

Water and Sanitation in the News

Business community takes guardianship of rivers in Stellenbosch

Stellenbosch Municipality has formed an innovative, and worthy of emulation, partnership with local entrepreneurs and communities to improve the long-term health of rivers in Stellenbosch. A number of private companies and wine estates are active members of the river guardianship action program - officially known as the River Stewardship Action. With this initiative members take 'guardianship' of a particular piece of the river and undertake to rehabilitate and preserve this part on the basis of a set of best practice methodologies.



This water in Jonkershoek, Stellenbosch, is clean and unpolluted. Unfortunately rivers in the region are increasingly under pressure due to pollution. Photo: Clive September.

"The Municipal Council approved this innovative partnership so that we can try to save the vital rivers of Stellenbosch," says Schalk van der Merwe, environmental planner of the Municipality and the driving force behind this initiative. "Rivers are important ecological arteries linking the ecology of the natural habitat and giving life. The rivers of Stellenbosch are very important to the overall environmental health of the ecosystems in the Cape Winelands Biosphere Reserve." UNESCO listed the Cape Winelands Biosphere Reserve in 2007 on the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. Thereby the global importance of this reserve has been confirmed.

The water quality of many rivers in the greater Stellenbosch municipal area is very poor due to illegal dumping in rivers and polluted water from industries and residential areas in the rivers flowing. Overgrown river banks contribute to the problem. The initiative involves the restoration and ongoing management of the different parts of the removal of invasive plants, the removal of general waste, the establishment of indigenous water and riparian plants and the stabilization of banks to prevent erosion. The actions will continuously be subject to

monitoring and auditing processes to measure outcomes and improve the process. The initiative will begin in the rivers that are associated directly with the town of Stellenbosch; the Eerste, Plankenburg, Krom and Blaauwklippen Rivers.

This initiative is based on voluntary participation and builds on the commitment and goodwill of the people and institution involved. The municipality has issued a brief situation report for businesses and other interested parties. "This is a fully participatory initiative and the document is open for comment," said Van der Merwe. "A number of businesses and organizations have already committed to the initiative, but we hope that more entities will join hands so that it is indeed a holistic effort by the whole community." Members will also, as far as possible, make use of people who are registered as members of the Expanded Public Works Programme to do the job. "The River Stewardship Action is an innovative way to address the challenge of pollution. This is something that affects us all," said Councillor Conrad Sidego, Executive Mayor of Stellenbosch. "Every citizen has a constitutional right to clean water, but polluted rivers affect this right negatively. Together with our partners, we can do a lot to save our precious Biosphere Reserve and to ensure water of high quality."

Source: *Stellenbosch Municipality, Dec. 2015*

The **Municipal Assistant™** system supports river conservation by means of the following core functionalities:

- Water quality and quantity monitoring and management (including demand and loads)
- Evaluating and reporting compliance with regulatory water quality standards and criteria
- Assists the user in the compilation of various reports (including a Blue Drop/Green Drop reporting facility)
- Asset management to ensure optimal performance of facilities to produce good quality drinking water and safe discharge to help prevent rivers becoming polluted
- Operational and maintenance scheduling of equipment and staff utilisation (**helps prevent asset failures and water losses**)
- Assist with routine and process control inspections and incident reporting
- Compilation of operational and maintenance budgets to ensure timeous preventative maintenance and replacement of equipment

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