



THE WEssa FRIENDS GROUP AND AFFILIATE MEMBERS HANDBOOK

An easy guide on establishing a WEssa Friends Group or Affiliate

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION
2. MISSION, VISION, AIMS & VALUES OF WEssa
3. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FRIENDS GROUP CONCEPT
4. BASIC PRINCIPLES OF WEssa FRIENDS GROUPS & AFFILIATES
5. SOME IDEAS OF WHAT FRIENDS GROUPS & AFFILIATES DO & SHOULD TAKE CARE TO AVOID
6. BENEFITS OF AFFILIATION TO YOUR WEssa REGION
7. RELATIONSHIP WITH WEssa
8. NETWORKING
9. AFFILIATION OF INDEPENDENT ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS OR ORGANISATIONS
10. TEN EASY STEPS TO ESTABLISHING A FRIENDS GROUP OR AFFILIATE
11. MORE INFORMATION ON STARTING A WEssa FRIENDS GROUP OR AFFILIATE
12. GUIDELINE TEMPLATES

WEssa CONTACT DETAILS

NATIONAL FRIENDS GROUPS ADVISER
Marion Mengell (Dunkeld)
Tel/Fax (012) 667 2183
friendsnlysvley@mweb.co.za OR
mwmwmd@mweb.co.za
PO Box 80, Irene, 0062

WEssa NATIONAL MEMBERSHIP OFFICE
1 Karkloof Road, Howick
Tel (033) 330 3931
Fax (033) 330 4576
Email wessafriends@wessa.co.za
PO Box 394, Howick, 3290, KZN

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INTRODUCTION

WEssa Friends Groups and other groups or organisations affiliated to WEssa encourage public participation in caring for the Earth. They comprise of volunteers who band together to conserve, rehabilitate or prevent inappropriate developments in a natural or semi-natural area/environment or place of special interest. These areas need not be large formalised nature areas, but can be small non-formalised pockets of the terrestrial and/or aquatic (freshwater and marine) environment in various states of conservation worthiness.

Friends Groups and affiliates encourage local communities to become more involved with their local environment and take responsibility for its continued well-being. Friends Groups and affiliates are guided by the Mission Statement, Policies and Position Statements of WEssa.

MISSION, VISION, AIMS & VALUES OF WEssa

WEssa's Mission: To implement high impact environmental and conservation projects which promote public participation in caring for the Earth.

WEssa's Vision: To be a highly effective and well-supported champion of the environment.

WEssa's Aim: To contribute to conserving the Earth's vitality and diversity by:

- promoting sound environmental values and sustainable lifestyles
- integrating conservation and development
- encouraging and generating individual and community action
- enabling and growing a vibrant and active broad-based membership
- securing the protection and wise use of natural resources
- acting as an environmental watchdog
- influencing policy and decision-making
- responding to changing needs
- fostering collaborative partnerships

WEssa's Values:

- **Integrity:** We shall endeavour to uphold our integrity, both as individuals and as an organisation, at all times, as we recognise that this principle is the value upon which all others are founded.
- **Mutual Respect:** We shall, at all times, treat each other with mutual respect. Mutual respect at all levels fosters a sense of pride and belonging that is essential to a positive culture and enjoyment of both the workplace and WEssa's activities. We therefore promote tolerance, sharing, humility and a desire to seek consensus.
- **Excellence:** We shall conduct ourselves and do business in a manner displaying the highest level of professional competence and behaviour, thereby bringing credit to WEssa. We shall always strive to be consistent, conscientious and focussed in our quest for personal excellence as we recognise that individuals striving for personal excellence will enhance any team and, thereby, the organisation as a whole.
- **Innovation:** We shall promote an organisational culture that embraces diversity and empowerment for the value it adds. Our ever-changing environment requires us to be adaptable in order to remain effective and to seize opportunities. We shall therefore always encourage proactive problem-solving, initiative, and the search for better ways to succeed in our activities and mission.

