

Magaliesberg proclaimed a World Biosphere Reserve by Unesco

9 June 2015

Release by the Magaliesberg Biosphere Initiative Group

After nearly a decade of lobbying and sustained efforts by a small committee of dedicated environmentalists, the Magaliesberg has been declared a World Biosphere Reserve.

The announcement was made today (9 June) in Paris by the International Coordinating Council of the Programme on Man and the Biosphere (MAB). This is a Unesco programme that aims to build a supportive and sustainable relationship between people and their environments. In effect, this means a specific focus on safeguarding natural ecosystems through innovative approaches to economic development.

The World Network of Biosphere Reserves, which Magaliesberg now joins, counts 631 biosphere reserves in 119 countries.

“We are delighted with this final acknowledgement of the unique nature of the Magaliesberg and the powerful contribution it is making to our country, to the ecosystem services in Gauteng and the North West and the communities it nurtures over an extensive area,” said Paul Fatti, chair of the Magaliesberg Biosphere Initiative Group (MBIG) that has been lobbying authorities since 2007 to support the establishment of the Biosphere.

Vincent Carruthers, past chair of MBIG and renowned author of “The Magaliesberg”, the most authoritative study of the mountain range, said that this announcement was the culmination of a campaign that began in 2006.

“I’m most grateful there is now international recognition of this great mountain range that has witnessed the whole span of life, from its very origins,” he said. “The Magaliesberg is almost 100 times older than Mount Everest and half the age of the earth, a unique treasure for us in this part of Africa.”

Officials from South African environmental authorities were also at the MAB meeting in Paris when the announcement was made.

“The Magaliesberg Biosphere will be formally registered by Unesco and the Department of Environmental Affairs in October,” added Carruthers, who is chair of the Magaliesberg Biosphere Not-for-Profit Company. “But before that happens we need to appoint a Board of Management for the Biosphere.”

The Board will be made up of representatives of 16 interest groups who are involved one way or another in the Magaliesberg. These include bodies involved in conservation, education, tourism, culture/historical activities, business and religion.

The Magaliesberg is under intense pressure from urbanisation and has lacked the support of a strong regulatory framework to back its status as a Protected Area.

“Our hope is that this recognition by a world body and the renewed local focus it will put on the Magaliesberg, will energise initiatives towards greater protection and balanced and sustainable use,” said Fatti who was at Unesco in Paris for the announcement.. “This is the duty the Board of Management will be taking on.”

The Magaliesberg Biosphere Reserve covers almost 358 000 ha - 58 000 making up the core area, 110 000 ha the buffer area and 190 000 ha the transition area.

Besides the range’s unique biomes - the Central Grassland Plateaux and the sub-Saharan savannah - it has a very rich biodiversity. The Aloe Peglerae and Frithia pulchra are unique to the area which has 443 bird species, almost half the total bird species of Southern Africa.

In its report recommending that the Magaliesberg join the exclusive club of World Biosphere Reserves, the International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves, noted: “The area is endowed with scenic beauty, unique natural features, rich cultural heritage value and archaeological interest with the Cradle of Humankind, which is part of the World Heritage Site with four million years of history.”

South Africa now has eight Biosphere Reserves. Besides the Magaliesburg, the Gouritz Cluster was also declared a Biosphere Reserve by Unesco today (Tues).

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