CRMC Conservation Manifesto

Purpose:

The purpose of the manifesto is to supplement, in particular, the CRMC Constitution's Conservation Policy within the bounds of the broader corporate body principles and by taking cognisance of limitations such as individual members' rights, lack of external game fences, budget constraints etc.

Various references and inputs such as National and Provincial Environmental Management Acts, the Ecological Study and Environmental Management Programme compiled by Rhengu Environmental Services, Research project reports and opinions gleaned from interested and affected parties were consulted in compiling this document.

Background:

National and Provincial Departments of Environmental Affairs regulate environmentally sensitive areas of national importance ito biodiversity protection and conservation through laws governing environmental integrity, including but not limited to:

- National Environmental Management Act (NEMA), National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEMBA)
- National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act (NEMPAA).
- Provincial legislation for local application of the Acts listed.

CRMC currently features at the lowest scale of official environmental protection through the recognition of the mapped area as a Conservancy within the Mpumalanga Province. Notwithstanding the provincial declaration of the Conservancy, all management functions remain the responsibility of the members of the Conservancy Committee. This includes security/antipoaching, environmental management and monitoring, matters of socioeconomic interest, tourism etc. The Conservancy is also required to fund these activities internally by means of levies, fundraising events and if possible, from external donations.

Research indicates that external donations from National and International Environmental and Wildlife protection agencies, are available to nationally recognised and registered conservation entities that meet strict criteria set by the agencies to ensure responsible utilization of funding of sustainable, auditable and attainable strategic objectives. Private Conservancy entities are unfortunately not included in these funding programmes.

CRMC has an enthusiastic membership with high standards and goals. To meet these goals, funding over and above membership levies and fundraising events will inevitably be required and further investigations into leveraging of funding must be done if CRMC is to meet its mandated objectives.

Conservation Mission.

To promote and support the conservation and sustainable land use in the Crocodile River Mountain Conservancy as essential elements of biodiversity protection, economic development and the contribution to the challenges of climate change in accordance with the ***Purpose*** of the conservancy as articulated in the **CRMC Constitution.**

Core values of the CRMC

- We are passionate about nature and cherish the diversity of ALL life in our conservancy and endeavour to improve and sustain ecological integrity.
- We respect and trust each other and embrace the diversity of our cultures, talents and experiences.
- We make every decision with integrity and are accountable for the choices we make.
- We have the courage to take bold action in the face of criticism and persevere through challenging times to pursue our vision with enthusiasm within a safe and secure environment.
- We endeavour to advance the sustainable utilization of Eco-opportunities to the benefit of all the members.

Generic Definition.

A Conservancy is the collaboration between landowners to achieve management of the biodiversity in an integrated mosaic of varying land use types. The normal approach is characterised by the obligatory arrangements to reduce internal fencing where possible with concomitant reduction in domestic livestock and crop farming, applying law enforcement (environmental and criminal), wildlife management and off-take systems including trophy hunting where permitted and control and prevention of encroachment by alien invasive plant and animal species. Property owners gain income from an extensive range of land uses including agricultural, tourism and wildlife-based activities on a scale of property ownership, facilitated by the Conservancy.

Conservation activities on private property remain the responsibility of the individual landowner members, supported and advised by the Conservancy committee and the relevant policies and rules contained in the Conservancy Constitution.

Conservation Management and Planning.

(Ref: CRMC Constitution, clause 7 Conservation Policy as applies to this Manifesto, Statutory requirements and the Ecological study and Environmental Management Programme (Rhengu Environmental Services).

CRMC is a mosaic of different geographic land types varying from Archaean Mpageni Granite in the north along the Crocodile River gorge to steep slopes and lower lying flatlands and valley-bottom riverine areas.

The foothills of the Makonjwa mountains of which much of the Conservancy forms a part includes areas of Barberton Montane Grassland (assessed by Rouget et al. as *vulnerable)* which is home to the vulnerable *Protea curvata.* Along drainage lines, slopes and some flat land and riverine areas the *Scarp Forest* on Sour Lowveld Bushveld occurs with a unique, dense woody component of Bushveld trees.

Large areas of the Bushveld enjoy a high conservation status due to the uniqueness of the geology and biodiversity.

The conservation and management of the CRMC will require commitment from all landowners/members of the Conservancy. To this end, an Environmental Management Plan will be compiled taking into account the complexity of the Bio-diversity and the socio and economic constraints.

- Economics: The CRMC Constitution is not explicit in the allocation of responsibility ito maintaining the state of the environment. This refers in particular to cost driving activities such as management and control of alien invasive plant species, erosion control and maintenance of public roads etc. Clause 4.1.3 empowers the Conservancy to employ, discharge, pay and arrange conditions of employment of staff for its activities. Certain parcels of land are highly infested with AIPS, possibly due to landowner complacency or high costs. Should the Committee be unable to apply pressure on members to comply with the Conservancy rules, it would be expedient to have the work done by either Conservancy appointed employees or contractors. It is not clear if the Committee is empowered to recover such costs from the members in question. It will require the Conservancy to become financially viable to enable the execution of such functions. Job creation would be a positive spin-off in an economically viable environment.

- Compile an Environmental Management Programme (EMP) by Ecosystem approach. (Adaption of section 15 of the EMProgramme prepared by Rhengu Environmental Services) The cost of achieving the objectives of conservation must be assessed. The EMP alone will not guarantee success and economic reality must be included in the EMP for it to evolve into an Integrated Management Plan (IMP).

- List of Key conservation performance areas

    - Wildlife management- wildlife offtakes protocol and reporting
    - Integrated invasive alien plant species management plan (key species identified)

- Natural resource use planning, water resource management and strategies.
- Compliance with local fire management requirements
- Implement Ecosystems management to maintain habitat integrity and diversity – set criteria
- Participate in Provincial and Municipal development processes
- Socioeconomic development, Eco training, job creation, environmental education programmes, Community opportunities.
- Prioritise conservation tasks eg. Vegetation Condition Assessment (VCAs), plot the invasive species areas, perform annual environmental audits on VCAs, plan invasive species eradication/control/management.
- Support members with conservation-based tourism initiatives.
- Litter and waste management.

❖ Planning
- Targets should be set for the achievement of particular conservation activities or operations

❖ Tourism Activities. (Separate portfolio)
- Tourism type activities as income generators for landowners and Conservancy. Investigate implementation of a central booking arrangement. Obtain details from members offering these activities. Coordinate and Integrate with Eco-training. Present the Conservancy as a practical study area for students qualifying in environmental studies.
- Nature walks –. Name each nature walk by utilizing the conspicuous attraction and details. (Tree identification, Rock art, Birding, Mpakeni mountain hikes etc)
- Camping areas with particular attractions.
- 4x4 routes.
- Hunting
- MTB Cycling
- Horse riding
- Quad bikes
- Fishing

- Game viewing
- Historical routes and info.
- Birding

❖ Fire management and control. (Separate portfolio)
- Advise all landowners to be members of LEFPA.
- Assess a worst-case scenario of possible catastrophic bush fires. (Risk analysis).
- Determine positioning of strategic fire breaks (> 30m wide) in the greater Conservancy area. Obtain cooperation of affected landowners.
- Compile a register of ALL firefighting equipment available and the storage locality.
- Compile rules and penalties.

❖ Wildlife management. (Separate portfolio)
- Compile a policy document to control:
  - Game census and species
  - Permits for hunting
  - Off-take numbers
  - Trophy hunting
  - Veterinary inspections of carcasses (F&M red line area?)
