

SKEP COORDINATION UNIT

MEDIA RELEASE

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SKEP 2011 CONFERENCE 'TEN YEARS OF ADAPTING IN THE SUCCULENT KAROO'

Biodiversity is the foundation on which the wealth of South Africans is built. The theme of the SKEP 2011 conference is "*Ten Years of Adapting in the Succulent Karoo*" and will focus primarily on strengthening complementarities between biodiversity conservation and livelihood-sustaining land uses in the Succulent Karoo. The main purpose of the 2011 SKEP conference is to elevate the profile of the Succulent Karoo and mainstream the conservation messages of SKEP into the developmental discourse in the country. The conference will be held from the 28th to the 30th of September 2011 at the Masibambane Thusong Centre in Vanrhynsdorp.

The Succulent Karoo stretches from the Klein Karoo up the West Coast through Namaqualand and into Namibia. The biome has a wealth of unique biodiversity but has been severely damaged by human activities such as mining, overgrazing and ostrich farming. The vision of the SKEP programme is that the people of the Succulent Karoo take ownership of and enjoy their unique living landscape in a way that maintains biodiversity and improves livelihoods now and into perpetuity.

The 2011 conference will be used to reflect on the work of the SKEP partnership since the inception of SKEP. This conference will draw heavily on the implementation experiences throughout the Succulent Karoo, and will also highlight the policy parameters within which conservation interventions are directed.

The conference will be attended by representatives from all three tiers of government, international donors, conservation agencies, SKEP's Namibian counterparts, the farming community, mining giants, tourism industry stakeholders, NGO's and education departments.

The West Coast District Municipality is sponsoring a gala dinner on the first evening of the conference at which a SKEP film will be launched, followed by entertainment for the evening. Conference delegates will also be treated to traditional Nama cuisine from the unmatched culinary skills of the Kookskerm ladies.

An artistic inspired wall mural will be created through the participation of conference delegates, which is set to be launched at the COP17 by Conservation South Africa (CSA). Non-profit organization Indigo Development & Change will facilitate an interactive session on climate change adaptation in the Succulent Karoo.

The conference will derive its key thematic focal areas from the original goals for the SKEP action plans which are the following:

1. Conservation authorities who have extended their protected area networks and are managing it effectively to address biodiversity priorities
2. The mining industry's awareness and taking care of priority areas within their lands
3. The tourism industry's awareness and taking care of priority areas that are tourist attractions
4. Land use decision makers at all levels of government who are taking account of SKEP biodiversity priorities in their decision-making
5. Farmers, both communal and private, are aware and taking care of the priority areas within their lands
6. Government and donor programs who are supporting ecologically sustainable development in the Succulent Karoo

The conference will address progress made in each of these goals, showcase case studies from previous SKEP project experiences that align with these focal areas, and identify challenges for the next decade. For each focal area, we will assess how we can provide answers to key challenges facing conservation in the Succulent Karoo.

The South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) houses the coordination unit of SKEP. SKEP is a twenty year, multi-stakeholder conservation programme that seeks to ensure the conservation of the rich and rare

diversity of natural resources in the Succulent Karoo while also promoting and sustaining a matrix of harmonious land uses in a way that sustains representative ecosystems and ensure sustainable livelihoods in the Succulent Karoo. The programme is guided by a twenty year strategy and is currently implementing the second phase of coordinating conservation actions in the Succulent Karoo.

Registration to attend the SKEP Partners conference closes on the 23rd of September 2011. There are no registration costs. Conference delegates are to pay for their own travel and accommodation. Visit the SKEP website to obtain the conference registration at www.skep.org.za

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