- **Accountability:** We recognise that each of us is a part of a team, and that no individuals can achieve more by themselves than everyone working together. In so doing, we shall always make the extra effort for our fellow team members whilst ensuring that all of us take full responsibility for our roles and remain accountable for our actions. We shall be empowering and continually re-evaluating ourselves in our actions.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FRIENDS GROUP CONCEPT

The concept of Friends Groups was the brain-child of Ann Bean, a Committee member of the then Western Cape Branch of the Wildlife Society (as WEssa was then called), in the early 1980s, and in 1985 the Wildlife Society's Project "Friends of Nature Areas" was born. Ann was concerned that lack of money, human resources and interest on the part of provincial and local nature conservation authorities was leading to degradation and, in some cases, even the de-proclamation of important nature reserves. It was her belief that the public had to become involved in safeguarding these resources and work with the owning or managing authorities. The scheme was initially only for nature reserves, in an endeavour to protect their integrity.

After 1994 when South Africa became a democracy, there came about a new wave of public awareness regarding environmental concerns and awareness that people had the democratic right to be consulted and to get involved in decision-making regarding the environment on their own doorstep. The Friends Scheme evolved to include any natural, semi-natural area or built environment – from pristine through to degraded – where a group of concerned local people are prepared to do something about the situation.

Legislation, such as the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA), has also provided a significant increase in opportunities for the participation of individuals and groups in expressing their democratic rights as interested and affected parties (I&APs) in planning and development proposals that impact on their local environment.

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF WEssa FRIENDS GROUPS & AFFILIATES

- a. Friends Groups & Affiliates understand and are guided by the Mission Statement, Policies and Position Statements of WEssa.
- b. Friends Groups & Affiliates are encouraged to affiliate to WEssa to use the WEssa logo. (See www.wessa.org.za for the latest membership fees.)
- c. Friends Groups & Affiliates shall have a constitution, approved by WEssa, giving the Friends Group a legal identity.
- d. Friends Groups & Affiliates may raise funds from the public in their own name if they comply with the Non profit Organisations (NPO) Act. They may only raise funds in WEssa's name with prior permission from the relevant WEssa region. (Affiliation to WEssa and use of the WEssa logo does, by association, increase credibility of the Friends' fundraising efforts.)
- e. Friends Groups & Affiliates are involved in their chosen natural environment (or component parts, such as rare species) voluntarily and at their own risk.
- f. Friends Groups & Affiliates work with the agreement and under the guidance of the landowners / managing authorities of the particular area.
- g. Friends Groups & Affiliates should work towards the conservation of their natural environment and actively encourage the involvement of local communities in their work.
- h. Friends Groups & Affiliates welcome membership from any concerned member of the public.
- i. Friends Groups & Affiliates function using *Robert's Rules of Order* (See: <http://www.robertsrules.org/>)
- j. Friends Groups & Affiliates are financially independent. They must keep proper financial records. These records must be available for public scrutiny.

- k. Friends Groups & Affiliates may not institute or defend legal action in the name of WESSA, without prior sanction.
- l. WESSA supports Friends Groups as far as is reasonably possible.
- m. Friends Groups & Affiliates should stay in contact with their WESSA Region.
- n. In order to report back to each other, share ideas and successes, as well as learn new skills, Friends Groups & Affiliates undertake to attend WESSA Regional Friends Groups & Affiliates events whenever possible.
- o. Friends Groups & Affiliates are encouraged to keep a log book of events and happenings.
- p. Friends Groups & Affiliates are encouraged to contribute to WESSA's monthly e-newsletters or any other news dissemination structure as requested by WESSA.
- q. Friends Groups & Affiliates registered in terms of the Non Profit Organisation Act (NPO) (No. 71 of 1997), shall abide by the conditions of the Act.

