

Seeing coal like an activist in early 21st Century SA

Global Change/Local conflicts Symposium
Free University of Berlin, 2 December,
Dr Victor Munnik,
University of the Witwatersrand

Intro and overview

- * How can we analyse social movements and their struggles against mining?
- * Discuss a frame or perspective switch in anti-coal struggle in South Africa
- * Environmental Justice (Hallowes)
- * Framing in social movement theory (McAdam et al, Kurzman) & rhetoric (Nixon)
- * Critical realism as underlabourer (Bhaskar)
- * Public sociology approach (Burawoy)
- * Participation Action Research (with activists)
- * Challenge: engaging with opponents empirical knowledge & arguments (Mining Weekly)

Dominant view on coal

- * Conventional South African view is that we cannot afford not to mine coal.
- * 90% plus of electricity from coal
- * Large coal exporter - foreign exchange
- * 80 000 jobs in coal mining
- * Incumbent hegemony: argue against renewables
- * State monopoly electricity generator (Eskom) limits renewable energy, wants nuclear





Mixing water & coal, large scale



Environmental Justice Framing

(From US enviro injustice, in SA since 1992)

Enclosure - illustrate as a history of land and water grabs, how the SA Mpumalanga coalfield was formed historically

Externalisation - of costs through pollution; through coal mines that leave behind a giant mess

Exclusion from decision making, incl. politics of knowledge - which explains in large measure how the coal pollution comes about.

Frame switch

- * Dominant view inhibits anti-coal activism
- * Every year, groundWork EJ report, 2016:
- * Document social destruction and rebellion against coal
- * Figures of rhetoric to create a double take on conventional descriptions: bulls and bears, portfolio of scandalous mines (tracking company histories)
- * Re-interpret empirical evidence of environmental destruction: water & soil
- * People imagine alternatives (post-mining)

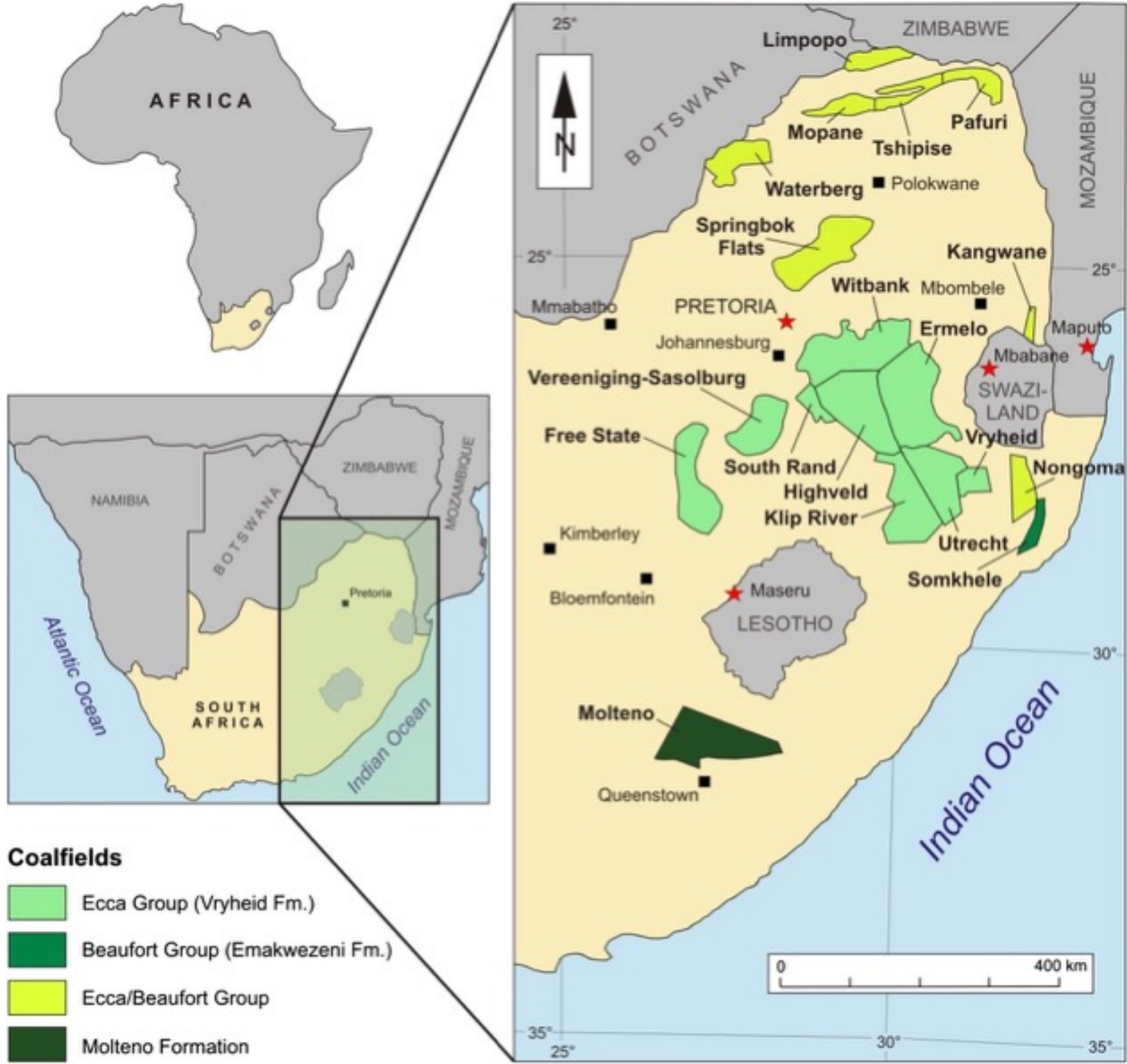
The Destruction of the Highveld

Part 1: Digging Coal



The Destruction of the Highveld

The groundWork Report 2016



History of land and water grabs (Enclosure)

- * Show how mining landscape was constructed
- * 1850s, Swazi rulers “gave land” on Highveld to Boer settlers (it belonged to Pedi kingdom)
- * Property division made real by 1st Anglo-Boer war - today's big white farms
- * 1880s, gold and coal mining industries, 2nd Anglo Boer war, priority of mining
- * After 1994, state as custodian of mineral and water rights (but not land)
- * ANC builds middle class, deals with big international corporates, scope for corruption

Re-interpret empirical evidence (deal with Exclusion)

