



PRESENCE: An Overview

PRESENCE is a multi-stakeholder learning network active in forming mutually beneficial and synergistic partnerships for enabling socio-ecological restoration in South Africa. It is presently securing additional investment and collaboration to ensure that its ambitious vision of ‘guiding the restoration of living landscapes’ remains achievable into the foreseeable future. National and international partners include: governmental departments; universities & research institutes; implementation agencies; NGOs; private consultancies and community-based organisations.

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005) highlighted the fact that the transformation of ecosystems through human activity not only compromises biodiversity and ecological integrity, but ultimately affects the well-being of people who directly and indirectly depend on the benefits derived from socio-ecological systems (i.e. ecosystem services). The implications of such a scenario are clearly apparent in South Africa’s bio-culturally diverse Eastern Cape and Maputaland-Pondoland-Albany ‘hotspot’ where impaired ecosystem functioning is eroding natural capital and the prospect of achieving sustainable livelihoods and regional socio-economic prosperity over the long-term.

In response, the South African Government and institutional partners are developing national programmes - such as Working for Water/Woodlands/Wetlands - to investigate options for restoring the region’s valuable and globally significant biomes and landscapes to meet both socio-economic needs and ecological objectives. However, to achieve these ambitious aims, additional (research/institutional/community) capacity is required in order to improve best management practice across various scales. Practical knowledge of the complex dynamics of restoration coupled with effective dissemination of new insights and adaptive learning is a further step in the right direction. Participatory approaches which seek to engage, raise awareness, educate and change behaviour are vital in facilitating a clearer understanding of the resilience socio-ecological systems and how livelihoods depend on natural capital. PRESENCE embraces this learning process with the vision to provide a dynamic platform for securing ‘living landscapes’ for all.

1. Vision

Restoration of Living Landscapes (as defined by the Subtropical Thicket Ecosystem Planning (STEP) programme)
‘Mainstreaming’ restoration as a viable *multi-functional land-use across diverse sectors of society

**from socio-economic / socio-ecological and institutional perspectives*

2. Mission Statement

PRESENCE aims to be an adaptive learning community which serves as a dynamic platform to support and mainstream existing - and catalyze new - programmes for restoring ‘living landscapes’ (ecosystem services and social & natural capital) in key areas of the Eastern Cape and Maputaland-Pondoland-Albany hotspot.

Aims and objectives

The objective of PRESENCE is to undertake

1. **Rigorous transdisciplinary research/programs** to address critical knowledge gaps in our current understanding of ecological, cultural, economic and socio-political factors and their integration into implementation, management and planning of optimal restoration strategies;
2. **Best Management Practices (BMP)** for natural resource and ecosystem management to ensure equitable and effective landscape restoration over various geographical and institutional scales.

The transdisciplinary research underpinning the BMP will guide implementation to become:

- **stakeholder-driven** in adopting participatory approaches that: value processes as much as outcomes; respect local knowledge/values; recognise potential trade-offs in restoring desired ecosystem services
 - **socio-economically acceptable** in supporting local livelihoods and cultural traditions;
 - **ecologically sound** by maximising ecosystem integrity and biodiversity outcomes;
 - **financially sustainable** through the development of innovative reward mechanisms for ecosystem management (e.g. carbon credits, PWS, biodiversity auctions, tourism initiatives, elemental equity);
 - **institutionally feasible** through promoting good governance arrangements, effective community-based learning organisations and appropriate social change processes (e.g. social marketing strategies);
3. **Local capacity building through the mainstreaming of restoration processes.** This will involve two-way communication and education of (the importance of) the BMP in restoration across governmental, non-governmental and research institutions and the dissemination of knowledge and lessons learned to diverse stakeholder groups with tailored strategies (e.g. through local community-driven ‘learning organisations’).

3. PRESENCE Platform

The PRESENCE Platform is comprised of different groups, each with specific roles and responsibilities

- **PRESENCE Reference Group (PRG):** Comprised predominantly of representatives, researchers and implementers, of the key organisations involved in PRESENCE. The PRG advises and helps steer the PRESENCE programme and monitors and evaluates progress, activities and achievements/milestones made by the ‘Process Enablers’ (Coordination Team). The PRG currently consists of:

Dr. Christo Marais	DWA	Prof. James Blignaut	ASSET
Mr. Pierre Joubert	GIB	Prof. Richard Cowling	NMMU
Mr. Mike Powell	R3G	Dr. Dolf de Groot	WUR (NL)
Dr. Belinda Reyers	CSIR	Wayne Erlank	ECP
Josefien Oude Munnink	LNV/DLG (NL)	Dr. Herco Jansen	Alterra (NL)

Additional advisory network members include: Ms. Saskia Fourie (RU); Dr. Fred Ellery (RU); Mr. Edwill Moore (GIB); Mrs. Shirley Pierce-Cowling (R3G); and Mr. Dieter Van den Broeck (Living Lands / PRESENCE Secretariat).