SOME IDEAS OF WHAT FRIENDS GROUPS & AFFILIATES CAN DO AND SHOULD AVOID

- a. Under the guidance of the relevant landowner or authority, Friends Groups & Affiliates may do physical work such as control and eradication of invasive alien plants, problem animals, erosion control, signage / exhibition development, construction and repair of hides, walkways, jetties, bridges, pathways and fences, plant surveys, animal and bird censuses and other tasks.
- b. Friends Groups & Affiliates learn all they can about the natural history, archaeology, cultural history and past land uses of their area.
- c. Friends Groups & Affiliates can produce resource materials with information about the natural and man-made environment, such as brochures, booklets, field guides, posters, maps, as well as lists of animal, plant and cultural attributes of the area.
- d. Friends Groups & Affiliates are encouraged to lobby for the formal conservation of their natural environment, place of special interest or subject.
- e. Friends Groups & Affiliates are encouraged to comment on development proposals and participate in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) processes relating directly or indirectly to their area.
- f. Friends Groups & Affiliates are encouraged to give input into relevant environmental legislation and policies which could directly or indirectly affect their area.
- g. Friends Groups & Affiliates are encouraged to communicate with their members, WESSA, the general public and with other interest groups by producing a regular newsletter; email newswashes; website; and holding regular activities open to all.
- h. Friends Groups & Affiliates share their knowledge of the area, as broadly as possible.
- i. Friends Groups & Affiliates raise funds for the direct benefit of their area of interest or subject by conducting walks, outings, courses, camps and other events for the general public/visitors. Making indigenous plants available through running a nursery and selling relevant local arts and crafts, are some other suggestions.
- j. Friends Groups & Affiliates may seek sponsorship and donations from local businesses and benefactors for specific public-private-civil society partnership projects.

Friends Groups and Affiliates should take care to:

- Avoid becoming involved in unsustainable, exploitative activities in their natural environment or place of special interest.
- Avoid becoming involved in activities that are not supported by sound scientific knowledge and research.
- Unless working with 'Biocontrol' technologies Friends Groups & Affiliates will not be associated with the introduction of species of genetic origin from outside the specific area of distribution, or other unwise management practices.

BENEFITS OF AFFILIATION TO YOUR WEssa REGION

- a. **History:** WEssa is the oldest membership-based environmental Non-Government Organization (NGO) in South Africa (established in 1926) with years of environmental expertise and action behind us.
- b. **Educational resources:** WEssa can provide access to a range of resources and support materials, such Share-Net and other educational resources (books, posters, magazines, newsletters.)
- c. **Publicity:** Friends Groups & Affiliates benefit from exposure through channels such as regional newsletters, national publications and the WEssa website.
- d. **Handbook:** Friends Groups & Affiliates receive a comprehensive handbook.
- e. **Fundraising:** Friends Groups & Affiliates can raise funds and enhance their credentials through their affiliation with WEssa
- f. **Marketing materials:** Friends Groups & Affiliates may use WEssa's name and logo on signboards and other materials such as letterheads, brochures.
- g. **Networking & Capacity Building:** WEssa can provide capacity building and networking opportunities for Friends Groups.
- h. **Events and activities:** Representatives of Friends Groups & Affiliates may attend WEssa workshops, events and activities at a reduced fee. Friends Groups & Affiliates receive frequent e-mail newsflashes notifying our Friends Groups (and Membership) of important environmental updates, events, talks and other activities.
- i. **Volunteers:** WEssa offers the placement of WEssa volunteers to assist with your projects.
- j. **Preferential distribution of funds:** Funding from National Lotteries and other funders is preferentially sub-contracted to Friends Groups & Affiliates for appropriate projects.
- k. **Newsletters and magazines:** Friends Groups & Affiliates receive two copies of Environment magazine each quarter and an electronic regional newsletters each quarter.
- l. **Professional advice and Support:** WEssa has a great deal of shared experience in contributing to environmental policies and legislation and is able to assist with interpreting environmental legislation and offer legal advice (through the Centre for Environmental Rights and other organisations) as well as refer you to relevant contacts from our extensive network, which may be able to offer further assistance.

RELATIONSHIP WITH WEssa

Friends Groups & Affiliates may call upon the expertise of WEssa to help them to facilitate their relationship with the landowners or to provide environmental or legal expertise and other help or guidance at any stage from start up onwards. WEssa shall keep a watching brief on Friends Groups & Affiliates activities and, if necessary, intervene tactfully where WEssa policies are not being adhered to. WEssa shall also encourage and recognise successful or innovative Friends Groups & Affiliates projects, make corporate funding links and look to established Friends Groups & Affiliates as valuable sources of information and expertise on environmental matters.

