



ITHALA GAME RESERVE

BACKGROUND INFORMATION DOCUMENT

Introduction

The purpose of this Background Information Document (BID) is to inform stakeholders about the revision of the management plan for Ithala Game Reserve. This document provides an overview of the planning process, outlines the legal and policy context, and highlights key aspects that will guide the management of the reserve. Stakeholder input is an essential part of this process, and this BID serves as a starting point for meaningful engagement, ensuring that the perspectives and knowledge of all interested and affected parties are considered in managing Ithala Game Reserve.

Overview of Ithala Game Reserve

Ithala Game Reserve covers 29 653 hectares in northern KwaZulu-Natal, located between the town of Louwsburg and the Phongolo River, approximately 70 km from Vryheid and 80 km from Pongola. It borders community and commercial lands, with Traditional Authority areas to the north and the town of Louwsburg to the south. The reserve falls within the Zululand District Municipality and spans three local municipalities: uPhongolo, Abaqulusi, and eDumbe.

Ithala is known for its dramatic altitudinal range, which supports a rich variety of habitats and species. It was originally proclaimed to protect key wildlife, especially black rhinoceros, and to reverse environmental degradation through biodiversity restoration. Its establishment also involved the redress of historical land dispossession under the Restitution of Land Rights Act (Act No. 22 of 1994).

The Protected Area Management Plan

This version represents a revision and update of the previous management plan for Ithala Game Reserve, which covered the period 2009–2013. In accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act No. 57 of 2003, protected area management plans serve as essential tools to guide the strategic planning and effective management of protected areas.

Historically, Ezemvelo's management plans were developed as high-level, five-year documents. However, this revised plan for Ithala has been structured as a high-level, ten-year framework. It aims to be adaptive and responsive to emerging challenges and opportunities, with the intention of remaining relevant and useful beyond the initial ten-year period. This approach supports Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife in fulfilling its mandate to conserve and manage biodiversity within the reserve and province.

Key Management Issues and Opportunities

The preliminary situational analysis has identified a range of management challenges and opportunities that must be addressed through the revised management plan. Key challenges include increasing human encroachment along the reserve boundary, rising incidents of poaching, alien plant invasions, illegal mining, and ongoing human-wildlife conflict. Declining financial and human resources further constrain effective management, while external land-use practices and water use planning are negatively impacting the reserve's ecological integrity.

Additionally, there are several important opportunities to enhance the reserve's value and resilience. These include improving eco-tourism infrastructure and experiences, expanding the reserve, promoting cultural heritage sites, and developing environmental and cultural awareness programmes. There is also strong potential for targeted research and fostering sustainable community partnerships, particularly around job creation and local beneficiation. Addressing these issues will be critical to ensuring the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of Ithala Game Reserve.

Stakeholder Consultation Process

A core principle of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife in preparing protected area management plans is collaboration and transparency. Stakeholder engagement is essential to ensure that the management plan reflects the values, concerns, and aspirations of those who live in, work with, or are affected by the protected area.



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Efforts will be made to actively engage with a wide range of stakeholders and obtain their input in the development of the plan. Several stakeholder engagements were facilitated to discuss the strategic direction of Ithala Game Reserve and to identify key issues, challenges, and opportunities that should be addressed in the management plan. We are, therefore, inviting interested and affected parties to participate in the review process by providing comments on the revised plan.

The draft management will be available for review at the following locations:

1. The Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife website at www.kznwildlife.com (Pathway is [Public Notices and also Documents > Protected Area Management Planning > Documents for Public Review]).
2. The uPhongolo, Abaqulusi, and eDumbe Local Municipality offices.
3. The main gate at Ithala Game Reserve.
4. The reception at Ntshondwe Camp in Ithala.

If you or your organisation would like to participate in this process or would like any further information, please contact:

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Comments will only be acknowledged if submitted via the email address provided above or delivered in hard copy to one of the listed physical locations.

Closing date for comments: 31 October 2025

Privacy: Note that this is a Public Participation process in compliance with section 33 of the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act No. 57 of 2003. Therefore, going forward, any submissions received by Ezemvelo will be treated as public documents.

Ezemvelo will deal with any personal information you supply in your future submission and/or engagement by the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013. Ezemvelo will only use your contact details to acknowledge and process your submission, having due regard to the provisions of the Promotion of Access to Information Act 2 of 2000 and the Promotion of Access to Information Act 2 of 2000). Please note that as part of this process, your name and submission may be included in documents that are available to the public.