



## Natural Resources

# KwaZulu's new approach

In April 1982, the conservation of the natural resources of KwaZulu was given new impetus by the formation of the Bureau of Natural Resources under the direct control of the Chief Minister of KwaZulu.

The vitality of this new body is such that in three short years it has grown from a position of relative insignificance to being recognized as one of the most important conservation organisations in the Natal/KwaZulu region.

The Bureau has been acclaimed by noted conservationists for having taken the lead in what is essentially a new approach to conservation. It allows for the maximum possible utilization of natural resources while at the same time involving rural projects and integrating conservation development within the local economy.

The Bureau has the awesome responsibility of implementing sound conservation management in economically deprived areas where desperate poverty has led people to exploit beyond their reproductive capacity virtually all of the basic natural resources.

In addition, high human populations in rural areas inevitably go hand in hand with high stock numbers and when this is accompanied by confinement to fixed fragile environments such as hillsides — which abound in KwaZulu — severe overgrazing results. The resultant soil erosion is evident to anyone who has travelled through KwaZulu. In addition, a large

percentage of the indigenous forests proclaimed between 1948 and 1952 have been chopped out totally or damaged so severely that they will never recover.

This is a serious situation even if forests are viewed as a source of energy only. The problem is compounded to catastrophic proportions if it is also taken into account that forests exercise considerable control over patterns of climate, hydrology, circulation of nutrients and soil erosion.

Understandably therefore the Bureau has concentrated much of its initial efforts in developing ways and means of ensuring the continued functioning of mountain catchment areas and indigenous forests. It is after all the first duty of any environmental agency to ensure the maintenance of essential ecological processes and life support systems.

The Bureau has the vital role of ensuring that environmental factors are taken into account in the development of KwaZulu. Failure to do so in other parts of the world has all too often had disastrous consequences as the following example provided by Gareth Hardin clearly illustrates: "In building the High Aswan Dam engineers intended only to produce more water and electricity. They succeeded in the expressed goal, but at what cost? Deprived of the fertilizing silt of the Nile flood waters, the sardine population of the Western Mediterranean has diminished by 97%. The rich delta of the

Nile, which increased in area for thousands of years, is now rapidly eroded away by the Mediterranean because the Nile is depositing no more silt at its mouth. Until Aswan, the yearly flooding of riverine farms added 1mm of silt to the land annually; now that the floods have stopped the previous silt is piling up behind the dam diminishing its capacity. Soon the poor Nile farmers will have to buy artificial fertilizers (if they have the money). Moreover, irrigation without flooding always salinates the soil: in a few hundred years (at most) the Nile Valley which has been farmed continuously for 5 000 years, will have to be abandoned".

This type of catastrophe can be ill-afforded by KwaZulu. The Bureau must ensure the maintenance of a proper balance between development and human improvement on the one hand, and the preservation and survival of an ecological equilibrium on the other.

The maxim of the early physicians, "Primum non nocere — First do no harm", could well be adopted by those whose task it is to ensure the sustainable utilization of natural resources.

As part of its strategy towards maintaining ecological equilibrium the Bureau has identified a number of priority areas it wishes to have set aside as conservation areas. The first of these is the Tembe Elephant Park which was proclaimed on October 21, 1983. Negotiations concerning areas in



the KwaZulu Drakensberg and around the Kosi Lake are currently in progress.

KwaZulu conservation areas will differ from the other Game Reserves in two important aspects. Firstly, whenever possible the natural resources contained within them will continue to be available to the people living in the surrounding area. Secondly, 25% of all the revenue earned by the conservation area will be paid to the Tribal Authority in which ward the conservation area is situated. This effectively integrates the conservation area into the local economy and provides direct benefits to the people to whom the land ultimately belongs.

People in the rural areas depend on resources such as firewood, thatch, fish, herbs, wild fruit and building materials on a day to day basis. The Bureau believes that the proper utilization of these resources can lead to an improved quality of life. However, if this is to be achieved it is necessary to ensure that such utilization is sustainable in the long term.

An understanding of the subsistence utilization of natural resources is therefore essential. In order to obtain this understanding the Bureau has undertaken a number of Research projects.

These Research projects concentrate on essentially practical issues, such as:

1. The resource value of indigenous



plants and grasses in Maputaland as a buffer against rural poverty.

2. Monitoring fish-kraal catches in the Kosi Bay estuary and their effects on the ecology of the region.
3. Research into the feasibility of cottage industries from surplus game products from Game Reserves.
4. A soil erosion survey of KwaZulu.
5. Recreational development and planning in the coastal and coastal-lake zone of Maputaland and other KwaZulu areas.
6. Research into sustained yield harvesting of various natural resources from tribal resource areas.
7. A survey of the remaining indigenous forests of KwaZulu, and their potential for conservation, utilization and recreation.

Tourism has been identified as a major resource in KwaZulu and its development is a priority. Because of its close relationship with the environment, its management has become the responsibility of the Bureau of Natural Resources.

The main thrust of the Tourism section of the Bureau so far has been in the planning of tourist facilities at Lake Sibaya, the Maputaland Coast, Kosi Bay and the historical heartland area centred around Ulundi.

The tourism section is concentrating on providing wilderness-type camp facilities which are compatible with the environment and at the same time allow people of all persuasions to experience life close to nature.

Very few of the objectives of the Bureau of Natural Resources can be achieved without the active co-operation and support of the public of

KwaZulu. For this reason the Bureau is developing a large extension section whose task is to engender an awareness and understanding of environmental issues amongst the public of KwaZulu.

The extension section has initiated the following projects.

- Conservation awareness tours for the traditional leaders of KwaZulu.
- In-Service ecology courses for teachers.
- Using mobile film units in rural areas where the Bureau is not resident to promote an awareness amongst the people.
- Holding a Conservation Week during the sitting of the KwaZulu Legislative Assembly when conservation issues are presented to KwaZulu's decision makers.
- Day-to-day liaison with tribal authorities.
- Provision of resource material (leaflets, posters, etc.)
- Exhibitions at agricultural shows.
- Provision of field schools for extramural activities.
- Press and TV promotions.

The Bureau of Natural Resources has been set the difficult task of improving the quality of life of all the people living in KwaZulu by trying to ensure that they live in a healthy environment. The Bureau had widened its scope of operation far beyond the development of game and nature reserves to which nature conservation departments traditionally confine themselves. Its task is in a much broader context that of working with people and the environment and establishing symbiosis between man and nature.