NETWORKING

Value can be gained by Friends Groups & Affiliates networking with other local organisations, such as Residents / Ratepayers' Associations, Schools, BirdLife SA, Justice and religious organisations, local CBOs, EJNF, EWT, WWFSA and BotSoc. A Friends Group may be affiliated to more than one organisation.

AFFILIATION OF INDEPENDENT ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS OR ORGANISATIONS

Independent, environment-based organisations with the same or similar aims as those of the Friends Groups are welcome to become affiliate members of WEssa, thus strengthening the conservation movement. Groups caring for monuments or historical / archaeological sites, etc. are also welcome to become affiliate members of WEssa.

TEN EASY STEPS TO ESTABLISHING A FRIENDS GROUP OR AFFILIATE

STEP 1: Public Meeting

It is often concerned members of the public that identify the need for a Group to conserve an area of conservation importance. To call a public meeting:

- Choose a venue, date & time
- Print pamphlets with aim of holding a public meeting
- Distribute pamphlets in the local area
- Advertise in local newspapers & radio
- Print agenda
- Print attendance register
- Hold meeting
- Take minutes
- Ask for volunteers attending in this meeting to assist in establishing Friends Group Steering Committee
- Distribute minutes to attendees

STEP 2: First Interim Steering Committee Meeting

Contact all the members that volunteered their services and convene a meeting. The following issues should be attended to at the first meeting:

- Choose a name for the group that is appropriate and relevant to the area / site / work with which the group is involved.
- Initiate the drawing up of the constitution
- Select a committee
- Finalise a plan of action for the forthcoming year
- Election of portfolios

Portfolios

- CHAIRPERSON: Chairing of meetings / Coordinating of projects
- VICE CHAIR: Share responsibilities of Chairperson
- SECRETARY: Taking, typing & distributing minutes / Convening meetings
- TREASURER: Keep book of financial income and expenditure
- MARKETING: Liaising with media / Newsletter
- PROJECTS: Annual plan of action
- ADDITIONAL MEMBERS: Assist with year programme

STEP 3: Draw up a Constitution

Work through this as a committee and submit to WEssa Membership for acceptance. If you have a legal person that you can help you, make use of this resource. (See *draft guideline template on page 9*)

STEP 4: Register the Friends Group or Affiliate with WEssa

WEssa stands for The Wildlife & Environment Society of South Africa. Our National Friends Group Advisor will be able to assist you with registering your Group (see contact details on last page) as well as members of the WEssa Regional Committee in your area.

STEP 5: Opening of Bank Account

Funds from membership fees and donations or sponsors will be paid into an account opened in the name of the Friends Group.

STEP 6: Registering as a PBO and with SARS

PBO stands for Public Benefit Organisation. It is not compulsory to register as a PBO but the group must register with SARS as they may be receiving money from the public.

STEP 7: Draft a Basic Management Plan

This management plan will contain the following:

- INTRODUCTION
 - Description of area
 - Background & History
 - Maps
- STATUS QUO
 - Ecological survey (Birds, Grass, Ground shrubs, Trees, Mammals)
- DEVELOPMENT & MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES
 - Restrictions
 - Facilities
 - Maintenance
 - Cost
 - Specifications

STEP 8: Drawing up a year programme (*for more detailed information on what Friends Groups & Affiliates do, see page 4*) Some of the activities members of the Friends Group can undertake and participate in are:

- Talks – birds, plants, butterflies, etc.
- Working parties – Invasive Alien Plant / erosion control / repair of infrastructure etc.
- Tree planting / tree labelling / bird counts
- Picnics
- Walks
- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIAs) processes affecting your or adjacent areas.

STEP 9: Recruiting of members

Drafting a membership form, groups should use their initiatives to recruit member.

STEP 10: AGM

After a year has elapsed, an Annual General Meeting should be held.

MORE INFORMATION ON STARTING A WEssa FRIENDS GROUP OR AFFILIATE

As it is very often concerned members of the public who identify natural or degraded environments that need improved management and ongoing monitoring, everything possible should be done by WEssa to encourage them to become a Friends Group.