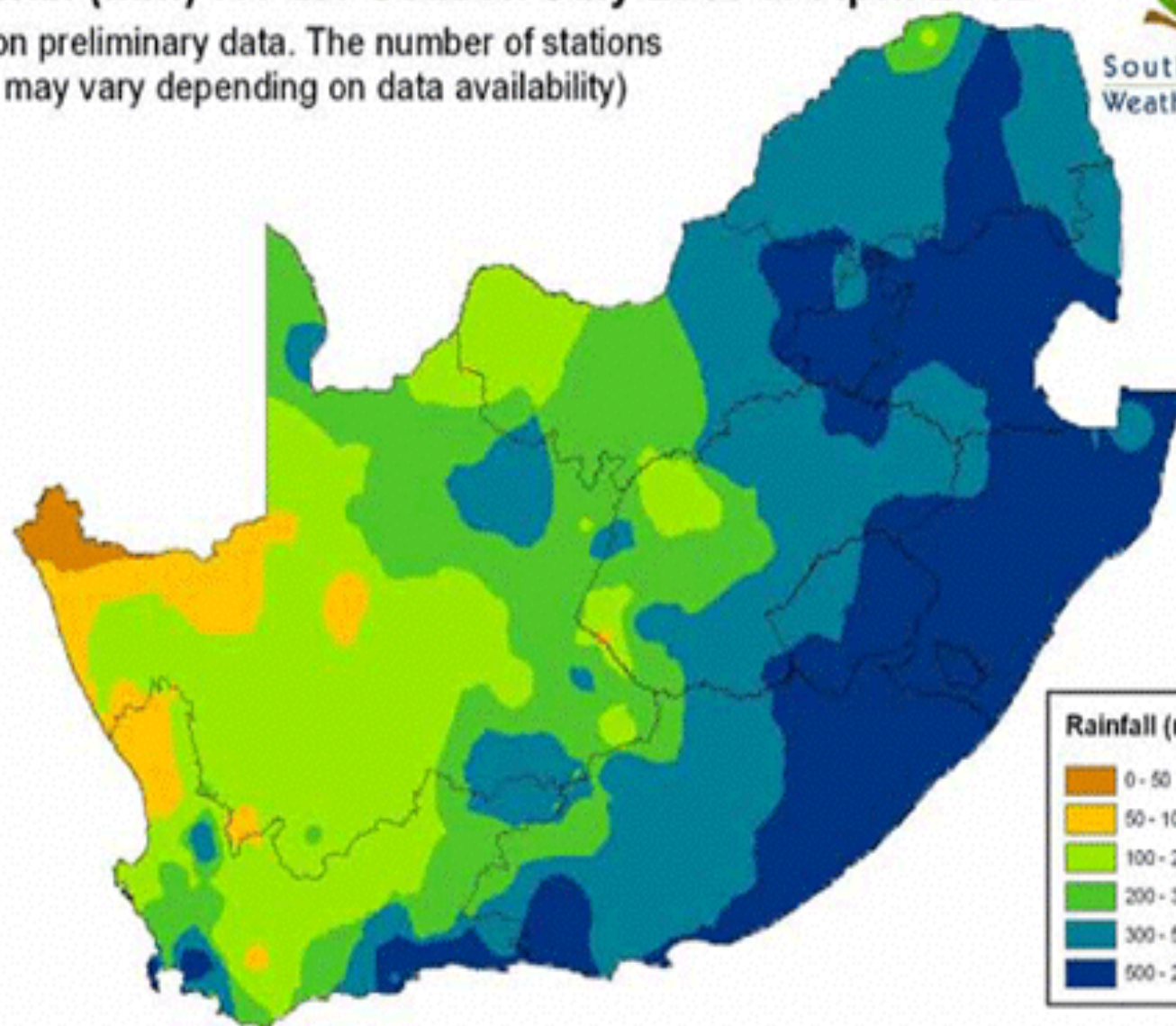
- * Scientific evidence on water quality, rehabilitation of post-mining soil
- * Expert science, Chamber of Mines reports, Coaltech confidential reports
- * Decode and translate seriousness of situation, use evidence
- * Compare acknowledged gold and uranium Acid Mine Drainage crisis with emerging coal AMD crisis
- * Foreground and question political assumptions in scientific literature: “polluter profits twice”

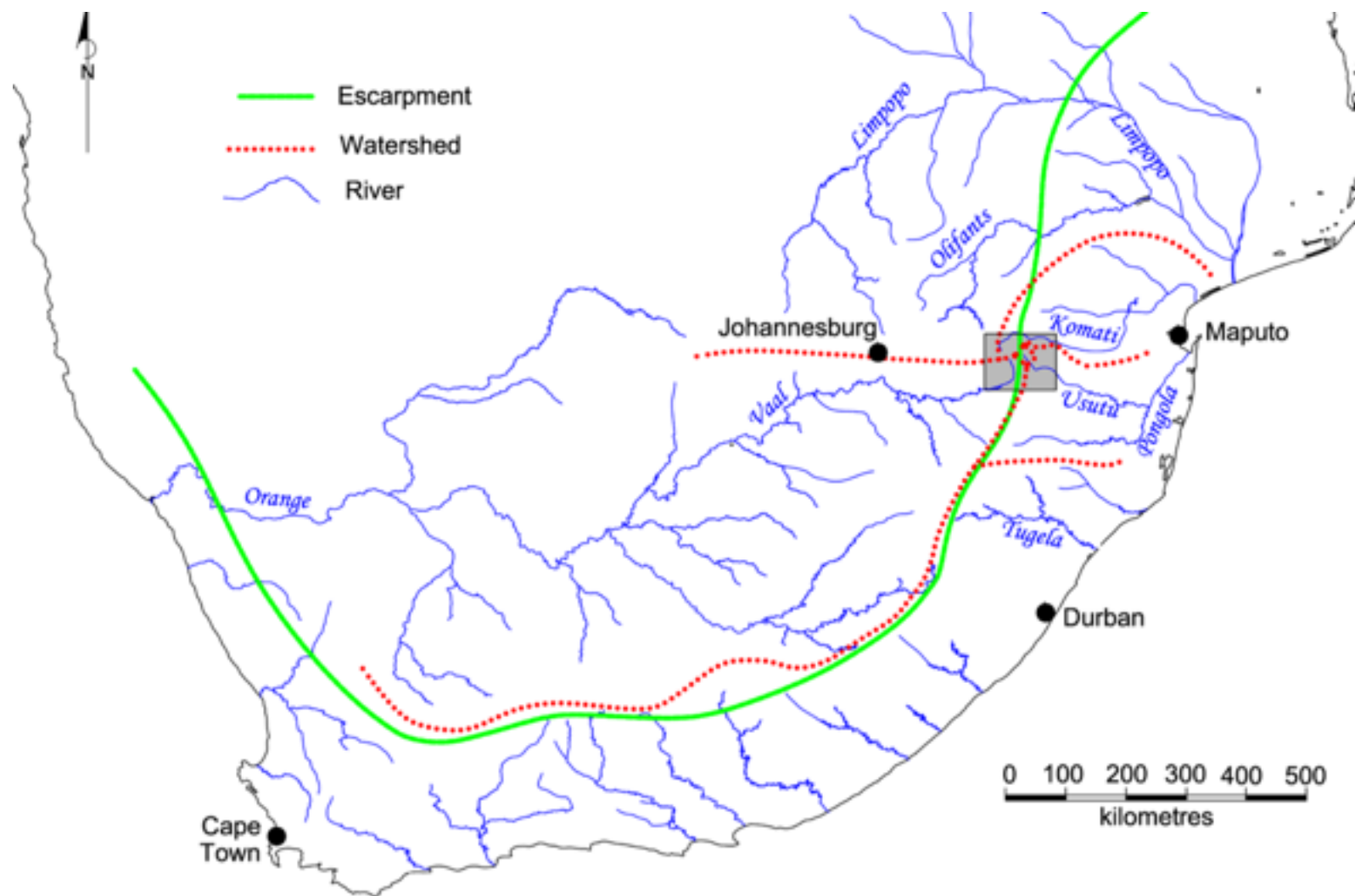
Rainfall (mm) for the Season July 2011 to April 2012

