



# Waterberg Nature Conservancy Newsletter

Occasionally issued news of interest to WNC members and others in the Waterberg Number 2, June 2008

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## Note from the Editor

You don't write, you don't call. I don't even know if you even read the first issue. But that doesn't stop me from asking, again, for

- Your ideas about a specific conservation/environment topic, which could be short or long;
- Your submission of a complete item, ready for publication;
- Your feeling about a wider distribution of this newsletter.

John Miller, Editor and Chairman, [equus@equus.co.za](mailto:equus@equus.co.za)

## Who We Are

After battling to find out who we are, I've found out – we are indeed strong.

### **Our 51 members own 162,131 hectares and employ 918 people.**

I think those are remarkable numbers and are very important to publically proclaim as we represent ourselves to local, provincial, and national government departments, as well as the Waterberg community and prospective members.

Our 51 members include 29 landowners who use their land commercially for **tourism, game ranching, hunting, research, education, and agriculture.**

Our 51 members include 16 landowners who use their land for **private residences and reserves** without commercial activities.

Our 51 members include 6 who don't own any land, but are equally interested in and committed to conservation.

## Modimolle Municipal Property Rates

As this is written, the Modimolle Municipality seems to have completed work on its property rates policy.

For rating purposes, agriculture may be defined to include not only *bona fide* commercial farms, but also eco-tourism, game farms, and hunting. But maybe it won't. It's not yet clear.

The rate itself may be lower than earlier proposals, or it may not. Not clear yet.

The Council may have made wise decisions based on the common sense we provided in our Conservancy letters and individual letters. But maybe not.

We'll report more at the Conservancy meeting on 18 June.

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## Meetings and Events

### Waterberg Nature Conservancy, General Meeting

Date: 18 June, Wednesday

Venue: Waterberg Academy (Main Hall), Vaalwater

Time: 14:30 for 15:00; tea, etc.

Agenda: Several items, followed by presentation by Mercia Komen about the National Association of Conservancies of South Africa (NACSA)

Cash bar and light supper immediately following meeting. Please RSVP to Glynis Brown.

### Waterberg Planetary Festival

12-19 August, Tuesday through Tuesday

For one week in August ALL the planets of our solar system will be on display, together, in an early evening sky. This spectacular and highly unusual event also just happens to coincide with an extraordinary collection of other astronomical marvels – a series of dramatic double and triple planetary conjunctions, and a near total lunar eclipse. The Waterberg Planetary Festival aims to bring all the splendour of this to all who are interested using the latest astronomical technology, including live projection onto a Big Screen. For more details go to [waterbergcottages.co.za](http://waterbergcottages.co.za) or call Philip Calcott 014-755-4425.

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## Residential and Commercial Development Proposals

By my count, there are at least 13 active residential and/or commercial development projects in the Waterberg. They range from the enormous Thaba Lesodi (855 housing units, 60-room hotel, two golf courses – on about 3,400 hectares) to a recent, much smaller proposal for 25 housing units on 250 hectares on Bakkers Pass Road to a residential/commercial development in Vaalwater. The projects are in varying stages of review. In fact, some have been approved and others seemed to have been halted by the developer. Ultimately it is the Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism (LEDET) that approves or denies.

The Conservancy is trying to be kept informed about projects, and be engaged with the environmental consultant, developer, and LEDET where appropriate. As we look at the bigger picture of impact on the Waterberg, we are concerned about water supply, densities, light and noise pollution, roads, sewage and refuse systems, and more. While we understand the rights of land owners to propose new developments, we are concerned that if all the proposals were approved and built, the essential nature of the Waterberg would be in for dramatic changes.

Our approach is not confrontational, but rather constructive. We are urging developers to take advantage of the environmental guidelines that the Conservancy prepared a couple of years ago to plan their developments in an environmentally wise and sensitive manner.

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## Eco-Tourism

I hope we don't abuse the concept and the word itself, whether hyphenated or not. I've been involved in eco-tourism, stayed at an eco-lodge, even walked on an eco-trail. Yes, they have a connection to ecology, but do they do less harm to the environment than similar activities? I'm afraid eco-everything is just a pat on the back. So often, we are saying nothing more than "I like the outdoors, I'm an eco-friendly bloke". Take a look at the following definition from a United Nations document and see if you think you operate an eco-tourism establishment:

*Ecotourism is environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features – both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low negative visual impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations.*

If you are interested in more on the topic, look at the May 2008 issue of Africa Geographic magazine.

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