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WILD TOMORROW FUND LAUNCHES UKUWELA CONSERVANCY

Wild Tomorrow Fund [announced today](#) that it has successfully secured a 1,235 acre (500 hectare) plot of riverfront wilderness in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa, creating a new protected area called the Ukuwela Conservancy.

Ukuwela is located in the center of the Maputaland-Pondoland-Albany Hotspot, one of the world's biologically richest and most endangered land-based ecoregions. It is surrounded by prestigious wildlife reserves, including Mkuze, St Lucia, Sodwana Bay, South Africa's first UNESCO World Heritage Site, the iSimangaliso Wetland Park, and the Phinda Private Game Reserve, with which Ukuwela shares a river border. These nearby reserves provide vital habitat for rhinos (including the critically endangered black rhino), African wild dogs, elephants, lions and other vulnerable, threatened and endangered species. In addition, South Africa's most endangered habitat type, the sand forest, is found within this ecoregion.

"We are thrilled, to have saved this stunning piece of land, which would otherwise have been destroyed," said Wild Tomorrow Fund Founder and Executive Director, John Steward. "A wild tomorrow is not possible without wild places. We believe that habitat loss is among the most dangerous long-term threats to wild populations, every bit as critical as the urgent crisis of poaching. This is hopefully the first of many acquisitions by Wild Tomorrow Fund to connect habitat and restore ecosystems."

The 1,235 acre parcel was at imminent risk of conversion to agricultural use, which would have meant clearing the land and catastrophic consequences for its forests, its portion of the Mzinene River (a vital fresh water source for neighboring reserves), and for the wildlife calling the land home, including leopards, a family of zebra, hippos, dwarf chameleons, nyala and more.

Wild Tomorrow Fund Chairman, Seth Hendon said: "Protecting Ukuwela's priceless wild nature made its acquisition compelling. In addition, its value as a like-minded neighbor to the reserves that border the Mzinene River make its acquisition an exciting investment in protecting crucial land links between the

wild areas of KwaZulu-Natal.”

Land rehabilitation at Ukuwela has already begun, with a program in place to remove alien plant species, old fencing and plastic pollution on the riverbank. An international group of volunteers is headed to the Ukuwela Conservancy this August and will work alongside local staff and community employees on land rehabilitation projects, biodiversity surveys and other land management tasks.

A camera-trapping biodiversity survey and recorded observations have already found at least six leopards roaming the land, transient cheetahs, honey badgers, spotted hyena, side striped jackals, various antelope, hippos, crocodiles, and aardvark, and more species are expected to be recorded. Working with local wildlife rescue and rehabilitation organizations, Wild Tomorrow Fund plans to reintroduce species to Ukuwela, including giraffe, wildebeest and impala.

Wild Tomorrow Fund also facilitated the acquisition of four small land parcels (each 50 acres in size) by conservation-friendly private investors, adding an additional 200 acres to the protected area, including an additional portion of Mzinene riverfront. Wild Tomorrow Fund’s long-term vision is to form and/or to join a regional conservancy, working together with neighboring landowners who share common conservation aspirations, with fences removed to further expand wild habitat. Ukuwela means “to cross over” in Zulu, and the protection, and further expansion of the Ukuwela Conservancy, will allow wildlife to continue, literally, to cross over the Mzinene from neighboring reserves.

Wild Tomorrow Fund Senior Ecologist Clinton Wright, a South African national, based at the new conservancy and responsible for implementing Wild Tomorrow Fund’s programs and research said, “This piece of land is truly unique. Besides being a crucial link and waterway feeding into the world heritage St Lucia Wetland, it represents a first step in linking two large existing protected area complexes, expanding habitat for all species, restoring natural processes, and protecting this region's very special biodiversity. As human populations continue to rapidly expand, we need to act now to secure the remaining habitat before it is gone.”

About Wild Tomorrow Fund

Wild Tomorrow Fund Inc. is a 501(c)(3) registered charity based in New York. Its affiliate, Wild Tomorrow Fund South Africa NPC is a registered Public Benefit Organization (PBO) based in South Africa. Wild Tomorrow Fund's vision is a world in which wildlife habitats are expanded and protected, where global citizens work with local communities to protect nature for the benefit of all.

Additional Resources and Media

Website: <http://www.wildtomorrowfund.org>

Online release: <https://www.wildtomorrowfund.org/blog/savingukuwela>

Ukuwela conservancy video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5er2RXg3C8>

Media folder for additional photos: <http://bit.ly/2sbOXYp>