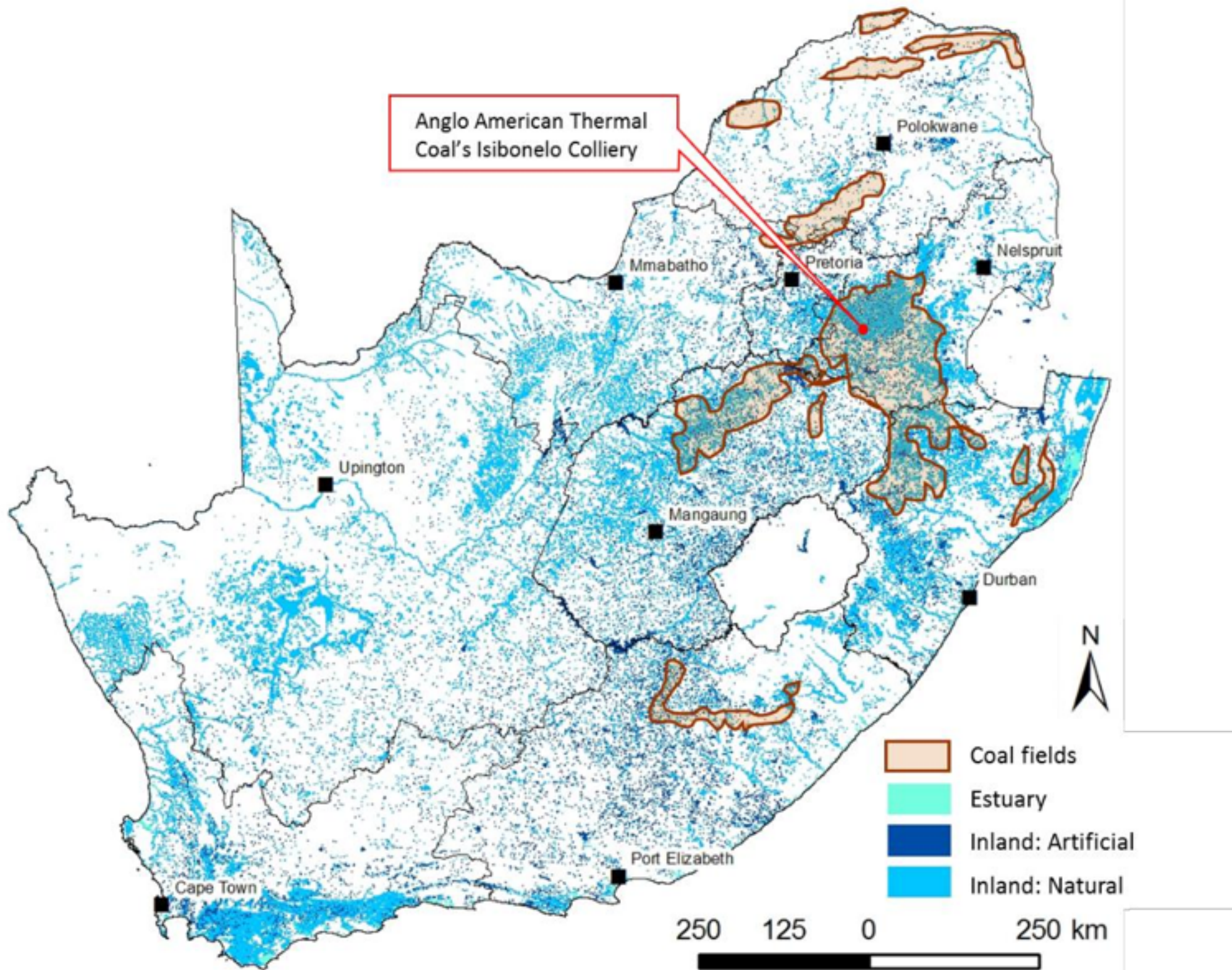
(based on preliminary data. The number of stations used may vary depending on data availability)



