

REVEGETATION AND REHABILITATION PLAN

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of the rehabilitation plan is to ensure that areas cleared or impacted during construction activities of the Gunstfontein BESS are rehabilitated with a plant cover that reduces the risk of erosion from these areas as well as restores some ecosystem function. The purpose of the rehabilitation plan for the site can be summarised as follows:

- » Achieve long-term stabilisation of all disturbed areas to minimise erosion potential.
- » Re-vegetate all disturbed areas with suitable local plant species.
- » Minimise visual impact of disturbed areas.
- » Ensure that disturbed areas are safe for future uses.

This Revegetation and Rehabilitation Plan should be closely aligned with other site-specific plans, including the Erosion Management Plan and Alien Invasive Management Plan. Where a site-specific plan is developed, this site-specific plan may take precedence and must replace this plan.

2. RELEVANT ASPECTS OF THE SITE

The site occurs within a semi-arid environment and a fundamentally different approach to rehabilitation efforts in such areas is required as compared to traditional rehabilitation approaches within more mesic areas. In addition, rehabilitation techniques which rely on agricultural techniques such as the application of fertilizer and the planting of annual grasses or other alien species are not appropriate. The major implication of the semi-arid nature of the site is that the use of appropriate species and techniques is key in order to achieve long-term success.

3. IDENTIFICATION OF TARGET AREAS

The construction activities required for the development will result in significant disturbance at the site. Rehabilitation is costly and time-consuming and therefore priority areas where rehabilitation should be focused must be identified. Priority areas include areas vulnerable to erosion such as on steep slopes as well as areas near to important ecosystems such as areas near to drainage lines.

4. TOPSOIL MANAGEMENT

Effective topsoil management throughout the project life cycle is a critical element of rehabilitation, particularly in arid and semi-arid areas where soil properties are a fundamental determinant of vegetation composition and abundance. Although some parts of the site consist of exposed bedrock, most parts of the site have at least some topsoil. Where any excavation or topsoil clearing is required, the topsoil should be stockpiled and later used to cover cleared and disturbed areas once construction activity has ceased.

- » Topsoil is the top-most layer (0-25cm) of the soil in undisturbed areas. This soil layer is important as it contains nutrients, organic matter, seeds, micro-organisms, fungi and soil fauna. All these elements are necessary for soil processes such as nutrient cycling and the growth of new plants. The biologically active upper layer of the soil is fundamental in the maintenance of the entire ecosystem.

- » Topsoil should be retained on site in order to be used for site rehabilitation. The correct handling of the topsoil is a key element to rehabilitation success. Firstly, it is important that the correct depth of topsoil is excavated. If the excavation is too deep, the topsoil will be mixed with sterile deeper soil, leading to reduction in nutrient levels and a decline in plant performance on the soil.
- » Wherever possible, stripped topsoil should be placed directly onto an area being rehabilitated. This avoids stockpiling and double handling of the soil. Topsoil placed directly onto rehabilitation areas contains viable seed, nutrients and microbes that allow it to revegetate more rapidly than topsoil that has been in stockpile for long periods.
- » If direct transfer is not possible, the topsoil should be stored separately from other soil heaps until construction in an area is complete. The soil should not be stored for a long time (longer than 12 months) and should be used as soon as possible. The longer the topsoil is stored, the more seeds, micro-organisms and soil biota become sterile.
- » Ideally stored topsoil should be used within a month and should not be stored for longer than three months. In addition, topsoil stores should not be too deep, a maximum depth of 2m is recommended to avoid compaction and the development of anaerobic conditions within the soil.
- » If topsoil is stored on a slope then sediment fencing should be used downslope of the stockpile in order to intercept any sediment and runoff should be directed away from the stockpiles upslope.
- » Reduced activity at the site after large rainfall events when the soils are wet is encouraged. No driving off of hardened roads should occur immediately following large rainfall events until soils have dried out and the risk of bogging down has decreased.
- » Any topsoil, waste rock or other material dumps should be protected from erosion with silt traps and other suitable prevention measures.
- » Gabions and other stabilisation features may be utilised during construction activities on steep slopes in order to prevent erosion, where necessary.

5. GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR REHABILITATION

5.1. Mulching

Mulching is the covering of the soil with a layer of organic matter of leaves, twigs bark or wood chips, usually chopped quite finely. The main purpose of mulching is to protect and cover the soil surface as well as serve as a source of seed for revegetation purposes.

- » During site clearing the standing vegetation should not be cleared and mixed with the soil, but should be cleared separately, either mechanically or by hand using a brush-cutter. The cleared vegetation should be stockpiled and used whole or shredded by hand or machine to protect the soil in disturbed areas and promote the return of indigenous species.
- » Mulch is to be harvested from areas that are to be denuded of vegetation during construction activities, provided that they are free of seed-bearing alien invasive plants.
- » No harvesting of vegetation may be done outside the area to be disturbed by construction activities.
- » Brush-cut mulch shall be stored for as short a period as possible.

5.2 Seeding

In some areas the natural regeneration of the vegetation may be poor and the application of seed to enhance vegetation recovery may be required. Seed should be collected from plants present at the site and should be used immediately or stored appropriately and used at the start of the following wet season.

