Postal Address:* PO Box 80, Irene, 0062

*Tel/Fax:* (012) 667 2183

*Email:* mwmwmd@mweb.co.za

##### **WESSA National Office**

*Physical Address:* 1 Karkloof Road, Howick, KwaZulu-Natal

*Postal Address:* PO Box 394, Howick, 3290

*Tel:* (033) 3303931

*Fax:* (033) 3304576

*Email:* alisonk@futurenet.co.za

##### **WESSA Border-Kei**

*Physical Address:* 11 Chamberlain Road, Berea, East London, 5201

*Postal Address:* PO Box 19147, Tecoma, 5214

*Tel/Fax:* (043) 727 0726

*Email:* wessa@lantic.net

##### **WESSA Eastern Province**

*Physical Address:* 2B Lawrence Street, Central Hill, Port Elizabeth, 6013

*Postal Address:* PO Box 20108, Humewood, Port Elizabeth, 6001

*Tel:* (041) 585 9606  
*Fax:* (041) 586 3228  
*Email:* cherylgd@wessaep.co.za

**WESSA Free State**

*Physical Address:*  
*Postal Address:*  
*Tel:*  
*Fax:*  
*Email:*

**WESSA KwaZulu-Natal**

*Physical Address:* 100 Brand Road, Durban, 4001  
*Tel:* (031) 201 3126  
*Fax:* (031) 201 9525  
*Email:* management@wessakzn.org.za

**WESSA Lowveld**

*Postal Address:* P O Box 336, Kiepersol, 1241  
*Cell:* 083 675 3142  
*Fax:* (011) 507 5975  
*Email:* wessa@ibomax.co.za

**WESSA Northern Areas**

*Physical Address:* 18 Blackwood Street, Bryanston x3  
*Postal Address:* P O Box 435, Ferndale, 2160  
*Tel:* (011) 462 5663  
*Fax:* (011) 462 8364  
*Email:* info@wessanorth.co.za

**WESSA Northern Cape**

*Postal Address:* PO Box 316, Kimberley, 8300  
*Tel:* (053) 392 717 / 839 2700  
*Fax:* (053) 842 1433  
*Email:* se@museumsnc.co.za

**WESSA Southern Cape**

*Postal Address:* PO Box 2529, Knysna, 6570  
*Tel/Fax:* (044) 381 0237  
*Email:* wildlife.knysna@pixie.co.za

**WESSA Western Cape**

*Physical Address:* 31 The Sanctuary, off Pollsmoor Road, Kirstenhof  
*Postal Address:* PO Box 30145, Tokai, 7966  
*Tel:* (021) 701 1397  
*Fax:* (021) 701 1399  
*Email:* andy@wessa.wcape.school.za

[www.wessa.org.za](http://www.wessa.org.za)



**WILDLIFE AND  
ENVIRONMENT  
SOCIETY OF SA**  
*People caring for the Earth*

## **WESSA Friends Group Affiliate Membership Application Form**

New group/renewal: .....

If renewal, membership number:.....

Name of group: .....

Name of contact person: .....

Postal address: .....

City: ..... Postal code: .....

*Telephone numbers:*

Daytime: (.....).....

Cell: .....

Fax: (.....).....

E-mail: .....

Approximate number of members presently in the group: .....

Chairperson: .....

*Payment details:*

Membership fee:.....

Cheque: ..... Postal Order:.....

(Please cross and make cheques or postal orders payable to WESSA.)

Credit card:..... (Visa/Master cards only)

Credit card no.:.....

Name of cardholder:.....

Expiry date:..... Last 3 digits:.....

Please post to: Private Bag X007, Howick, 3290

or fax to: (033) 330 4576

or e-mail to: [wessamembers@icon.co.za](mailto:wessamembers@icon.co.za)

*Note:* Affiliate members receive 2 x *African Wildlife* and *EnviroKids* magazines per quarter plus local newsletters.

***Thank you for joining/renewing your affiliate membership of WESSA.***

## Addendum 1

### Dept. Nature Conservation: Tshwane Municipality

#### 10 Easy Steps to establish a Friends Group

##### **Step 1 – Public meeting**

It is often concerned members of the public that identify the need for a Friends Group to conserve a natural area.

- Choose a venue, date & time
- Print pamphlets with aim of public meeting
- Distribute pamphlets
- Advertise in local newspapers & radio
- Print agenda
- Print attendance register
- Have meeting
- Take minutes
- Ask volunteers in this meeting to assist in establishing Friends Group
- Distribute minutes to attendees

##### **Step 2 – First interim committee meeting**

Contact all the members that volunteered their services and convene a meeting. The following issues should be discussed at first meeting.

- Election of portfolios:
  - Chairperson**  
Chairing meeting  
Coordinating projects
  - Vice chair**  
Share responsibilities of Chairperson
  - Secretary**  
Taking, typing & sending minutes  
Convening meetings
  - Treasurer**  
Keep book of money  
Signing checks
  - Marketing**  
Liaising with media  
Newsletter
  - Projects**  
Year programme
  - Additional members**  
Assist with year programme
- Choose a name for the group

##### **Step 3 – Draw up a constitution**

An example is attached. Work through it as a committee. If you have a legal person that you can help you, make use of that resource.

#### **Step 4 – Register with WESSA**

WESSA stands for Wildlife & Environment Society of South Africa. Contact person to help you with registration is: Marion Dunkeld Mengell (012) 667 2183

#### **Step 5 – Opening of bank account**

Funds from membership fees and donations or sponsors will be paid into an account

#### **Step 6 – Register as PBO**

PBO stands for Public Benefit Organisation

The group must register with SARS as they will be receiving money from the public.

#### **Step 7 – Draft a basic management plan**

This management plan will contain the following:

- **Introduction**  
Description of area  
Background & History  
Maps
- **Status quo**  
Ecological survey (Birds, Grass, Trees, Mammals)
- **Development & Management strategies**  
Restrictions  
Facilities  
Maintenance  
Cost  
Specifications

#### **Step 8 – Drawing up a year programme**

This is for the members of the Friends Group. Activities can include the following:

- Talks – bird, flower, grass, butterflies
- Working parties – Alien/erosion control
- Tree planting
- Picnics
- Walk & run for wildlife

#### **Step 9 – Recruiting of members**

Drafting a membership form, group should use their initiatives to recruit members. There is an incentive membership card that allows the bearer of the card free access to reserves in Tshwane.

#### **Step 10 – AGM**

In a year's time, an Annual General Meeting should be held to adopt the constitution, the management plan and to select a new committee.