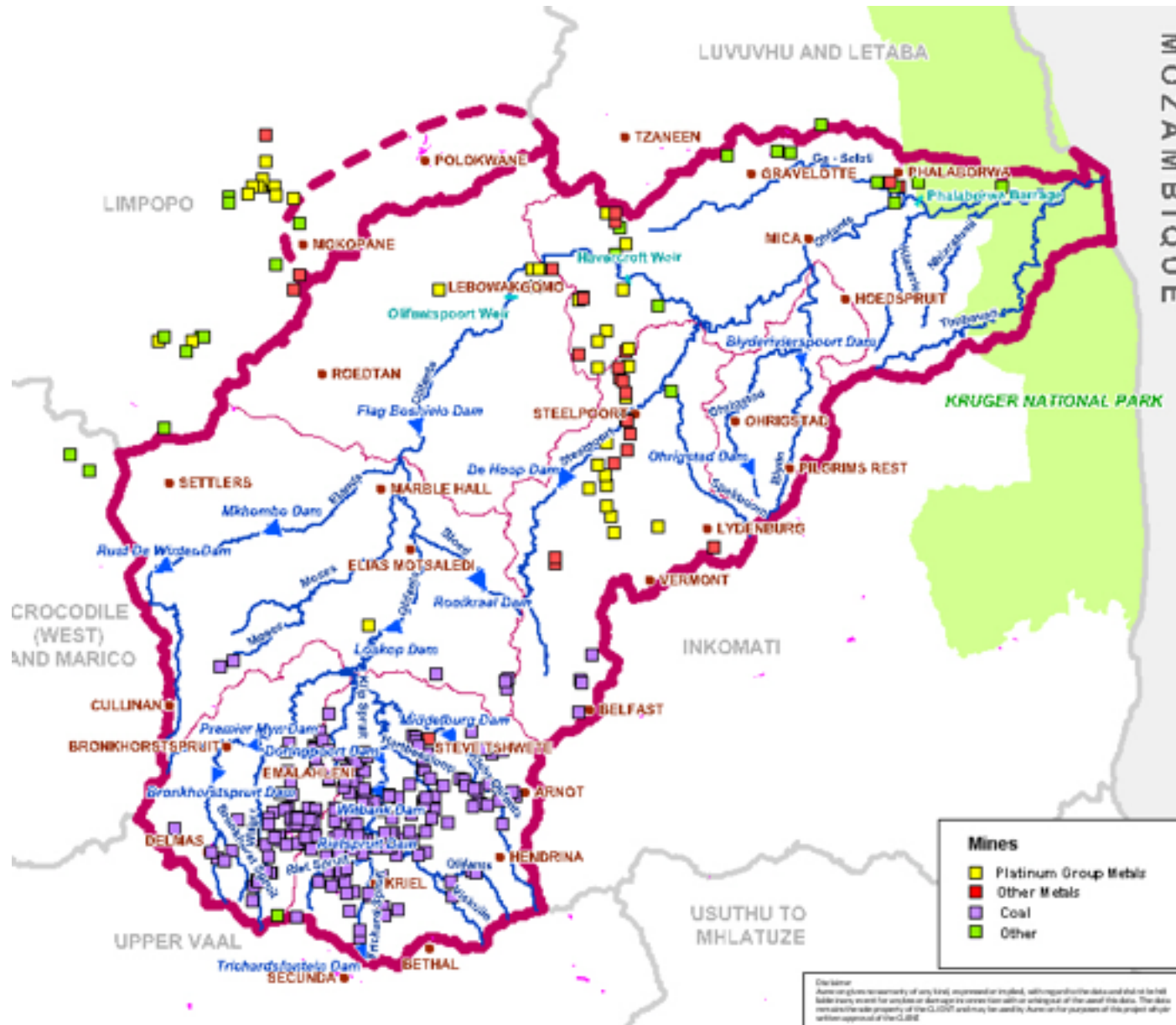
South African
Weather Service

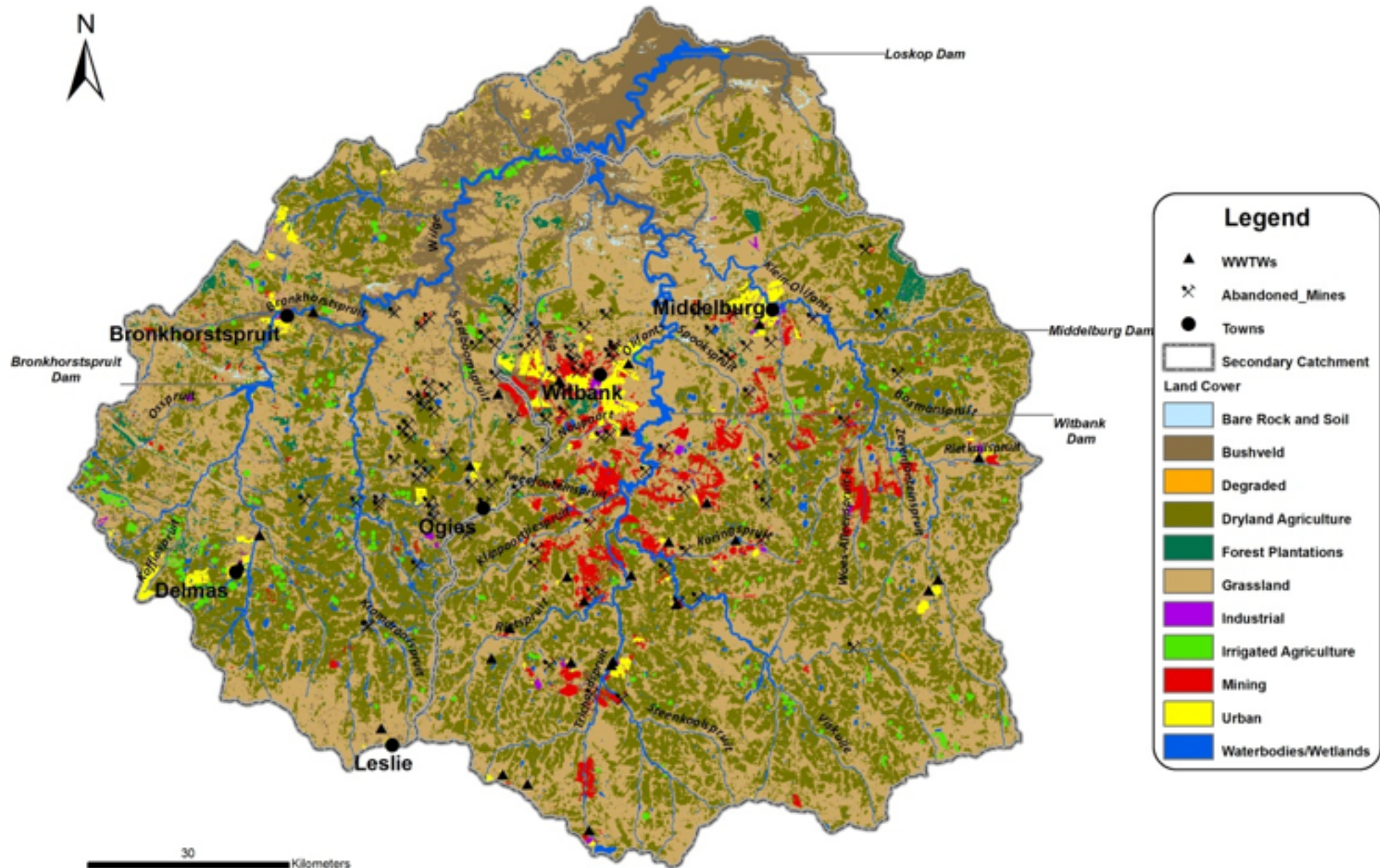




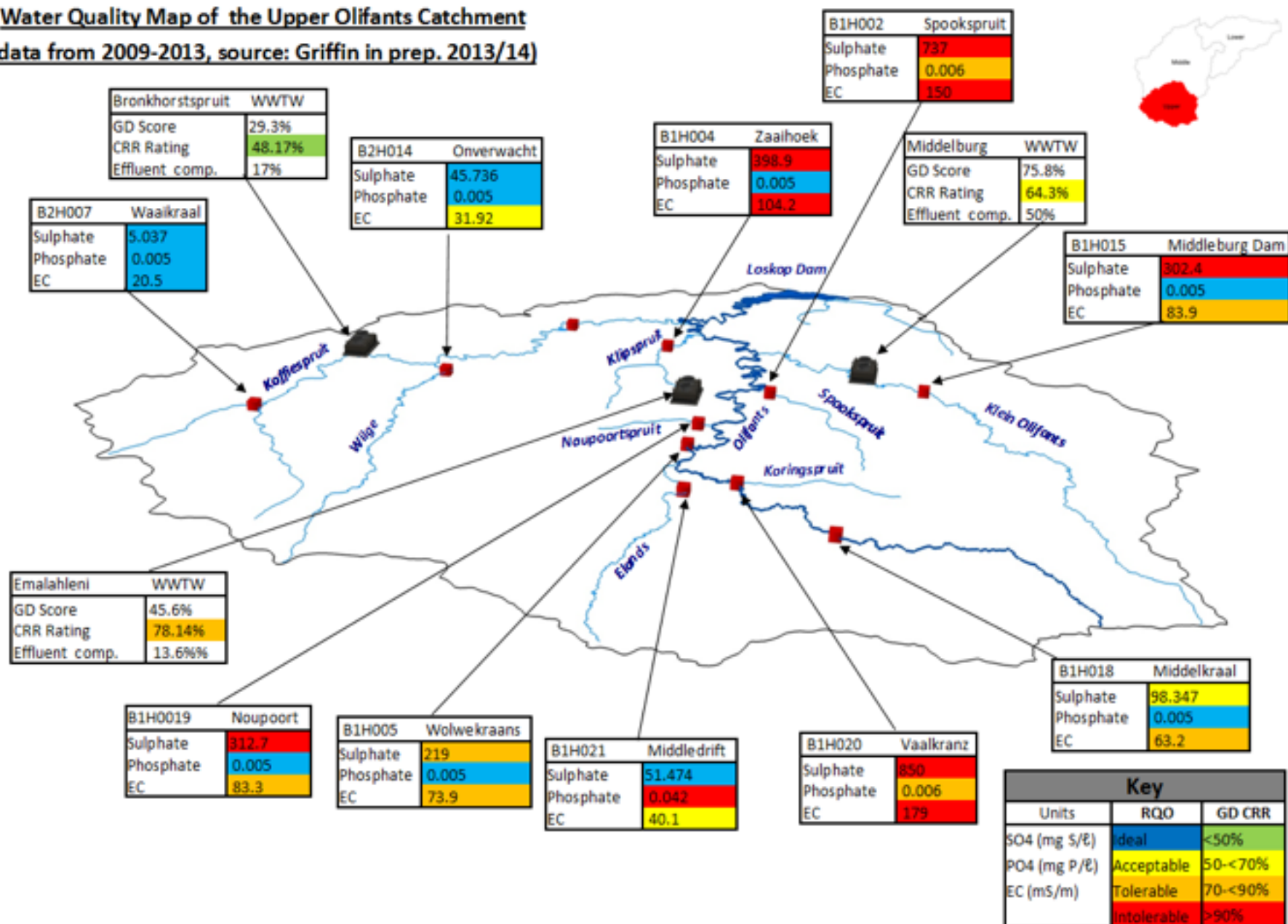