One of two things usually happens:

- Local people notice a problem and ask WEssa for help
- WEssa staff or members notice a problem and ask local people for help.

The first step is for an event to be held at the proposed site, commencing with for example a work party and followed by a short social event at which the need is discussed and formulated informally. This needs to be extensively advertised locally first. The landowners / authority must be involved from the beginning of the initiative.

Once the need for help has been established and sanctioned, the following process should be put in place:

- a. Inform the landowners/managers of the help being offered. Obtain approval.
- b. Register your interest with WESSA as an emerging Friends Group.
- c. Arrange a visit by a representative of the WESSA Region to assess the area's problems/needs.
- d. Obtain a copy of the Friends Group Handbook from WESSA and a Friends Group and Affiliate Member application form.
- e. Call a public meeting to ascertain levels of interest and support.
- f. At the public meeting explain the problems/needs and elect volunteers to a preliminary Steering Committee to prepare a draft constitution and carry the initiative forward.
- g. Ask every attendee at the first public meeting to register his or her contact details.
- h. Membership forms should be available for people to join as formal members (*see guide template provided on page 10*)
- i. The preliminary Steering Committee develops a draft constitution (*see details below*) that suits the area's needs and submits to the WESSA Region for preliminary ratification. The Regional Manager or his designate will give help with the process hereafter.
- j. A second public (inaugural) meeting is called. The now WESSA-ratified constitution is presented for discussion and finalisation. Permission to affiliate to WESSA is given and a permanent Committee is elected.
- k. The finalised constitution and action plan is submitted to the WESSA Region for final ratification.

Drawing up a Constitution

Friends Groups & Affiliates will need to adopt a constitution. (*See draft guideline template on page 10*)

- a. The constitution shall stipulate, *inter alia*, the group's objectives, number of office bearers, their duties and the length of their terms of office, financial management, records and reporting.
- b. The size of a quorum for all meetings must be stipulated in the constitution.
- c. The portfolios will include chairman, secretary, treasurer, and possibly liaison officers with the WESSA Region, publicity, the managing authority (ex officio), as well as project leaders.
- d. Once this constitution has been accepted by the WESSA Region and confirmed in writing and affiliate membership entered into, the group is established.

Registering as a Non-Profit Organisation under the NPO Act

The Non profit Organisations Act (No. 71 of 1997) came into operation on 1 September 1998 as a result of a lengthy process of policy and legislative reform negotiated between government and civil society organisations.

The Non profit Organisations Act (NPO) hopes to achieve its objectives of creating an enabling environment for NPOs and setting and maintaining adequate standards of governance, accountability and transparency by creating a voluntary registration facility for NPOs.

The Act provides a registration facility for the existing South African legal forms for NPOs, namely Section 21 Companies, Trusts and Voluntary and other Non-profit Associations, providing that certain minimum establishment requirements and annual reporting requirements are complied with.

The Minister may prescribe benefits or allowances for registered NPOs. If he/she should, only registered NPOs will be eligible for these benefits. It is anticipated that NPOs receiving any benefits or money from government will be required to be registered as an NPO.

For more information see: "*Guide to the Non-profit Organisations (NPO) Act*"
<http://www.etu.org.za/toolbox/docs/building/guide.html>

