



Wildlands Conservation Trust

UPPER THUKELA STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

Pioneers Payment for Ecosystem Services

Local communities to benefit financially from conservation efforts

As part of the broader KZN Biodiversity Stewardship program being driven by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, the Wildlands Conservation Trust (Wildlands) is assisting in the facilitation of the proclamation of an important part of the upper course of the Tugela River, some 45,000 ha area of unsettled land in the Drakensberg mountains, as a new protected area.

The Upper Thukela Stewardship Project (UTSP) will secure an area having a crucial function of supplying a very important source of fresh water to people in perpetuity. Much of the water from the Upper Thukela region, a catchment area which falls on community land owned by the amaZizi and amaNgwane communities, is used either for electricity gen-

eration or as a source of water for Gauteng. The ecosystem provides free services to these communities in the form of water catchment, water filtration, flood attenuation, good infiltration in summer and slow, steady flow in winter because of better water retention. Local communities which own the land on which these services are provided have access to an income model, since local authorities could pay them for services provided by their ecosystem.

Effective management

According to Wildlands Strategic Manager for Stewardship and Protected Area Expansion Kevin McCann, local communities have not effectively managed their land in terms of grazing and fire management in the past. However,

in unlocking the potential of the payment for ecosystem services, various work has been performed which shows the direct financial benefit to communities for managing in a certain manner to allow more water to be "produced" for sale by local or water authorities. Apart from their intrinsic desire to conserve the area, the community has a definite, vested interest in protecting their immediate environment.

The Upper Thukela site is the first pilot of its kind, and securing it as a nature reserve (protected area) legally binds the local community to manage the area in a certain way. The