Coal mines in Upper Olifants

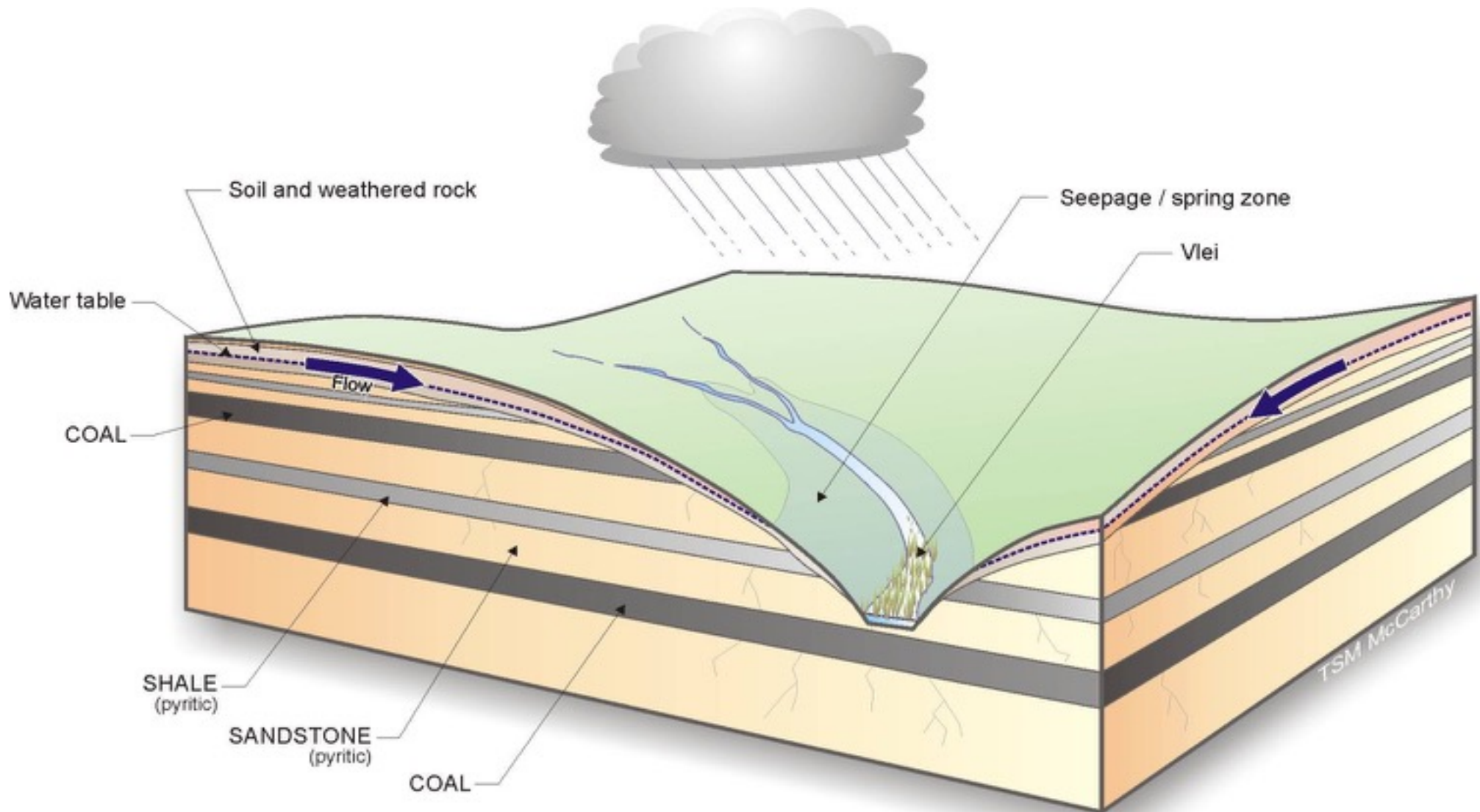




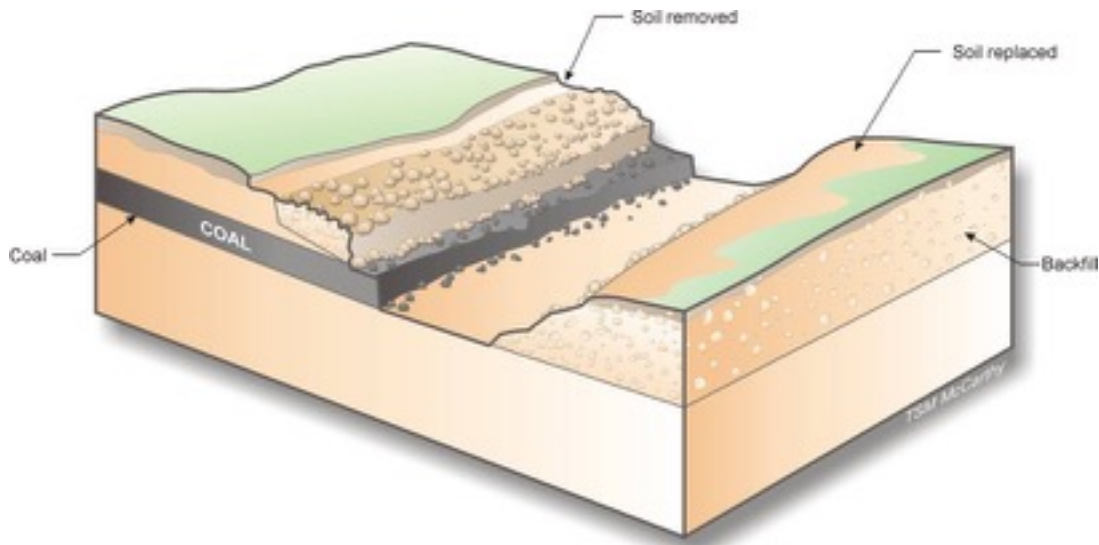
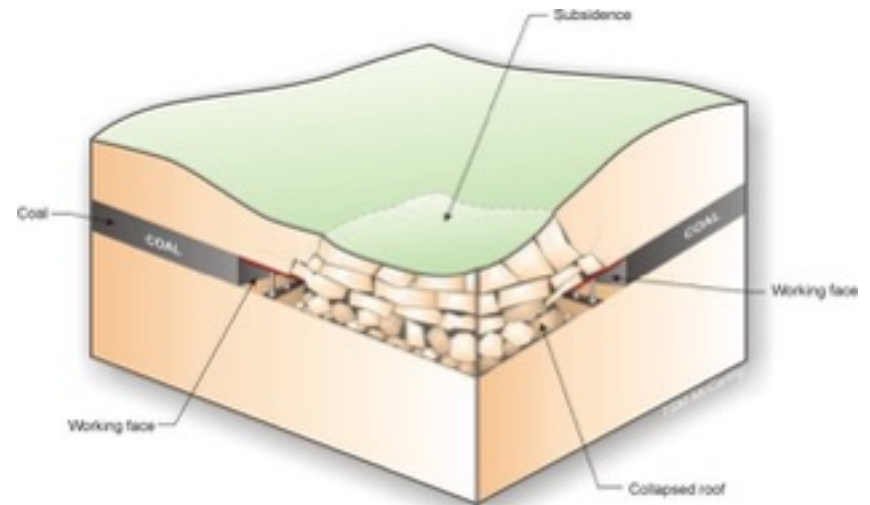
