

Local news

Endangered Aloe simii in jeopardy due to planned development

A critically endangered aloe species is in jeopardy due to the planned development of large portions of a protected nature reserve in Colt's Hill.

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2 minutes read



Aloe simii grows only in a very small natural geographic range; from Sabie southwards to White River and around Mbombela.





Populations are also declining due to the drying out of the aloe's wetland habitat. This is caused by adjacent plantations and water extraction, alien plant invasion, urban expansion and rural development.

White River Nature Reserve (WRNR) NGO, White River Ratepayers Association (WRRPA) and various other outraged community members raised concerns over the proposed development.





Tiger Business Enterprise has allegedly already been appointed by the Mpumalanga Department of Human Settlements, and members of WRRPA claim that the contractor has already begun with soil samples.

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Claims were also made that “they are moving through the grounds with heavy machinery with very little regard to our endangered and endemic aloe species, Aloe simii”.

Simon Evered of WRRPA said they were hoping that they had more time to deal with this at ground level, but that the municipality seemed to have gone ahead regardless.





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“It is illegal until impact studies have been done, as they are required by law to do. They must also notify the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA), public participation is required and signs must go up stating what they are planning.”

Tiffany Briggs, WRNR chairman, said, “This is also very destructive to all other small fauna, such as the marsh mongoose, porcupine, white-tailed mongoose, and duiker that are seeking sanctuary from the ongoing development and agricultural land use shift that is currently surrounding White River.”

Briggs added that not only is this a threat to the little bit of wild space left in town and to the the reserve’s re-wilding projects, but it will also put even more stress on the already constrained and struggling water supply and sanitation plants.



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“At this time White River cannot sustain its current population on a high-functioning level, never mind increasing this by a further 400-plus houses and flats.”

The suggested plans range from low- to more high-income housing, including but not limited to four- to eight-storey buildings, to increase high-density housing.



A source at MTPA confirmed that an independent ecological control officer must be appointed to ensure that plants are handled correctly and a suitable habitat found. He added that the MTPA received no documents with regards to development applications for that portion of White River.

Joseph Ngala, spokesman for the City of Mbombela Local Municipality, was unavailable to confirm or comment on the allegations, despite various attempts to reach him.

The planned Mbombela P166 link road to the R40 south, between White River and Mbombela, was recently put on hold because of this scarce aloe.





The MTPA allegedly required the South African National Roads Agency to put in place measures that include seed harvesting and propagation as conservation tactics while it constructs the road.

The harvesting and propagation has been undertaken successfully in the South African National Biodiversity Institute Lowveld National Botanical Garden, with germination rates in excess of 90 per cent.

