



What is the environment and what does it mean to be a part of GEKCO

If one looks at the aims of the Gauteng Conservancy and Stewardship Association (the old GCA) it states as its aims:

- to conserve Gauteng’s environmental and agricultural resources;
- to join forces with other conservation bodies to seek solutions to environmental problems;
- to actively involve all people and communities within our conservancies in conservation issues;
- to develop a strong, united voice for conservation in Gauteng;
- to encourage the formation of rural, urban, school, industrial and informal settlement conservancies within Gauteng;
- to give support to and network with conservancies in Gauteng and throughout South Africa, by sharing information and resources;
- to raise awareness among all residents of conservancies and the public, of the need to conserve our environmental and agricultural resources; and
- to gain recognition and support for our aims from the public, government and business.

GEKCO – as one of the Gauteng conservancies (GCA number 055) – needs to align itself with these aims. This means that the conservation of the environment (and specifically the environment we are presently living in) must be at the forefront of what GEKCO is about.

But what does it mean when we refer to the ‘environment’?

Although one could find many dictionary definitions of this word GEKCO has chosen to align itself with the national environmental legislative framework currently in place. In terms of the current legislative framework (The National Environmental Management Act, 107 of 1998, NEMA) the environment is defined as: “***the surroundings within which humans exist and that are made up of –***

- (i) ***the land, water and atmosphere of the earth;***

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- (ii) micro-organisms, plant and animal life;***
- (iii) any part or combination of (i) and (ii) and the interrelationships among and between them; and***
- (iv) the physical, chemical, aesthetic and cultural properties and conditions of the foregoing that influence human health and well-being.”***

GEKCO feels that this definition is sufficiently wide to include our unique environment.

Along with this definition – it is also important to consider the principles contained within NEMA. These principles are contained in section 2 of the Act and provide in essence that any decisions taken or functions performed by an organ of State must use the guidelines as a reference point. More specifically, the principles provide that:

- environmental management must place people and their needs at the forefront of its concern, and serve their physical, psychological, developmental, cultural and social interest equitably;
- development must be socially, environmentally and economically sustainable; and
- sustainable development requires the consideration of a number of relevant factors.

Currently, although a conservancy does not enjoy direct legislative protection (ie GEKCO is not a protected area in terms of national legislation) the benefits of being a conservancy are included on a more local level under the current Regional Spatial Development Framework and the current Environmental Management Framework. Both of these frameworks recognize GEKCO as a conservancy and as such, there are certain limitations placed on development within the GEKCO area. This awareness of GEKCO has been built up and nurtured over a number of years.