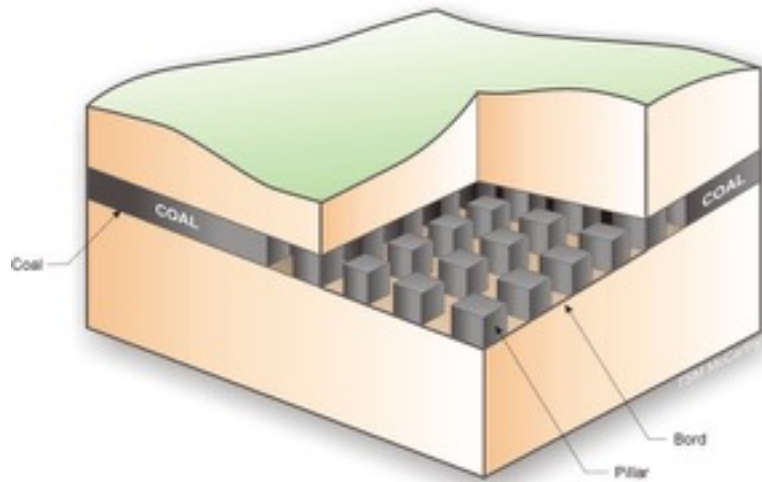
Water Quality Map of the Upper Olifants Catchment (data from 2009-2013, source: Griffin in prep. 2013/14)

