

## MEDIA RELEASE - 25 March 2003

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### **FLOOD IN WILDERNESS NATIONAL PARK**

Last night heavy rains experienced in the Southern Cape caused extensive flooding in Wilderness National Park and the surrounding residential areas in Wilderness and Sedgefield.

The Touw River in Wilderness breached its banks at 04h00, eight hours after the mouth of the river was artificially opened by South African National Parks personnel. The mouth was opened at around 2,1m above mean sea level, which is well within the recommended range for opening the mouth.

The Swartvlei estuary has flooded large areas within the town of Sedgefield . The level of the estuary was closely monitored by SANParks staff, but the water level was at some 1,2 m when it was checked yesterday, with 2 m being the desired opening level. With only a 70% rain forecast by the Weather Services for the Southern Cape , it came as a big surprise when in excess of 150mm of rain fell between 17:00 yesterday and about 05:00 this morning.

Recognising the danger, SANParks staff began manually opening the Swartvlei lagoon mouth early this morning, but because of transport problems, due to flooding, could only get a bulldozer to assist with the opening at about 10h00. The mouth was finally opened at around 11h00, but by that time large areas of Sedgefield were flooded. However, because of the volumes of water draining into the vlei and estuary it would have made little difference if the mouth was open or not.

Local police and the NSIR assisted SANParks staff to evacuate guests from low lying areas and caravans to the chalets, which are built on stilts. All the 80 guests of the national park were reported to be safe.

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