

**STATE OF CONSERVATION REPORT
FOR THE FOSSIL HOMINID SITES OF SOUTH AFRICA WORLD HERITAGE SITE
(C 915 BIS)**



PREPARED IN COMPLIANCE WITH PARAGRAPH 169 OF THE OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES
BY THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

DECEMBER 2024

IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROPERTY

Name of property: Fossil Hominid Sites of South Africa

Identification Number: C 915 BIS

State Party and Province(s): South Africa: Gauteng, North-West and Limpopo Provinces

Criteria: (iii) and (iv)

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State of Conservation report outlines the conservation status of the Fossil Hominid Sites of South Africa as well as the activities that have been undertaken or are ongoing within the property to protect the Outstanding Universal Value. It is the State Party of South Africa's response to **Decision: 45 COM 7B.132** adopted at the extended 45th session of the World Heritage Committee (Riyadh, 2023).

In the decision, the WHC commended the State Party's completion of the Integrated Management Plans (IMP) and the Integrated Management Plan Framework (IMPF) for all three components of the property, as well as the continued monitoring of the risk reduction and risk prevention interventions at the Fossil Hominid Sites of Sterkfontein, Swartkrans, Kromdraai and Environs (FHSSSKE) component. The State Party wishes to inform the World Heritage Committee that due to financial constraints, it was unable to proceed with the development of the Risk Prevention Strategy for the Fossil Hominid Sites of South Africa, as reported in the 2022 State of Conservation Report. The State Party of South Africa has submitted to the World Heritage Fund the funding request to develop the Risk Preparedness Strategy for Fossil Hominid Sites of South Africa to UNESCO World Heritage Centre on the 31st of October 2024.

However, the Fossil Hominid Sites of Sterkfontein, Swartkrans, Kromdraai and Environs (FHSSSKE) component the Management Authority, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), and the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) continue to monitor the identified risk reduction and prevention interventions. The State Party is also committed in continuing with the monitoring of the water resources in the FHSSSKE component.

The State Party has not identified any other current conservation issues or major projects, including mining licenses issued adjacent to or in the vicinity of all components of the property which may have a negative impact on the property's Outstanding Universal Value.

2. RESPONSE TO THE DECISION OF THE WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

Decision 45 COM 7B.132 of the World Heritage Committee requested a response from the State Party on the following discussion points.

2.1. Recalling **Decision 44 COM 7B.121** adopted at its 44th session (Fuzhou / online, 2021)

The State Party notes the recall of **Decision 44 COM 7B.121** adopted at the extended 44th session of the World Heritage Committee in Fuzhou / online in 2021.

2.2. Welcomes the completion of the Integrated Management Plans (IMP) for all three components of the property, of the Integrated Management Plan Framework (IMPF), as well as the continued monitoring of the risk reduction and risk prevention interventions at the Fossil Hominid Sites of Sterkfontein, Swartkrans, Kromdraai and Environs (FHSSSKE) component;

The State Party of South Africa has submitted to the World Heritage Fund the funding request to develop Risk Preparedness Strategy for Fossil Hominid Site South Africa to UNESCO World Heritage Centre on the 31st of October 2024. The State Party commits to continuing monitoring the risk reduction and risk prevention interventions at the Fossil Hominid Sites of Sterkfontein, Swartkrans, Kromdraai and Environs (FHSSSKE).

2.3. Notes that the implementation plan of the IMPF and the IMPs for the individual components are planned up to 2026 and requests the State Party to ensure the Joint Management Committee is established and functioning and to provide an interim monitoring report of the implementation of the IMPF, as an annex to its next state of conservation report, so that the efficacy of the IMPF can be assessed;

The State Party has developed a report to outline the interim implementation of the Integrated Management Plan Framework for the Fossil Hominid Sites of South Africa attached as Annexure A on the State of Conservation Report. The Joint Management Committee has not yet been officially established, the parties involved continue to meet regularly to discuss the joint management of the serial World Heritage property, including progress on the implementation of the component Integrated Management Plans (IMPs) and the Integrated Management Framework (IMPF). The State Party of South Africa is currently in the process of finalizing the Terms of Reference and the Memorandum of Agreement for the formal establishment of the Joint Management Committee.