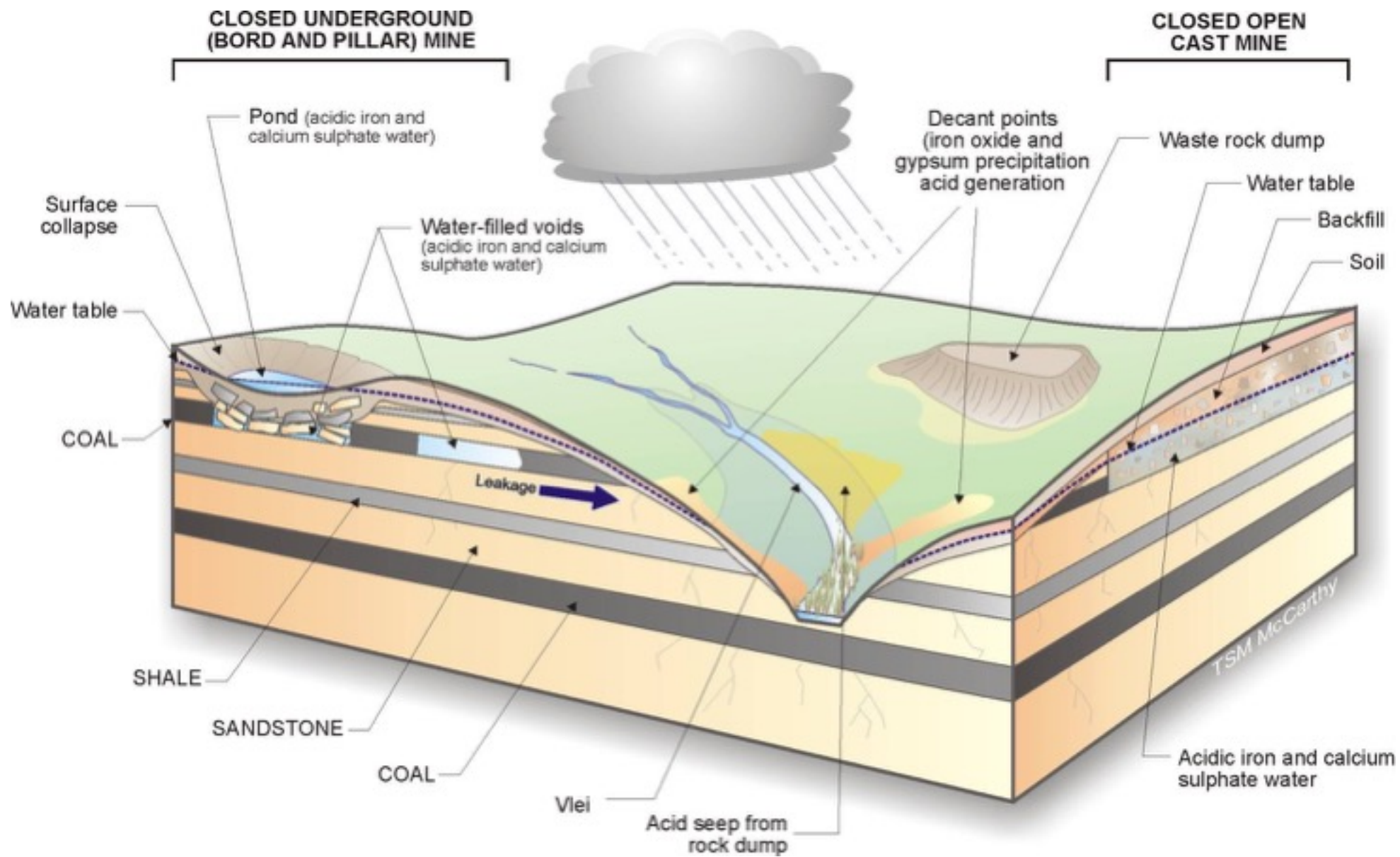


Surface and ground water on the Highveld



Coal mining methods

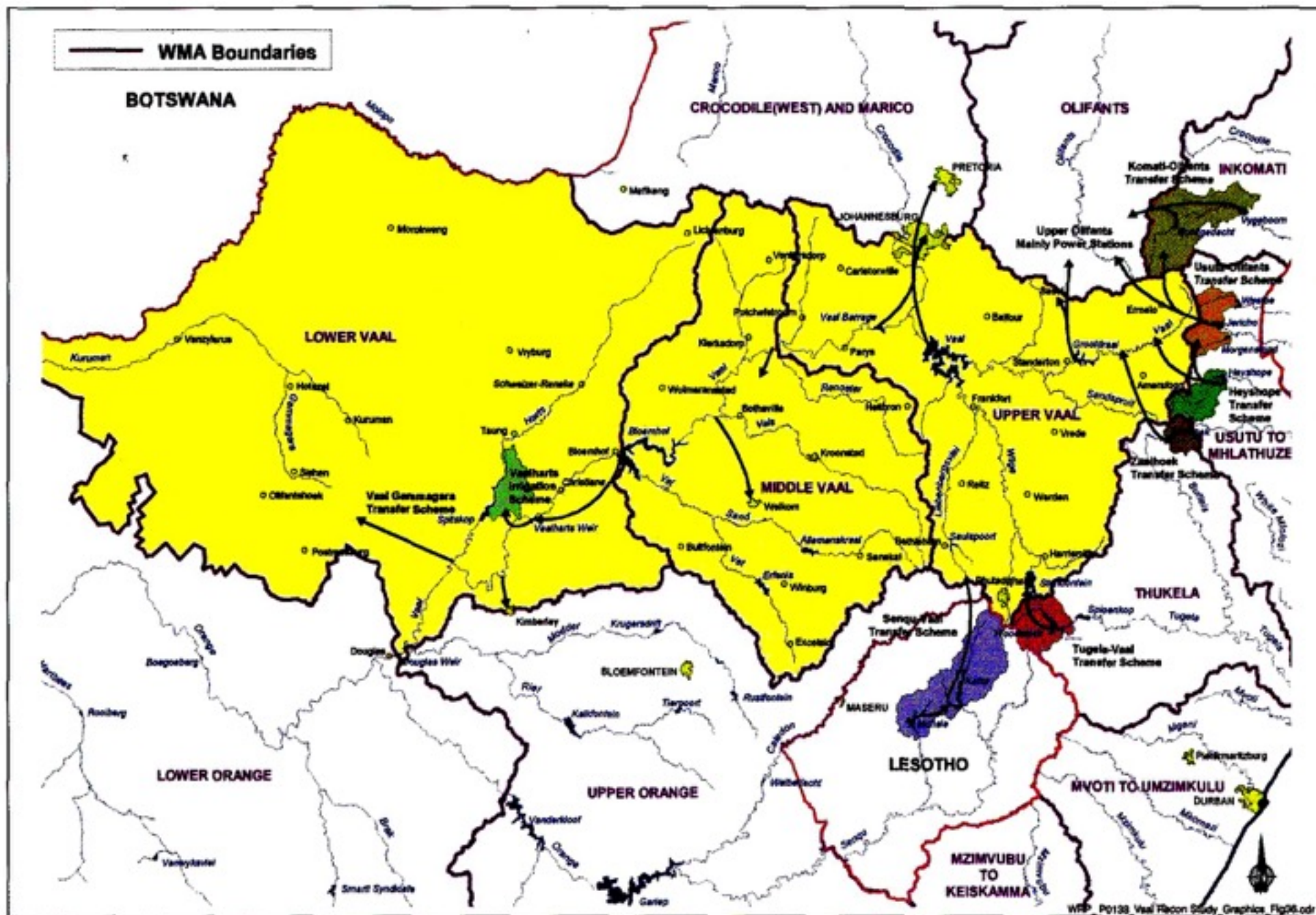




Acid Mine Drainage in a small town (Externalisation)

In 2012, after a rainstorm upstream from a wetland, acid water that had been accumulating in a wetland, was flushed into the town's dam.

