

NOTE FROM THE AFRICAN RHINO SPECIALIST GROUP

Update on the Black Rhino Range Expansion Project

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Much of the focus this year of the Black Rhino Range Expansion Project of the World Wide Fund for Nature and Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife has been negotiating the legal and administrative requirements involved in transferring state assets—black rhinos—onto non-state property. The aim of the project is to increase land available for black rhino conservation, thus reducing pressure on existing reserves and providing new areas in which black rhino numbers can rapidly increase. This will be done by forming strategic partnerships with private and communal landowners on whose land founder populations of up to 20 black rhinos will be released. As the arrangements will be custodial, with Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife retaining ownership of the founder population and half of the progeny, National Treasury has an interest in ensuring that these state assets are being dealt with in a responsible manner.

The project initially applied for exemption from National Treasury through the public–private partnership (PPP) process, but this was not granted. Thus we are now going through the full PPP process, which

involves appointing a legal team to submit the application to National Treasury. We are working closely with National Treasury and should have the final stamp of approval for transferring black rhinos to the first project site within a few months. That means that the project will still be on track to release the first founder population this year.

The final selection of Site One has been delayed until the PPP process is completed, but potential candidates have been identified and assessed according to a number of criteria, the most important of which are the ecological carrying capacity for black rhinos and security prospects. The land must also be free of barriers to black rhino movement. To meet these requirements fences between neighbouring landholders will have to be dropped. Already potential site partners have done a great deal of work, and although the project has not yet committed itself to any specific site, it is good to see that many landholders in the province are prepared to consolidate their pieces of land into larger, more ecologically viable blocks.