



## NEWS FLASH – SOUTHERN AFRICAN WILDLIFE COLLEGE

### DYNAMIC ALLIANCE ESTABLISHED TO BOLSTER RHINO ANTI-POACHING EFFORTS

On the western boundary of Kruger National Park (KNP), private and community owned game reserves - represented as the Greater Kruger Environmental Protection Foundation (GKEPF) - have joined forces with conservation agencies, non-profit organisations and security service providers to bolster conservation management and realize increased environmental asset protection through integrated anti-poaching and security strategies across the region.

This strong public private partnership, that includes cooperation with South African National Park (SANParks), the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Authority (MTPA), Peace Parks Foundation (PPF), and the Southern African Wildlife College (SAWC), aims to put an end to the often fragmented approach taken to protect wildlife species under threat. The activities of GKEPF and its partners also assist in securing the private and community owned game reserves as part of a Joint Protection Zone (JPZ) - the area demarcated as a cooperation-based conservation management block with KNP in the centre and including all private and community owned reserves on KNP's borders.

*"It is vital that we develop the capabilities that exist within the region for the protection of all species by enhancing the effectiveness of management authorities and resources,"* said the GKEPF Director of Operations, Colonel (retired) Otch Otto. *"We are actively trying to ensure collaborative conservation management and enhanced security as a result of the effective sharing and exchange of information, sharing of equipment and advanced technologies, skills, training, experience and moral support.*

Today (Monday, 26 June 2017) marked the official declaration of these partnerships with the opening of the GKEPF ComCen. The ComCen, or command and communications centre, is situated at SAWC and forms the 'central point of coordination' as it were of activities as managed by GKEPF. With financial support from PPF, the ComCen has been staffed and equipped with technology, communications and data management systems, so as to allow for optimal execution of monitoring and response, as well as administrative and logistical functions. Funded by generous donors of SAWC, a hangar was erected as part of the ComCen, enabling rapid deployment of aerial assets within the Greater Kruger Environmental Protection Alliance (GKEPA) support area.

As part of efforts to truly invigorate joint anti-poaching and asset management efforts, Peace Parks Foundation funded the implementation of an extended digital communication system across the GKEPA operational area. This system, which was initially only operational within the Intensive Protection Zone of KNP, has now been extended to include the GKEPA reserves and integrated into the ComCen system – allowing for secure and seamless communication between security personnel in KNP and the private and community managed game reserves on both sides of KNP's boundary.

Whilst exerting primary efforts on establishing capabilities and strategies that would improve the environmental management capacity of all GKEPA partners, the initial phase of the project also saw specific focus being placed on improving security infrastructure at Manyeleti Game Reserve. Manyeleti – positioned at a critical location within the JPZ – was being targeted by poaching syndicates as an access route through which to enter KNP and other reserves. PPF provided funding to upgrade a vulnerable stretch of the Manyeleti boundary fence, install an electro pulse monitoring system, which feeds data directly back to the GKEPA ComCen.

Says Werner Myburgh, CEO of PPF: *“As we move forward step by step in our collective effort to combat wildlife crime, the forging of partnerships and the use of modern technologies is imperative so as to stay one step ahead of poaching syndicates. In this instance secure digital communications and smart monitoring systems with rapid response capabilities were vitally important for the development of effective protection strategies. The initial results are encouraging and within the first year that the Centre has been operational, there has already been a 50% reduction in rhino poached in this particular region. No doubt these collective and structured efforts are contributing to realise this progress.”*

