

The Sunday Tribune Game Changers series gives a voice to people who are making this world a better place for nature and people. E-mail your nominations to: [tribunenews@inl.co.za](mailto:tribunenews@inl.co.za)

# iMfolozi: war against mine greed

There's no going back for those determined to halt mining activities in the globally treasured wilderness areas of KZN, writes **Liz Clarke**

**E**NOUGH is enough. We will not move! This is the heartfelt cry from a rural community in KwaZulu-Natal, whose members believe that ongoing coal operations affecting a wilderness area, which is home to the Big Five, has to stop.

The area under threat is the iMfolozi wilderness area, part of the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, where coal mining activities in Somkhele are causing irreparable damage to the environment and impacting negatively on the community.

A month ago, the neighbouring Fuleni community learnt that Imvukuzane Resources is applying for a prospecting right over the whole Fuleni Reserve, an extensive area that runs along the south eastern boundary of the iMfolozi Wilderness.

Among those assisting the neighbouring community in their determination to halt the mines and any further mining concessions is the Global Environmental Trust (Get), whose ambassador, Sheila Berry, spoke to us about the trust's goal and mission.

"There is so much passion and courage in these communities. The people are determined that any further plans to mine for minerals like coal in their area is an absolute no-no and must be stopped.

"When you listen to the heart-breaking stories of fam-

## FACT FILE

EARTHLORE is part of a network of international organisations that promotes the idea that ecosystems have the right to exist, thrive and evolve and that nature should be able to defend its rights in court, just as people can.

ilies who, far from benefiting from mining, have seen their homes, livelihoods and communities destroyed, you realise that their cry for help is part of a global call for radical intervention and immediate action."

The area under threat of mining abuts the iMfolozi wilderness reserve, part of a sanctuary set aside for the Southern White Rhino 110 years ago, one of the most endangered species on the planet. It is where the battle to save rhinos from extinction is ongoing.

"Communities living next to this protected wilderness, where their ancestors used to live, have an innate respect for the environment," says Berry.

"Rural Zulu farmers have generations of knowledge and traditional experience of how to use the environment for their wellbeing and many are dedicated to ensuring the wellbeing of the environment

and forests, streams and other places sacred to them.

"It is a symbiotic, beneficial partnership that has lasted for centuries and they certainly don't want to see it destroyed."

Berry explains how the trust works.

"What the trust does is assist vulnerable communities to seek justice in a way that is constitutionally acceptable and upholds human rights and human dignity, as well as the rights of nature.

"The law applies to all, including the mines. The Get recently discovered that the Tendele coal mine has been operating illegally for years and on August 24, our case will be heard in the Pietermaritzburg High Court."

The footprint of the mine, which is on the eastern boundary of the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park as one enters it, has been increased by a massive 222km<sup>2</sup> that will affect thousands more people over the next 30 years, until 2046.

"Get and the Mfolozi Community Environmental Justice Organisation (Mcej) appealed against the mining rights, but the minister turned down the appeal and so now we have to take it on review to the Pretoria High Court.

"We have to keep up the pressure for what is just and right – an enormous challenge in the current climate."

The current heated dis-



Sheila Berry meets residents of Somkhele, where coal mining operations have had a negative impact on communities and the environment.

course on the expropriation of land without compensation has, says Berry, brought the question of community justice and protest action to centre stage: "It is not going to go away. Somehow the country has to deal with the fact that so much land in South Africa is governed by private trusts like the Ingonyama Trust in KZN and a large proportion by the country's municipalities."

Within the ambit of expropriating land without compensation is, Berry says, the whole

question of mining and mining concessions.

"Vulnerable communities could face the prospect of having their land literally snatched from beneath their feet with little or no redress. This is where organisations like Get and affiliated NGOs play a significant role."

More than three decades ago Berry, a psychology graduate, was introduced to the founder of the Wilderness Leadership School, the late Dr Ian Player.

"His passion and concern

for the environment and the Earth's indigenous flora and fauna was inspiring. He made you understand there was no time to lose in trying to make a difference.

"I joined the Wilderness Leadership School and, before long, left the corporate world behind for good. For me it was the start of an incredible journey of learning and understanding. I am still very much on that journey. In many ways it has only just begun."

Working hand-in-hand with

the organisation, EarthLore, Berry, who is now its director, believes South Africa's strong NGO community is playing a significant role in promoting the concept of social and environmental justice.

EarthLore, Berry explains, focuses on the environment and traditional farming practices and governance, looking at issues such as food sovereignty, sustainability, drought and climate change. EarthLore says Yes to Life while Get says No to Mining!

"Given the enormous challenges facing the planet, there is an imperative for like-minded people and civil society and NGOs to work together to achieve our goals of a better quality of life and to wage war against greed and exploitation, particularly when it affects the environment and those with few resources to fight back."

For Berry, there is no question of backing away: "I'm in for the long haul. That's the way it is."

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Emily Cross's wild dog tattoo and, right, the animals that she plans to film.