[**DWAF:** Department of Water Affairs; **GIB:** Gamtoos Irrigation Board; **R3G:** Restoration Research Group; **CSIR:** Council for Scientific and Industrial Research; **ASSET:** Africa’s Search for Sound Economic Trajectories; **NMMU:** Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University; **WUR:** Wageningen University and Research Centre; **RU:** Rhodes University; **SUN:** Stellenbosch University]

- **Research Network:** provides the academic and research capacity within PRESENCE to:
 - Create and undertake the transdisciplinary research programmes;
 - Guide and supervise student research (Honours, Masters, PhDs, Post-docs, Interns);
 - Aid in the development of education and training courses and related activities.
- **Process Enablers:** (Coordination Team): provides vision and coordination to the initiative as well as ‘smooth’ facilitation and integration of day-to-day activities and PRESENCE management to ensure that opportunities are capitalised, synergistic partnerships formed are maximised and proposed outcomes reached.
- **Capacity Building:** focuses on integrating and disseminating a growing body of restoration knowledge comprising of:
 - **Science:** information generated through field research, reports, thesis and publications produced by students, researchers and academics to be effectively disseminated through a variety of channels;
 - **Technical:** experience gained from implementation and the transfer of applied research knowledge.
 - **Community:** sharing local knowledge and experience from land-owners and community involved.

Capacity building focuses on two-way communication and dissemination of information, knowledge and experience to stakeholders, a broader audience and collaborative restoration programmes in order to assist with the mainstreaming of restoration, the development of BMP and implementation strategies.

4. Strategy

PRESENCE is committed to: engaging a broad range of stakeholders; improving communication; seeking to disseminate information timely; and viewing restoration as a socio-ecological process. PRESENCE’s strategy is to be adaptive and strategically opportunistic in order to respond to: stakeholder preferences; implementer’s needs and constraints; and improved scientific understanding. Relationships between these groups must be founded on mutual respect and understanding - virtues which will build long-term trust and effective working relationships between partners. In summary, it is a transdisciplinary and adaptive process of (re-) defining, (re-)formulating and/or (re-) focusing according to ongoing results and monitoring, evaluating and feedback processes of past performances.



5. Collaborative restoration and research programmes

The knowledge, capacity and BMPs generated through PRESENCE is supporting numerous programmes, activities and organizations requiring related information on integrated restoration approaches (ecological, social and socio-economic aspects) of ecosystems.

"PRESENCE in the Baviaanskloof: A strategy for integrated catchment restoration"

Full proposal will be send on request

The PRESENCE approach to mainstreaming restoration is currently being trialled in the World-Heritage Listed Baviaanskloof. The programme is initiating a holistic stakeholder-driven restoration programme aimed at restoring denuded areas of subtropical thicket and vulnerable riparian/wetland systems to move toward sustainable catchment management. This is coupled with an investigation into suitable incentives and options to empower stakeholders.

These activities are being undertaken in collaboration with the following partner programmes:

- 'Restoring Natural Capital' - Research Programme (CSIR)
- 'Spearhead Ecosystem & Landscape Services' (WUR)
- 'Water for Food & Ecosystems' (Dutch Government (LNV) in partnership with WUR)

The following implementation-focused programmes are also collaborating with PRESENCE:

- Working for Water (DWA/ GIB)

This world-renowned programme linking poverty and conservation offers a potential win-win scenario for both people and the environment. Previously disadvantaged people are employed to clear alien invasive plants from priority catchments areas to improve long-term water security, biodiversity conservation and social upliftment.

- Working for Woodlands (DWA/ GIB)

In the same spirit and mould as Working for Water, this innovative poverty relief programme strives to use the same principles to re-vegetate degraded woodlands areas/ecosystems. The Subtropical Thicket Restoration Programme is the key research project active within the Eastern Cape.

- Working for Wetlands (SANBI / GIB)

Using the same model as above; Working for Wetlands focuses primarily on wetlands and riparian areas: the Kouga Riparian Rehabilitation Project and Kromme River restoration are showcase examples within the Eastern Cape.

6. Partners



PRESENCE is an initiative of EarthCollective and is facilitated by Living Lands: a team of conservation-minded professionals catalyzing, creating and 'enabling' positive initiatives that strengthen links between a healthy natural environment and human well-being. EarthCollective initiated PRESENCE to help 'mainstream' the restoration of living landscapes.

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For further information, please refer to the document "PRESENCE Seed Phase: Workshop Outcomes" available at <http://earthcollective.net> under right-hand menu-item 'PRESENCE'.