



R55m biodiversity offset pact signed

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Pretoria – South African National Parks (SANParks), Coal of Africa and the Department of Environmental Affairs have signed a historic biodiversity offset agreement (BOA) for Vele Colliery.

The BOA is worth R55 million over the lifespan of the mine, which is located in Limpopo.

SANParks Acting CEO Dr Nomvuselelo Songelwa, Acting Director General of Environmental Affairs Judy Beaumont and CEO of Coal of Africa (CoAL) David Brown signed the agreement on behalf of their organisations on Wednesday.

Speaking at the signing ceremony in Pretoria, chairperson of the SANParks Board, Kuseni Dlamini, said the process to revise the Mapungubwe World Heritage Site buffer zone showed that it was possible for Vele mine to continue its operations without compromising Mapungubwe.

“There are those who have insisted on seeing conservation as being opposed to development and job creation but this is certainly not the case.

“SANParks has long held the view that our national parks should serve as catalysts for local economic development, particularly in some of the more isolated rural areas where opportunities are limited.

“It was a complex journey as we sought to marry the interests of the environment, heritage and development. The signature of this agreement bears testimony to the commitment of the representatives of our respective organisations,” said Dlamini.

Mapungubwe was a pre-colonial state in southern Africa located at the confluence of the Shashe and Limpopo rivers, south of Great Zimbabwe. The kingdom was the first stage in a development that would culminate in the creation of the Kingdom of Zimbabwe in the 13th century, and with gold trading links to Rhapta and Kilwa Kisiwani on the African east coast.

Brown, whose company produces coking and thermal coal, said: “We believe that Vele Colliery has set a new benchmark for co-existence between mining, heritage and agriculture.”

Beaumont said South Africa’s mineral endowment implies that mining and the environment will continue to interact and will need to walk together to achieve prosperity in a sustainable environment.

Beaumont said the offset agreement will enable Mapungubwe National Park to implement various projects to rehabilitate and improve the management of archaeological sites, as well as develop roads and key park infrastructure such as an overnight education facility for children.

“We have indeed reached a momentous stage in our country’s development, where sectors originally perceived to have competing mandates have realised the common vision of growth and prosperity for our country and are beginning to walk this path towards sustainability together,” said Beaumont.

“I hope that this will set an example for other companies with mining and similar interest in environmentally sensitive areas to also act responsibly and ensure that any potential impacts are properly managed, including by way of offsetting.”

A balancing act

The biodiversity offset agreement for Vele Colliery is based on the ecosystem approach to biodiversity management.

The agreement is aimed at strengthening cooperation between the three parties towards the conservation and sustainable development of the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape World Heritage Site (MCLWHS).

It is also aimed at maintaining the integrity of the site and ensuring that the negative impacts of development are avoided, minimised or remedied in the pursuit of sustainable development.

The agreement is also intended to promote the development of Mapungubwe so that it benefits the environment, the local economy and resident communities.

The area is approximately 7km northeast of the MCLWHS boundary and within an area that was initially earmarked for expansion of the Greater Mapungubwe Transfrontier Conservation Area.

Vele Colliery applied for and was, on 5 July 2011, issued with an environmental authorisation in terms of Section 24G of the National Environmental Management Amendment Act (Act No. 107 of 1998), to continue with the listed activities that were commenced without authorisation.

The conditions for authorisation included formalisation and implementation of a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) between the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), CoAL and SANParks (the Management Authority for the World Heritage Site).

The MoA was signed on 1 September 2011 and relates to the implementation of the Section 24G conditions of authorisation, which included the development and implementation of the biodiversity offset programmes and implementation plans that were to be agreed upon.

It committed the three parties to “ensuring that the negative impacts of development are avoided, minimised or remedied in pursuit of sustainable development”.

A Steering Committee will be established to manage and implement the terms of the agreement.

Three representatives from each of the three parties will be appointed to the committee which will meet quarterly.

Limpopo Premier Stan Mathabatha, accompanied by provincial government officials, witnessed the signing ceremony. – [SAnews.gov.za](#)