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FREE STATE PROVINCE

MEDIA STATEMENT

NAVAL HILL A HIT WITH COMMUNICATORS

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Bloemfontein: Government Communicators responsible for environment from all environmental departments across South Africa descended in Bloemfontein recently to share experiences in their work. The Environmental Affairs Government Communicators Forum is a forum of public sector communicators within the environment portfolio under the custodian of the National Department of Environmental Affairs. The Forum seeks to co-ordinate communication around environmental issues.

The forum meetings are held quarterly on rotational basis between all the provinces and affects state owned entities. The forum meeting is part of an environmental communicators programme and its aim is to articulate messages and capture environmental programmes which are often very scientific and difficult to the ordinary member of the community to comprehend.

Telling the good story about environmental management was at the core of the deliberations during the two-day meeting. Communicators were unanimous about many successful environmental programmes that is not given attention by the media resulting in that, little is known of them. Working for water, working for fire etc, have yielded results in protecting and preserving the environment. These programmes have created many needed jobs among communicators and have removed tons of unwanted vegetation.

Rampant Rhino poaching also received much attention from communicators. At the centre of the deliberations was what should or could be done to raise the bar about the awareness programmes that could make the community particularly communities living in and near the nature reserve or park to join in the battle against this environmental crime.

Mr Phillip Volkwyn of Walking for Rhinos literally walked into communicators at their hotel where he shared with them his own experience with fight against Rhino poaching. He is an anti-poaching ranger walking more than 1600km in about 60 days to highlight the serious danger that is posed to rhinos across South Africa. He started his walk on 31st March 2014 from Naboomspruit in Limpopo Province on his way to Cape Town.

Sharing some of his experiences with communicators, Mr. Volkwyn says there are just too many people and NGO's purporting to be doing work in the name of Rhinos. "Millions of rands are being spent to promote anti poaching programmes and yet poachers continue to slaughter these majestic animals", he lamented. He said that he would like to establish a rhino orphanage through this hard and courageous campaign.

"JWALE KE NAKO YA KOTULO" JWALE KE NAKO YA KOTULO" JWALE KE NAKO YA KOTULO"

The last leg of this two day meeting was a visit to the Naval Hill where the visitors were taken through the developments taking place at the Hill. The Franklin Nature Reserve on Naval Hill was established in 1904 and it is the only nature reserve in the middle of the city. With the collaboration of Mangaung Metro and DETEA, the Hill has been salvaged from virtual ruin in just over three years.

Some of the developments on the Hill include the Madiba statue that was unveiled by President Jacob Zuma in December 2012. The new restaurant overlooking Bloemfontein is being built next to the statue and is nearing completion. The old Lamont – Hussey Observatory built in 1927 was refurbished and became the only digital planetarium on the sub-saharan Africa. Communicators had the opportunity to fly in to the universe with Professor Mattie Hoffman of the University of the Free State piloting the ship where the communicators explored the cosmos.

The Naval Hill is soon to become an astro-tourism destination of choice with many astronomical enthusiasts visiting the Planetarium.

End!!!

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Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs

**For more information please contact: Kagisho Leteane or Zia Nyangwa
051 400 9550/9547 or Email: leteanek@detea.fs.gov.za or
nyangwaz@detea.fs.gov.za**

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