



Greater Kyalami Equine Legacy Document

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The reality of our world today is that, often, short-term business success becomes such a powerful driver that it, in many cases, replaces a much more holistic and sustainable model. The aspect of wealth creation by medium and large corporations is easily supported by government, parastatals and banks as the budget to market their concepts and risk underwriting makes the concepts they promote easy to “pass”.

The message contained in this document is to demonstrate on a number of separate and individual levels that the catastrophic realities that face the Kyalami area in the short and medium term will have the ultimate effect of destroying a perfectly functional and stable socio-economic precinct.

Many aspects of the functioning of this area are “hidden” from outsiders. They are contained on large rural properties and the industries that they support are not always highlighted as formal sectors. This document seeks to explore and highlight these facts and to show the vast economic reality of our area. The Kyalami area represents a great economic success that needs to be sustained and stimulated and not ended and replaced.

INTRODUCTION

“A horse is the projection of peoples’ dreams about themselves – strong, powerful, beautiful – and it has the capability of giving us escape from our mundane existence” – **Pam Brown**

Horses have been part of human history since 4000 BC, when the domestication of horses started. Ever since then horses have walked alongside humans and have played a significant role in our global history.

In South Africa, the history of the domesticated horse starts in about 1653, when horses were brought to South Africa by the Dutch East India Company. This of course also begins the history of the Kaapse Boerperd, the South African Boerperd, the Basotho Pony, the Nooitgedacht Pony, the South African Vlamberd and the Cape Horse. Internationally both the South African Boerperd and the Kaapse Boerperd enjoy recognition as distinct horse breeds.

The Greater Kyalami area is often credited with having the most horses per capita. Although the exact number is not known it is estimated that there are approximately 2000 horses within the Greater Kyalami area.

The Greater Kyalami area is largely developed agricultural holdings ranging from 1 ha properties to much larger 20ha – 200 ha portions. It is home to Inanda Country Base, Kyalami Equestrian Park (previously the Gauteng Horse Society), the Lippizaners and numerous smaller grounds and arenas where competitions and events are regularly held.

The area has been subject to varying levels of disturbance and several alien plant species are present. It cannot be referred to as a truly natural environment, however there are nevertheless many noteworthy examples of natural vegetation of the region: there is a major ridge to the south of the area and many hill slope seepage wetland regions; there are a number of water courses that run through the area and several dams are present.

The area is going through a process of rural urbanization, which many residents do not agree with. The area is generally peri-urban with a strong equestrian presence. Development has and is threatening this lifestyle and one of the objectives of GEKCO is to try to slow this tide or at least educate it in ecologically sensitive and equine friendly development. There are still numerous fauna species in the area that are under threat: tortoises, terrapins, scrub hares, black-backed jackal, mongoose, the African Bullfrog etc. There are several red data plant and animal species within the area and over 250 bird species regularly seen in the GEKCO area. The wetlands form an integral part of the area not only from an aesthetic point of view, but also as filters and sites of species' richness and landscape heterogeneity.

Although one could argue that the domestic horse is not indigenous to South Africa and the Greater Kyalami area, however, they form an integral part of our lives, especially within the area. Within Kyalami it has been the presence of horses (and the wide open spaces that go hand in hand with the horses) that have allowed this rich biodiversity to flourish and continue merely 20km from Sandton.

It is impossible to put a true financial figure on the importance of the area to the greater Johannesburg. Not only has the presence of the horses in the area given rise to many niche businesses in the area (it directly and indirectly supports a complete network of trade) but it has allowed for much needed open space. Not only does this open space maintain a plethora of indigenous fauna and flora but it is essential for the future existence of equine sport in Gauteng.

THE ECONOMIC ADVANTAGE

“When all the trees have been cut down; when all the animals have been hunted; when all the waters are polluted and when all the air is unsafe to breath; only then will you discover you cannot eat money” – **Cree prophecy**



typical land use model in the Greater Kyalami area



a small scale view of what Kyalami equestria offers to other areas



showjumping has become an increasingly popular sport



horse riding appeals to riders of all ages

LABOUR

The equine industry in Kyalami contains a huge verity of different yards from a single horse to close to 100 horses on a property. Staff employed on these properties are employed to either provide care and safekeeping of a resident-owners horse/(s) or to the resident-owners horse/(s) and their clients. The provision of livery services provides for the most direct jobs in the area. Often a horse owner will choose to stable with a specialist yard where they can receive tuition of guidance related to their own particular interest. The result in labour demand is thus quite significant as a yard owner may have for instance 4 clients and probably 8 horses that would require about 5 staff members to take care of them. It is important to make the distinction between domestic staff that are remunerated by the resident and is non-income producing and these specialist grooms that derive their income indirectly from fees paid by clients. Often livery is viewed as being a “lost leader” as the yard owner receives their income from related activities such as providing lessons.