2.4. Also requests the State Party to expedite the development of the Western Basin Treatment Works Long-Term-Solution (LTS), and submit the following: A specialist committee report on the Western Basin Treatment Works LTS at the FHSSSKE component; A report on the choice of the option selected for implementation and the design specification; The design specifications for the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for LTS; for review by the Advisory Bodies as soon as these are available and prior to implementation;

The State Party of South Africa is aware of the World Heritage Committee request through Decision 44 COM 7B.121 to submit the design specification and the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the Long-Term

Solution (LTS) for review by the Advisory Bodies prior to implementation. As indicated in the State of Conservation Report submitted by the State Party in December 2022, the development of the Western Basin Treatment Works LTS has been formally discontinued. The decision is predicated upon the excessive financial burden associated with the project, coupled with the State Party's confirmed inability to secure the necessary funding to implement the intervention. Consequently, the design specifications and the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the Long-Term Solution were rendered moot with the decision to discontinue the development of the LTS.

The report prepared by the specialist committee, which includes recommendations for the most appropriate course of action in lieu of the Long-Term Solution, remains under review and is currently undergoing the requisite approval processes. The State Party affirms its commitment to submitting this report to the World Heritage Centre upon its formal approval.

Furthermore, the State Party hereby confirms that the interventions implemented through the Short-Term Solution (STS) been adequate and the discharged effluent has improved over time in the basin.

Upstream of the Hippo Dam, the quality of treated mine water discharged into the Tweelopiespruit is circum-neutral with pH values ranging from 6.5 to 9.5, relatively elevated concentrations of salinity and sulphate, in accordance with the directive limits. The salinity and sulphate values recorded in March 2024 range from 285 mS/cm to 290 mS/cm and 1610 mg/L to 1764 mg/L, respectively. However, further downstream of the F11S12 monitoring site, sub-acidic pH values ranging between 4.0 to 6.2 were observed. Given this apparent evolution of the surface water quality from the point of discharge to the downstream localities, further investigation needs to be made. Barring the pH values, the parameters recorded in March 2024 and September 2024 remain lower than the values recorded when Acid Mine Drainage (AMD) intervention measures were implemented, pointing to low risk on the environment of the FHSSSKE component.

2.5. Further requests the State Party, with the support from the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies, and with urgency and including through a Memorandum of Understanding with the local municipality, to address the function of the Percy Stewart Waste-Water Treatment Works to reduce the instances of bacteriological contamination in the surface water of the FHSSSKE component, and to continue monitoring surface water quality and to provide the Committee with a report thereon;

The State Party has plans in place to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Mogale City Local Municipality (MCLM). This MoU will establish a foundation for collaborative efforts with the FHSSSKE, focusing on heritage conservation, environmental preservation, sustainable tourism, and socio-economic development within the area. This partnership will aim to implement initiatives that protect the natural landscape and biodiversity, ensuring long-term sustainability for the region.

Water downstream from the Percy Stewart Wastewater Treatment Works, specifically in the Blougatspruit and Bloubankspruit, shows higher alkalinity and microbiologically, faecal contamination (*E. coli* recorded at >2419.6 MPN/100mL) is present, signalling severe water pollution. The deterioration of the surface water quality is further confirmed by the low scoring results of river health assessments conducted at various monitoring points along these systems. Groundwater resources remain largely at low risk of bacteriological pollution.

