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Park Committee Established For The Vhembe/dongola National Park

In terms of South African National Parks' (SANParks) policy, a Park Committee for the Vhembe/Dongola National Park has been constituted. This took place at the first meeting of stakeholder representatives.

The Vhembe/Dongola National Park is a new park being established in the Northern Province on the banks of the Limpopo River incorporating the very special archaeological area - Mapungubwe. The core area will stretch from Pontdrif to Weipe on the Limpopo River and extend Southwards to the Messina/Pontdrif road. This park, with its unique natural aspects and scenic beauty, will stimulate eco-tourism in the Northern Province. It will be a key participant in the Transfrontier Conservation Area being proposed, covering Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

The role of the Park Committee is to represent the local stakeholders of the park by providing inputs to the Park Management Plan and monitoring the implementation of the plan. Paul Hatty has been appointed as its first chairperson. He owns a game farm immediately adjacent to the park and is also chair of the Limpopo Valley Game Reserve Conservancy. The vice-chairperson is Gert Rall, who represents agriculture and the game farming industry on the committee. Ria Heitbrink of the Messina Local Transitional Council will be the secretary. There are 13 committee members in total representing the local stakeholders in the area surrounding the park. One of the first functions of the committee will be to suggest a name for the park.

At the conclusion of the first meeting the chairperson said that there are many important and controversial aspects that the Committee will have to consider when planning for the Vhembe/Dongola National Park. These include areas such as the Mapungubwe archaeological site and access to it by the public; an elephant management plan; and the protection of the San rock art. "It is going to be a challenge to assist SANParks to fulfil the policies and desires of all the stakeholders. Whatever is achieved, Vhembe/Dongola National Park will become an exciting new tourist destination in the near future."

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