

June 18th, 2015

**Summary of points discussed at the AGM, Wednesday, 6th May 2015 –
Remediation of Sundowner Park**

After a very well attended AGM of the SRA, certain points were agreed upon unanimously. Also a few exciting things have happened and will happen soon.

Geese and rabbits will be removed from Sundowner

This may come as a surprise to some residents as they bring joy to many park goers. Unfortunately, the geese have overgrazed the front of the dam, putting the entire dam wall at risk to erosion (the soil is highly erosive). Furthermore, inbreeding has already taken place, as can be observed by the fact that some geese are smaller with shorter necks. This is a pigmy trait which dominates and is therefore an indication of inbreeding. Finally, the low water levels do not give the geese, which are genetically flightless, an escape from dogs which may have slipped from the owners' control.

There is some consolidation, as a small flock of yellow-billed indigenous ducks have made the dam (or what is left of it) their home.

Unfortunately Rabbits can be highly destructive, if not kept in a cage. They re-produce at alarming rates and their digging and short grazing (as with the geese) destroys the growth point of grass and thus promotes erosion. Many are carriers of various diseases which pets are prone to get, this includes rabies. They are equally a risk to people (especially small children.)

Rabies is still not a fully controlled disease with many pets not vaccinated in South Africa (including our suburb). Setting rabbits or any domesticated animal or species free, is irresponsible and illegal in South Africa. Indigenous animals need permits to be released.

Both, the geese and the rabbits are of domestic origin. The geese can be more easily controlled than the rabbits. Australia pulled a fence from east to west 3 times to stop rabbits invading the other half of Australia. Just imagine the cost of such a fence! In Spain a chemist developed a pathogen (germ) which killed the rabbits (still there is an overpopulation almost a 100 years later). The environmental impact rabbits can have on the few open natural spaces, can be extremely serious!

Another concern is that while it is nice to see the Rabbits and Geese running free, people are not as keen take responsibility or care for a goose or rabbit that has been driven over by a car, attacked by a dog or succumbed to disease?

Please, consider what is fair and let us re-home these animals to where they belong – somewhere where one can take care of them and be responsible for them in a controlled environment.

Department of Parks and Zoo – currently they have employed a contractor to remove the invasive poplar saplings.

Gauteng has experienced wetter than normal summers and these trees (and other alien invasive trees such as wattle, mulberry, white stink wood and blue gum trees) threaten the highly delicate wetland, which is found within the stream bed. Almost 80 % of the park is considered a wetland, and therefore falls under stringent environmental law – hence the reaction by government to set funds aside for especially these invasive tree species.

The contractor is tasked with removing and controlling the explosion of these trees and their saplings by cutting them down and treating them with specific chemical herbicide to only destroy these alien invasive trees. This is a highly controlled and managed process. Certain trees will not be removed.

First priority are the indigenous trees, and more so the indigenous trees to the area (endemic).

Why not other pretty trees? The fact that trees not endemic to especially Gauteng, have no natural predators (insects and fungi/bacteria) makes them very dangerous. Why? Nothing controls them – they pose safety and fire dangers to us as residents and humans. They have serious environmental implications. This includes the very large (older than 20 years) blue gum trees. However, these very old gum trees play a current important hydrological role in our suburb. They extract so much water which would otherwise flood houses and create watercourse erosion, destroy roads and infrastructures, etc.

Eventually all established trees, including the watercourse will be replanted with indigenous trees. These trees will suit the environment much better (where gum trees and wattle cause hotter fires, destroy grasses beneath them and promote erosion due to their high resin content). These trees will also be pruned as natural herbivores would, from underneath to create crowns and thus pose natural competition for sunlight and beneath their roots will do the same for nutrients. This in return will control the overgrowth by these natural trees. Further, they will be a much better indicator of a healthy park environment as they react to subsurface sewage spills etc. by dying etc. thus helping us to maintain a healthy urban environment. Once the natural vegetation and trees, including the wetland have re-established themselves, there will be an increase in wildlife, especially birds that will add to the joy of all residents.

For now, perhaps take a stroll through an indigenous nursery and start saving for an indigenous tree that you would like to see in the park. Ask the attending helper (many of which are very knowledgeable) what tree would grow near a watercourse or higher up in a wetland, on shallow granitic soils or in between rock or on koppies.

The first mail which was sent out contained some tree species names, perhaps have a look what they cost and send your name and pledge through to buy one of them once spring comes around. The quicker the trees grow the quicker they will remove the ground water, the quicker we can get rid of the very large blue gum trees that can then be replaced by indigenous, even more beautiful and beneficial trees.

Trees to remain standing will have danger tape around them. Just as indication to both the contractors and residents. See how few indigenous trees there are. See how destroyed this wetland is?

Security and Fire hazards – a meeting with the SRA garden service took place and it was indicated which spots pose security and fire hazards concerning long grass. Also trees, not falling into the budget of the contractors mentioned above, will be cut down and cacti and other weeds/invasive species removed.

Plans are under way to cut the large trees into firewood and sell back to residents to create a revenue stream for the park project.

Please report any fires in the Park to 082 430 9027. Fires are a serious threat and have to be handled as soon as possible.

Sponsors

The break in the Dam Wall is also a priority as it causes a major erosion problem. We need empty sandbags and metal wire with which to stitch the sandbags closed. We have enough sand for now. The filled bags will have to be stacked up and the old dam overflow be repaired so it can safely conduct water down the intended way.

We need plastic sheeting (building quality – as to put on top of one's foundation to damp-seal). In this case the plastic will help to control the water above the soil, so not to wash underneath the slabs. 2 opportunities are available –

- a) Either someone can donate large (70 to 150 mm diameter crushed stone (about 1 ton) or
- b) Someone can buy the existing concrete panels (which were previously used).

Some have been washed away, others stolen and again others are broken.

For now that is all to report.

A meeting with relevant government and municipal departments is in the pipeline.

We need the legal go-ahead to fix the park. For more information, contact Eva Tinnefeld 082 430 9027.

**Kind regards,
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