Draft guideline template
CONSTITUTION OF THE FRIENDS OF XYZ

1. Name and general

- 1.1. A Friends Group is advised to choose its name in relation to the area in which it works, for example "WEssa: Friends of XYZ". ("The XYZ WEssa Friends", "The XYZ WEssa Environmental Group", "The XYZ WEssa Working Group", "The XYZ WEssa Action Group" etc. Note that the word "Friends" is not essential, but is preferred.
- 1.2. The WEssa Friends of acts as a support group for the XYZ natural environment.
- 1.3. The WEssa Friends of acknowledges and agrees that it will work in accordance with the *Basic Principles of Friends Groups* statements.
- 1.4. The WEssa Friends of undertakes to become an Affiliate Member of WEssa (registered as a member of WEssa's Friends Scheme) and to renew its membership annually.
- 1.5. The WEssa Friends of undertakes to maintain regular contact with WEssa and to send copies of any written reports and Committee minutes to the WEssa Region.
- 1.6. Friends undertake to hold their own regular work parties, meetings, and other events. They undertake to attend general Friends Groups events (normally organised by the WEssa Region), to share skills and ideas.
- 1.7. Friends undertake to hold an ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM) soon after the end of the financial year. (WEssa's financial year ends 31 March. Although a Friends Group may set its own financial year-end, groups are encouraged to synchronise with WEssa.) Notice of the AGM shall be given to each member not less than 14 days beforehand, and shall include a reminder about nominations for office bearers. The Chairman or his appointee shall preside.
- 1.8. Nominations of office-bearers should be submitted in writing to the Secretary at least ten days before the AGM, giving proposer, seconder and the written agreement of the nominee.
- 1.9. The following business shall be transacted at the AGM:
 - Presentation of the Chairman's Annual Report.
 - Presentation of the financial statements.
 - Discussion and formal acceptance of these reports.
 - Election of committee.
 - Any other business that the Chairman, at his/her discretion, may allow.
- 1.10. Each member in good standing shall have one vote and a quorum of not less than 50% plus 1, shall be stipulated in the constitution. By prior arrangement a proxy vote is acceptable.
- 1.11. Through the Secretary, Special General Meetings may be called for, in writing, stating the purpose of the meeting. A proposer and seconder and at least 4 other members or% of members in good standing shall sign the notice, issued at least 14 days in advance.

2. Financial Responsibilities

- 2.1. The WEssa Friends of shall open and operate an account in its own right with a commercial bank. All monies accruing to the Friends Group will be administered wholly by that group.
- 2.2. The Friends Group may levy an annual subscription to cover administration costs. Alterations to this amount must be ratified at the next AGM.
- 2.3. The Friends Group may collect monies from members and the general public.
- 2.4. The Friends Group shall keep a proper set of accounts and submit a financial statement at each AGM. If the income and/or assets of the group exceeds R50 000 the statement shall be audited, and a copy shall be submitted to WEssa within 30 days of the AGM.

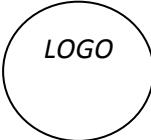
3. Legal Actions

- 3.1. Friends Groups may not singularly institute or defend legal action in the name of WEssa. Affiliated groups require WEssa sanction prior to any legal action being taken.

4. Dissolution

- 4.1. In the event of the cessation of the existence of the XYZ Friends Group, or the proposed dissolution of that group, all assets not already committed for use in the XYZ natural environment shall be entrusted to the WEssa Regional Committee until the group is reconstituted. Should the decision be that the group not be reconstituted, such assets shall be used in the project/geographical area/subject for which they were originally raised.

Draft guideline template
FRIENDS GROUP OR AFFILIATE MEMBERSHIP FORM

	<p>FRIENDS OF XYZ</p> <p>Application for Membership</p>	
<p>NAME:</p> <p>FAMILY MEMBERS:</p> <p>TEL. HOME:</p> <p>WORK/CELL:</p> <p>POSTAL ADDRESS:</p> <p>..... CODE:</p> <p>EMAIL 1:</p> <p>EMAIL 2:</p> <p>Please tell us of any skills or contracts you may be able to contribute to the project</p> <p>Are you a member of WESSA? Yes/No</p> <p>Membership Fees: Families R.... Singles R.... Businesses R....</p> <p>Membership Fee Enclosed: R</p> <p>Donation: R</p> <p>Total: R</p>		
<p>BANK ACCOUNT DETAILS FOR EFT PAYMENT</p> <p>Name of Bank: Branch Code:</p> <p>Account Number:</p> <p><i>Please make cheques payable to: XYZ</i></p>		
<p>Thank you for joining Friends of XYZ. We welcome your support as we strive to conserve XYZ. Members receive regular e-newsflashes and a newsletter every...</p> <p>I/we understand that I/we attend work parties, courses and other Friends of XYZ activities at my/our own risk.</p> <p>Signed: Date:</p> <p>Please return to Friends of XYZ: PO Box ... Email: ... Tel: ... Fax: ... NPO No: ...</p>		