Large yards in the area employ as many as 50 staff members. The working hours at a livery yard are also extended as the staff need to tend to the horses shortly after sunrise and end their day at sunset. There are extended breaks provided during the day but the staff and their families are often accommodated on the premises so that they are able to work these extended hours. The additional advantage to the labourer in having accommodation provided to himself and his family and not needing to use transport is very significant. The industry is growing and the need for additional labour is increasing steadily at a rate that is presently at least double the country's economic growth rate.

At a time when our government has stated time and again that creating jobs and providing houses is a top priority, this aspect of the argument needs to be given the correct attention. Breaking up the area by allowing mixed use or carving up the area by creating through roads would mean that many yard owners would either close down or leave their clients to their own devices. Many clients do not have the space, the skills or the inclination to care for their own horses and would simply stop participating in these equine activities. The resultant job losses would be massive.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

The skills associated with caring for horses are very specialised and these are acquired through an informal apprenticeship program. The yard owner almost always facilitates and oversees the training and evaluation of staff entirely at their own cost. A yard owner would typically be able to accommodate both a fast and a slow learner and the lengths of their apprenticeships would vary accordingly. The specific skills that an apprentice would learn are also vastly different and so as soon as they have mastered one skill, that skill could be utilised to providing that specific service while learning another skill on-the-job.

This is unlike acquiring the skills of say a boilermaker or refrigeration mechanic where they are only really economically valuable once they have achieved a certain level of overall proficiency. Also very significant is that in many cases, early school leavers with very limited academic proficiencies can become very good (expert in fact) at handling horses. We have experienced many cases where people with very limited academic ability end up being far better at handling animals than their much better educated counterparts. This is significant as there are few skills in formalised industry today of which this can be said.

We have heard of “skills incubators” being promoted by government and would like to suggest that we have a very large and very successful one running right here in Kyalami. When there is a small yard with only 2 to 4 horses, then the grooms need to be proficient at very many skills in order to take care of the horses so these multi skilled labourers normally are in demand when they have acquired many skills. The need to have many yards, both small and large on one area is essential in order to facilitate this movement of staff with different skill levels.

ECONOMIES OF SCALE

The equine industry in Kyalami works and is cost efficient mostly because of the incredibly high population of horses in one area. This means that we have very high economies of scale as service providers such as horse dentists, farriers, feed providers, veterinary doctors, horse physiotherapists, bedding providers, refuse removers, barn and fence builders, arena specialist and many other providers have critical mass and are able to maintain a business providing services at affordable prices.

This is indeed a very large problem as when there are large distances to travel between yards, the prices that service providers need to charge become prohibitive and therefore the businesses are not economically sustainable. The Kyalami area has all this at the moment and we can see the enormous growth of ancillary service providers as a result. We have equine hospitals and specialist facilities which otherwise would not exist.

SUPPLIER AND KNOCK-ON EFFECTS

Due to the high horse population in the Kyalami area, a unique situation develops where service providers are able to form links in services and products. This can be seen in a tack shop for instance where many items, which are sold by them (in a business that employs several people) are manufactured, maintained and repaired by another business also employing people. If the Kyalami area is not able to provide the economies of scale required, then all these ancillary jobs will be lost as well. There are clear and similar examples in other industries such as motor manufacturing which demonstrate this knock on effect. A supplier providing a large variety of goods only works when there are many customers in the area as otherwise they need to get rid of slow moving lines that individually would not be economically viable if the stock moves too slowly. Breaking up the Kyalami area would marginalise many of these businesses when demand drops below a certain level.

SPORTS DEVELOPMENT

The Kyalami area is unique in Africa as it provides several horse disciplines and specialises in all the Olympic equine disciplines. Most of the top internationally trained and competent trainers are in the Kyalami area. The pool of young talent comes from school children in the Johannesburg and Pretoria area. Many of the parents work and live in the Johannesburg northern suburbs and in order for these children to become competitive at their sport, they need to train during the week and then compete on the weekends.

The distance that parents travel during a school day afternoon in order to take children to and from riding lessons is limited. Travelling more than an hour to and another hour from a riding lesson (this is often at peak time traffic in the week is just about the limit without it impacting on the child's ability to do homework). If the equine industry in the Kyalami area is marginalised, the impact on sports development amongst young and adult riders will be devastating. Weekend riders also will mostly ride if their travel time is limited to say no more than 4 hours on a weekend. Assuming they ride on a Saturday and compete on a Sunday, then this also becomes prohibitive once they have to travel further. Also remember that if the number of active riders had to decrease, instructors will have a smaller number of students and their businesses will also be under threat. It's not difficult to see how many hundreds of jobs will be lost in these circumstances.