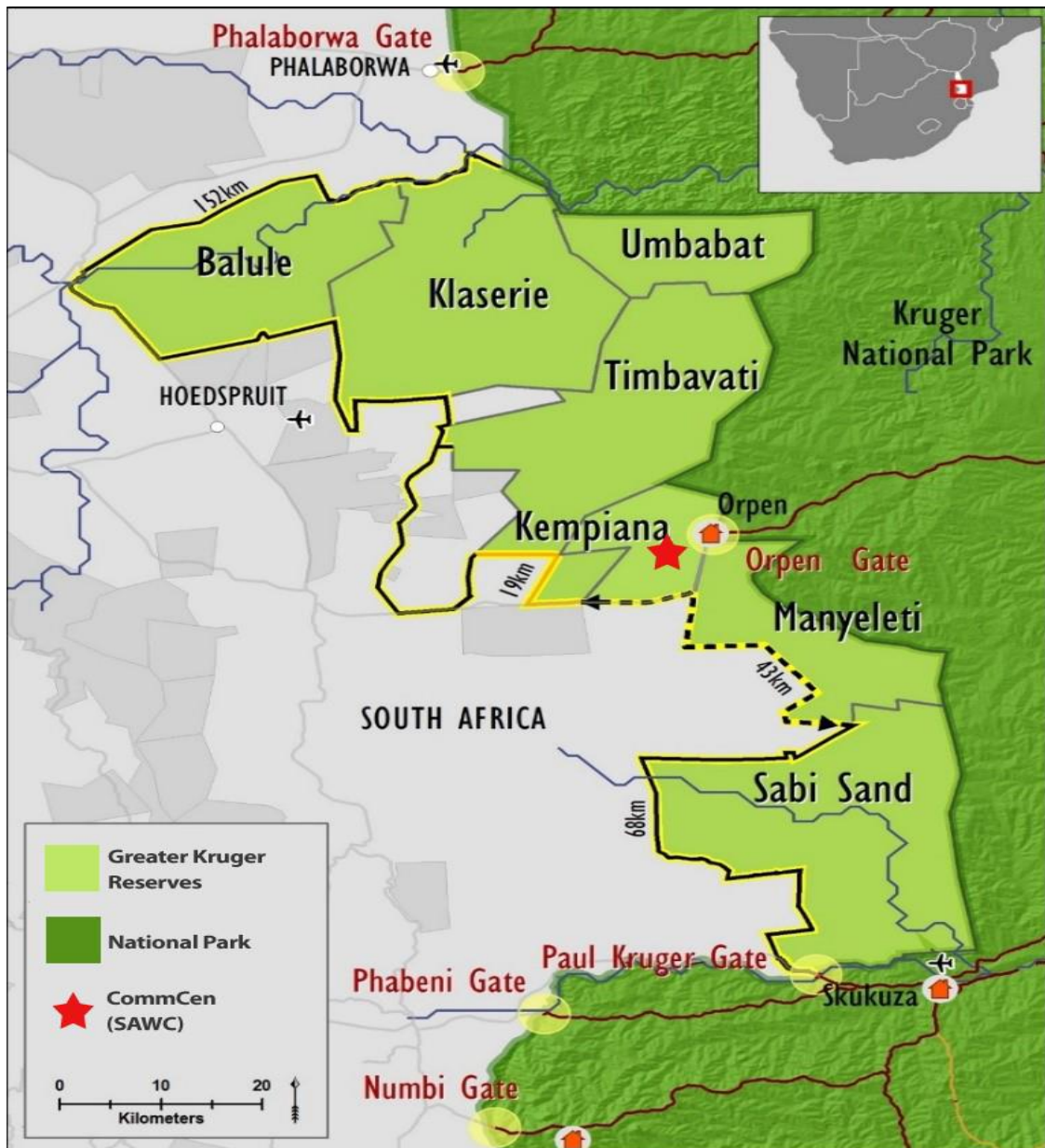


John Braithwaite (Chairperson: GKEPF); Theresa Sowry (CEO: SAWC); Major-General (Retired) Johan Jooste (Head: Special Projects, SANParks); Otch Otto (Director of Operations: GKEPF); Werner Myburgh (CEO: PPF); Joshua Ngomane (MTPA Cluster Manager: Ehlanzeni North)

Cooperative partnerships are an essential part of the GKEPA strategy, and with the ComCen and aerial capability perfectly located at the SAWC, it also exposes upcoming conservationists to best practice through applied learning to bolster species protection and counter rhino poaching. *“With the support of these alliances we are able to further facilitate education, training and skills development opportunities and harness available resources which, with the support of our neighbouring communities, will help improve security within the GKEPA area where the College is based”*, added SAWC CEO, Theresa Sowry.

With the capability provided and the joint assets created, GKEPF is also able to respond to community support programmes, medical emergencies, and also support government agency initiatives such as the National Counter Poaching Strategy “Operation Rhino7”, which would otherwise not be possible.

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