This threat had been masked by a water transfer system, for coal fired power stations, which used the river and town dam as a pipeline...



The Vaal River management areas.



Yellowboy on Carolina dam wall









Document the reality of impacts on people

- * Black majority have tenuous hold on the land - some with land claims, others holding on as small farmers, called “farm dwellers”, towns and informal settlements on mined out land
- * First an organised migrant labour regime, now individual workers in-migrate in expectation of work
- * Marked gender effects - “fathers to neither family” - women in “economic unions” - impacts of social fabric
- * Abandoned mines create dangerous livelihood opportunities for local people

Abandoned now burning



Bulls and Bears

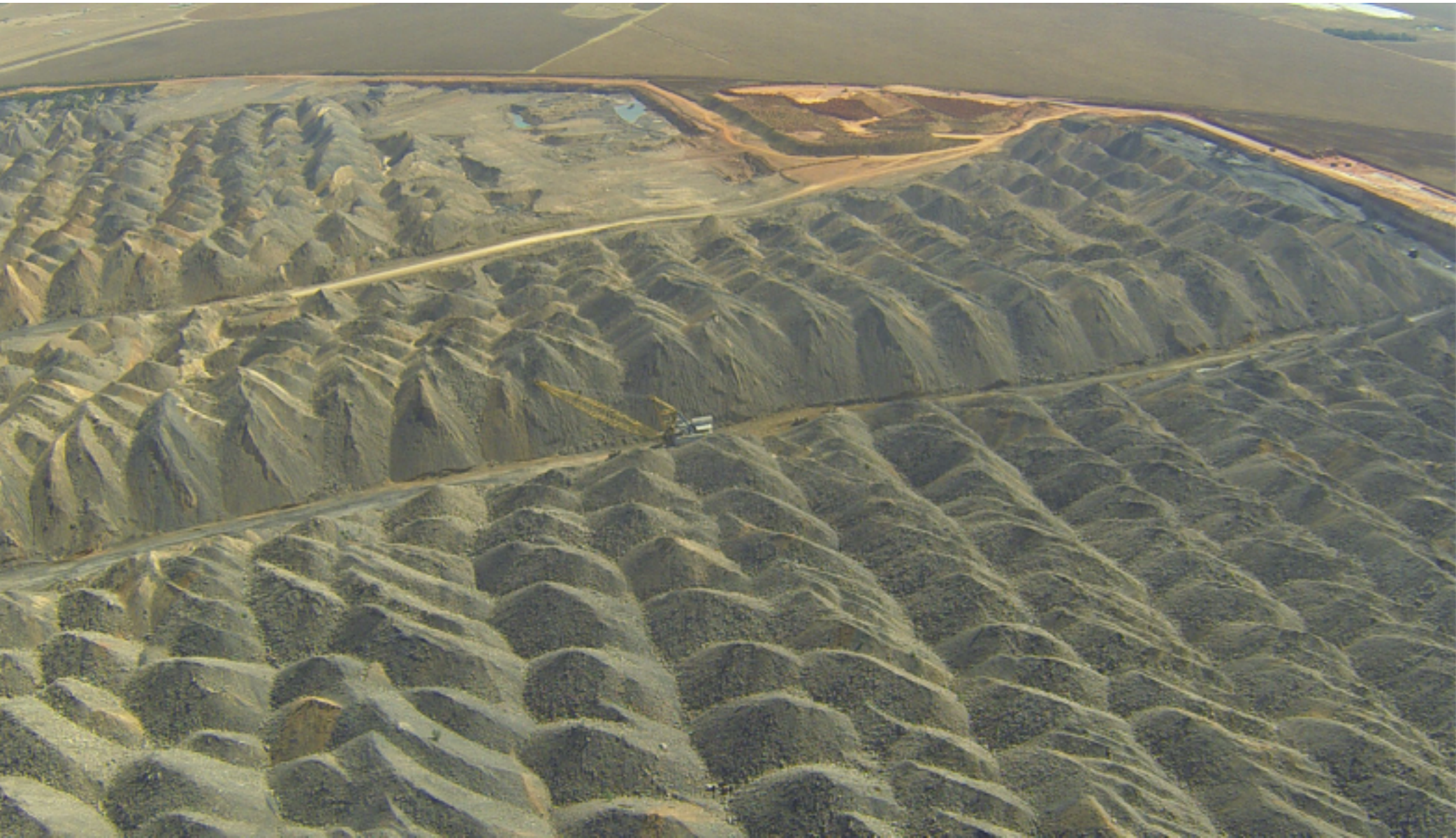


“Bulls and bears in rut”

* Create an ironic and suspicious mood in the text:

“It looks as if the earth has been torn by giant bulls and bears in rut. Bulls rule the capital markets when investors are optimistic and bellowing for quick returns. Then there is no time for environmental restraint and mines must pull out as much coal as possible while the good times last. Bears rule when times are bad at the bourse. Then there is no money to take care of environmental damage. Both ways, the environments and the people living in them lose.”

Spoil



Portfolio of scandalous companies

Optimum sprawling complex of nine mines, extensive damage since 1970s, above and underground, in corruption scandal with Gupta family, president's son, minister of mineral resources, Eskom (parastatal).

Coalfield largely mined out - majors leaving, minnows moving in for scraps... major messes...

Ruined farm land



Rebellion, post mining landscapes

- * White farmers seem powerless
- * Marginal black farm dwellers in the margins, people in townships and informal settlements (on mining land)
- * Mtsweni family blocked road to mine
- * Arbor Village - careless blasting, locked mine gate, interdict, stop free coal, complex local dynamics (thugs)
- * Question of the future - makes present problematic
- * Climate change politics means limits on future of coal

Applied theory for activism

- * Use robust rather than constantly spinning theory
- * Social movement theory very useful - e.g. framing, context of threat and opportunity, resource mobilisation, repertoire of activities
- * Fit them into shared network of Environmental Justice
- * Large amounts of empirical work needed, in communities and about mines
- * Uncoding scientific knowledge and engage polemically with mining interests
- * Recklessly borrow title from anarchist theory (Scott)

Invitations

Monday 18:00 Afrika Haus, discussion on climate change and coal with Laura Weis, Energiewende, and Melanie Mueller

Text of groundWork Report 2016:
[Www.groundWork.org.za](http://www.groundWork.org.za)

Coal and social movement discussion:
victor@victormunnik.co.za -