

Drone Users Conference 2019 takes flight

The Western Cape Department of Agriculture in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme-GEF5 Sustainable Land Management project, the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) and Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF) hosted a two-day interactive Drone Users Conference 2019 on the use and application of drones as a monitoring and assessment tool in the agriculture and conservation sector.



Ricardo Gomez Angel via [Unsplash](#)

Achieving sustainable conservation objectives

The conference brought together drone users, practitioners, service providers, as well as policy- and decision-makers, within the natural resource management field. The aim was to build networks and share knowledge towards the role of drones and related technology to achieve sustainable land management and conservation goals.

"The power of partnerships were once again showcased as this marks the first-ever drone users conference in conservation and agriculture in the Western Cape. In our Better Together drive, this multi-partnership brought a new view on drone utilisation, deepened the understanding of drone applications and started an exciting conversation on drone usage," said Dr Ilse Trautmann, chief director of research and technology development at the department and one of the members of the organising committee of the conference.

"Unmanned aerial vehicles or drones are rapidly evolving technologies. They have the potential to radically influence the way we do environmental research and practice conservation. While the possibilities are myriad there is still much work to be done to bring practice and theory together," said Cobus Theron of the EWT.

Advancing natural resource management

"During the past two years, the Sustainable Land Management (SLM) Project realised the huge potential for using drones as a monitoring tool in the field of natural resource management. We also realised many practitioners in the field of natural resource management want to use this technology, but don't know how and are duplicating effort and 're-inventing the wheel'.

"Considering that knowledge management and sharing lessons learned are project outcomes of the GEF5 SLM Project, we decided to host this Drone User's Conference with some of our key stakeholders in the agricultural (Western Cape

Department of Agriculture) and conservation fields (Endangered Wildlife Trust)," explained Lehman Lindeque, Global Environmental Facility (GEF 5) SLM project manager.

Effective drone regulation

The conference was attended by a total of 105 delegates from public and private organisations. The delegates hope to streamline activities and find common ground for the creation of an enabling environment where the regulations involved in managing drones can harmonise with the full potential and reach of drones within the respective sectors, as the regulatory aspect remains one of the most common challenges mentioned throughout the conference.

The dialogue from the two-day conference was recorded and will help provide guidance on the practicalities of effective drone regulations and the management thereof.

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