The State Party is implementing plans to address the operational efficiency of the Percy Stewart Waste-Water Treatment Works, with the aim of reducing bacteriological contamination in the surface water of the Fossil Hominid Sites of Sterkfontein, Swartkrans, Kromdraai and Environs (FHSSSKE) component. Ongoing monitoring of surface water quality will be conducted to assess the impact of these interventions. Additionally, the State Party will provide the Committee with a comprehensive report on the water quality monitoring outcomes and measures taken to ensure the sustainability of these efforts.

The MCLM have to started to restore Percy Stewart WWTW to full operational capacity. The appointed turnkey service provider has successfully stopped the spillages within the Percy Stewart WWTW. Cleaning of PST 1 and 7 is underway, and the pipes to the sludge lagoon have been unblocked. Bioremediation started at the beginning of November 2024, and results will be monitored weekly to assess any improvements in the performance of the facility. The plan is to get Percy Stewart WWTW fully operational by the end of June 2025. The State Party will monitor the progress on the refurbishment of the Percy Stewart WWTW.

2.6. Reiterates its request to the State Party for the submission to the World Heritage Centre the Heritage Management Plan, along with an updated masterplan and more detailed information on the proposed renovation of these built attributes, including how they support the historical narrative of this component, and await the review of the Advisory Bodies before further implementation;

The revised and updated masterplan is attached as Annexure B.

With regards to the proposed renovation of the built attributes, a detailed report on the concept and approach is attached hereto and emphasis is on the following:

- The renovations of the built attributes are mainly on the existing buildings i.e. historical / heritage properties on site, primarily within the core area;
- All the buildings (referred to as abandoned buildings in the original masterplan), are within the area zoned for tourism development. Reference to 4a in the Site Zoning Map (copy attached);
- The development / renovation concept is mainly to restore the old mine buildings which are now heritage buildings for adaptive re-use, mainly as facilities for work (office), tourism, education instead of erecting new buildings on the heritage property. For example, adaptation of a mine workshop for use as a museum / exhibition area;
- Generally, the building restoration seeks to revive the old derelict mine buildings, which have no direct impact on the OUV, whilst ensuring that the design approach takes into account the following:
 - The original building structure and design remains intact, thus allowing the building to narrate the original age, materials used, era/period it was built
 - Adaptation is mainly on the interior for adaptive re-use and compliance with national building standards to include ablutions, fire detectors/alarms, adequate lighting, ventilation, etc.
 - Materials used in the restoration process are a replacement of what was used and in instances where they are no longer available similar materials are used. Where new elements are used, the old/new contrast is made visible.

2.7. Also requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by 1 December 2024, an updated report on the state of conservation of the property and the implementation of the above, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 47th session.

The State Party has updated information on the State of Conservation of the property as evidenced by the contents of this report.

3. OTHER CURRENT CONSERVATION ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY THE STATE PARTY WHICH MAY HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE PROPERTY'S OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

The State Party has not identified any other current conservation issues which may have an impact on the property's Outstanding Universal Value.

4. IN CONFORMITY WITH PARAGRAPH 172 OF THE OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES, DESCRIBE ANY POTENTIAL MAJOR RESTORATIONS, ALTERATIONS AND/OR NEW CONSTRUCTIONS INTENDED WITHIN THE PROPERTY, THE BUFFER ZONE, AND/OR CORRIDORS OR OTHER AREAS, WHERE SUCH DEVELOPMENTS MAY AFFECT THE OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE OF THE PROPERTY INCLUDING AUTHENTICITY AND INTEGRITY.

The State Party has not identified any other current conservation issues or major projects, including mining licenses issued adjacent to or in the vicinity of all components of the property which may have a negative impact on the property's Outstanding Universal Value.

5. PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE STATE OF CONSERVATION REPORT

The State Party has no objection against the uploading of the State of Conservation report on the World Heritage Centre's State of Conservation Information System, thereby providing public access towards the report.

6. SIGNATURE OF THE AUTHORITY

Dr Tsepang Makholela

Deputy Director-General (Acting) – Biodiversity and Conservation: Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries

Date: 29/11/2024