## Passionate pitch about endangered wild dogs nets film funding

### IZZIE SIEMANN

YOU could say the African wild dog has got under Emily Cross's skin – she has the image of one tattooed on her forearm and has secured financial support to make a short film about the colourful, but endangered canines.

"The lack of knowledge about the African wild dog is ridiculous," said Cross, referring to a general lack of awareness and understanding of wild dogs by the general public.

Cross plans to help change this with a proposed short documentary, *Part of the Pack*, to be screened at schools near the dogs' natural habitat in KZN. She hopes it will be a precursor to a full-length documentary.

Cross was among four winners of the N.E.W. Pitch awards at the recent Nature, Environment and Wildlife Filmmakers (Newf) congress that formed part of a month-long film festival in Durban.

The competition provided

a platform for emerging film-makers to pitch short documentary proposals to seasoned professionals, who included Dustin Renwick, National Geographic's storytelling grants programme officer, and Ludo Dufour, the Amsterdam-based director of *Off the Fence* – a major international independent production company that specialises in non-fiction programming.

The Durban woman was also the winner of the Newf audience award, with a prize of game drives and accommodation at the Pilansberg National Park and Madikwe Safari Lodge.

The cherry on the top was that Cross's boss, David Leslie of the Tomfoolery Film Production Company, would also be supporting the production of the film. Before the competition, Leslie had told Cross that he would either match the R50000 pitch prize if she won, or give her the cash if she lost.

With this extra prize money, Cross plans to sponsor a track-



Emily Cross, with the sponsorship she has secured to make a documentary about the African wild dog.

ing collar in support of efforts by conservation body Wildlife ACT to monitor wild dog populations in KZN. Collars allow dogs to be tracked for research purposes, to predict movements and prevent conflict with humans and domesticated animals.

African wild dogs are the second most endangered carni-

vore in Africa, after the Ethiopian wolf. According to Wildlife ACT, there are fewer than 550 roaming in the wild in South Africa. This is largely due to ongoing habitat fragmentation, conflict with human activities and infectious disease.

Cross, whose day job involves making commercials, said all the N.E.W. Pitch

finalists had gained valuable insight and a confidence boost about their pitches from the judging panel and experienced film-makers.

Other finalists also received a confidence boost by engaging with experienced film-makers.

"I always wanted to be a wildlife film-maker, but it never occurred to me that I could actually make my own films," said Tessa Barlin. She pitched *Becoming One*, the story of Lucky Mahlatsi Raptisi who empowers rural children through nature and wildlife photography.

Barlin, 23, a University of Cape Town film studies graduate, also won a R50 000 production grant. She believes in focusing on both people and the environment, as "we can't do conservation without people".

The two other N.E.W. Pitch winners were Londiwe Shange, for her proposed documentary, *Toxic Relations* about life in and around the polluted Durban South's industrial zone, and Jessica Singh for *Epic Encoun-*

*ters* which looks at saving Africa's deadliest snakes.

The four winners will have access to mentorship during the production of their films, which need to be completed within a year before they are combined into a once-off 48-minute TV documentary to be broadcast on national television.

Three other finalists won mentoring support from *50/50* – SABC TV's environmental show. They were Surprise Matlaila, Myles Arendse and Liana Hassim, writer and director of the short film, *Behind the Monologue*, which featured at this year's Durban International Film Festival.

Hassim said the Newf congress had allowed her to pursue "a whole new avenue of film".

"Environmental film has a completely new, different feel. I've always focused on fiction – really bloody and gruesome fiction at that."

Hassim's documentary pitch, *Vida*, follows a homeless

woman representing Mother Earth and the challenges she faces.

Another finalist, Tumo Maokisa, from Botswana, said the grooming experience had been invaluable, as the contacts he had made "help you become the best film-maker you want to become".

Maokisa, who has travelled widely, pitched the short documentary, *When We Worked Away*, about sustainable farming. He said that as there were no similar events in Botswana, he would tell other film-makers there about the N.E.W. Pitch competition and also spread the word on his travels, in Kenya, Tanzania and Ethiopia.

Speaking at the prize-giving, Newf programme director Noel Kok said if the "energy of the event keeps up, then nature, environment, and wildlife have a chance".

Lauren van Nijkerk, deputy director of marketing for WildTrust, a co-sponsor of the event, agreed: "The passion in the room each day was electric.

I feel inspired to go forth and tell more stories through film."

So does Cross, 21, who started work on *Part of the Pack* this week. In her pitch, she recounted her first sighting of wild dogs at Mkuze Game Reserve in 2011. She took a photo of an African wild dog that had lingered near their vehicle for 40 minutes.

A picture of that very dog now lives on in ink on her forearm. "Dad" is written in the grass beneath the dog, a nod to her father with whom she shared the rare sighting. Cross also thanked her grandfather, Robert Cross, retired editor of African Wildlife magazine, without whom she might never have visited a game reserve.

Cross's passion for wild dogs isn't just under her skin, it's in her blood too. – Roving Reporters

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