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MODDERFONTEIN RESERVE OPENS TO THE PUBLIC

The Modderfontein Reserve is set to open to the public on 20 September 2012. The reserve will not only protect the indigenous fauna and flora in the area, but will provide an attractive open space within the urban fabric, where Johannesburg residents can come and enjoy its natural beauty without travelling too far from home.

The reserve is situated on land owned by AECI and forms part of its 2 400ha Modderfontein landholding, which is managed by Heartland on AECI's behalf. It has been AECI's intention to formalise the open land on which the reserve stands, and Heartland was assigned this role. Heartland, in collaboration with the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) and with the assistance of the Modderfontein Conservation Society (MCS), has proceeded with the rezoning of the 275ha site to 'private open space'. This will allow the Reserve to be accessible to the public in a controlled fashion.

Anthony Diepenbroek, CEO of Heartland, says he is excited about reaching this milestone. "Heartland's team, the EWT and the MCS have achieved a great deal so far in the process of formalising the Reserve. A good foundation has been laid and work will continue to restore the ecosystem balance and provide a safe and enjoyable space for the public in this unique piece of Highveld."

The EWT has been appointed by Heartland to manage the Reserve. They will run the Reserve on a day to day basis and have formulated a business plan to ensure its future sustainability. According to Luke Strugnell, the EWT's Urban Conservation Manager for the reserve, "It has always been our policy to work with partners – to turn stakeholders into supporters and colleagues - and our partnership with Heartland will mean that the Modderfontein Reserve, which is a valuable, urban conservation area, remains a green oasis amidst an increasingly concrete landscape. We hope that members of the public will take advantage of this beautiful reserve and support the development of further conservation spaces within urban and industrialised centres."

The MCS is playing a vital role in the reserve, having had an interest in the area for many years. They were involved in the initial commissioning of studies to determine the best possible options for the land. They organise various regular activities in the now formalised reserve and a number of the MCS members are actively assisting the EWT with various conservation activities in the reserve.

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The Endangered Wildlife Trust is a non-profit, public benefit organisation dedicated to conserving species and ecosystems in southern Africa to the benefit of all people.

NPO Number: 015-502, **PBO number:** 930 001 777, **Member of IUCN** - The International Union for Conservation of Nature
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There are several reasons why formalising the area as a privately owned reserve is beneficial. The land is owned by AECI, who will cover the high costs of maintenance and conservation work under the EWT's guidance. Proper management of the reserve will also ensure that the space is well maintained and safe for recreation and that the protection of indigenous flora will prevail as a primary objective.

With the management and conservation initiatives put in place by Heartland, the land on which the reserve stands is undergoing massive restoration and rehabilitation work, to achieve the overall conservation objectives. It is important that the reserve is able to operate as a self-sustaining entity in time, and a business plan is being drawn up to this end.

Under the guidance of Strugnell great progress has been made in several respects. The systematic removal of alien vegetation is an ongoing process (it is now a legal requirement to remove certain invasive alien species), as is the planting of indigenous trees around the reserve. As part of Heartland's enterprise development drive, two start-up companies are being incubated as service providers to the Modderfontein Reserve. Enterprise development is an important goal for Heartland and extends across a range of the organisation's activities including maintenance in the Reserve.

Various fauna and flora studies are being conducted to record animal and plant species in the reserve and a monitoring system is being implemented which will allow the EWT team to record changes at fixed points throughout the reserve over time. Mammals on the site include small buck such as Steenbok, as well as Black-backed Jackals. A bat survey has been carried out and studies on the bats are ongoing. Fish Eagles and Long-crested Eagles are among the bird life in the reserve.

Education programmes will form an important part of the activities on the reserve once it opens. This will encompass schools and other interest groups, and it is even hoped that university students will be able to use the area for research and field work for their studies.

The community will have access to the reserve at a cost of R30 per adult and R15 for children and pensioners. An annual fee option will also be available to those who want to access it regularly. Walking and cycling trails are in the process of being marked, and information will be available on these shortly. Interested parties can view regular updates on the Modderfontein Reserve website: www.modderfonteinreserve.co.za.

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