Seed can be broadcast onto the soil, but should preferably be applied in conjunction with measures to improve seedling survival such as scarification of the soil surface or simultaneous application of mulch.

- » Indigenous seeds may be harvested for purposes of re-vegetation in areas that are free of alien / invasive vegetation, either at the site prior to clearance or from suitable neighbouring sites.
- » Seed may be harvested by hand and if necessary dried or treated appropriately.
- » Seed gathered by vacuum harvester, or other approved mass collection method, from suitable shrubs or from the plant litter surrounding the shrubs must be kept apart from individually harvested seed.
- » No seed of alien or foreign species should be used or brought onto the site.

5.3 Transplants

Where succulent plants are available or other species which may survive translocation are present, individual plants can be dug out from areas about to be cleared and planted into areas which require revegetation. This can be an effective means of establishing indigenous species quickly.

- » Plants for transplant should only be removed from areas that are going to be cleared.
- » Perennial grasses, shrubs, succulents and geophytes are all potentially suitable candidates for transplant.
- » Transplants should be nearby and should not be transported around the site to distant areas.
- » Transplants must remain within the site and may not be transported off the site. Therefore, it is recommended that before construction commences individuals of listed species within the development footprint should be marked and translocated to similar habitat outside the development footprint under the supervision of an ecologist or someone with experience in plant translocation. Permits from the relevant provincial authorities must be obtained prior to relocation of listed plant species.

5.4 Use of soil savers

On steep slopes and areas where seed and organic matter retention is low, it is recommended that soil savers are used to stabilise the soil surface. Soil savers are man-made materials, usually constructed of organic material such as hemp or jute and are usually applied in areas where traditional rehabilitation techniques are not likely to succeed.

- » In areas where soil saver is used, it should be pegged down to ensure that it captures soil and organic matter flowing over the surface; and
- » Soil saver may be seeded directly once applied as the holes in the material catch seeds and provide suitable microsites for germination.

5.6. General

- » Progressive rehabilitation is an important element of the rehabilitation strategy and should be implemented where feasible.
- » Once revegetated, areas should be protected to prevent trampling and erosion.
- » No construction equipment, vehicles or unauthorised personnel should be allowed onto areas that have been revegetated.
- » Where rehabilitation sites are located within actively grazed areas, they should be fenced.
- » Fencing should be removed once a sound vegetative cover has been achieved.

- » Any runnels, erosion channels or wash aways developing after revegetation should be backfilled and consolidated and the areas restored to a proper stable condition.

6. OPEN SPACE MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Access Control:

- » Access to the facility should be strictly controlled.
- » All visitors and contractors should be required to sign-in.
- » Signage at the entrance should indicate that disturbance to fauna and flora is strictly prohibited.

Prohibited Activities:

The following activities should not be permitted by anyone except the landowner or his representatives:

- » No fires within the site.
- » No hunting, collecting or disturbance of fauna and flora, except where required for the safe operation of the facility and only by the Environmental Officer on duty and with the appropriate permits and landowner permission.
- » No driving off of demarcated roads.
- » No interfering with livestock.

Fire Risk Management:

Although fires are not a regular occurrence at the site, fires may occasionally occur under the right circumstances. Ignition risk sources in the area include the following:

- » Lightning strikes
- » Personnel within the facility
- » Infrastructure such as transmission lines

The National Veld and Forest Fires Act places responsibility on the landowner to ensure that the appropriate equipment as well as trained personnel are available to combat fires. Therefore, the management of the facility should ensure that they have suitable equipment as well as trained personnel available to assist in the event of fire.

Firebreaks

Extensive firebreaks are not recommended as a fire-risk management strategy at the site. The risk of fires is not distributed equally across the site and within many of the lowlands of the site, there is not sufficient biomass to carry fires and the risk of fires within these areas is very low. Rather targeted risk management should be implemented around vulnerable or sensitive elements of the facility such as in the immediate vicinity of the BESS, or other high-risk components. Within such areas, the extent over which management action needs to be applied is relatively limited and it is recommended that firebreaks are created by mowing and then burning to create firebreaks, provided this does not in itself pose a risk of runaway fires. Where such firebreaks need to be established around the BESS, a strip of vegetation 5-10 m wide can be cleared manually and maintained relatively free of vegetation through manual clearing on an annual basis. However if alien species colonise these areas, more regular clearing should be implemented.

7. MONITORING REQUIREMENTS

As rehabilitation success, particularly in arid areas is unpredictable, monitoring and follow-up actions are important to achieve the desired cover and soil protection. The following monitoring provision may be used as a guide in the absence of a site-specific plan having been developed:

- » Re-vegetated areas should be monitored every 3 months for the first 12 months and every 6 months thereafter for the next year.
- » Re-vegetated areas showing inadequate surface coverage (less than 30% within 12 months after re-vegetation) should be prepared and re-vegetated.
- » Where transplants have been used the survival rate of the different species used should be monitored every 3 months for the first 12 months and every 6 months thereafter for the next year. The results should be used to inform the choice of species for transplant and other factors which may influence survival.