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SUSTAINABILITY

Green Flags and Chequered Flags: South Africa's F1 Bid and the Net Zero Test

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by Natalie Scott, Director and Head of Sustainability (Reviewer), and Janice Geel, Associate

On 13 October 2026, Formula 1 ("**F1**") confirmed that the Republic of Rwanda ("**Rwanda**") will host the Formula 1 African Grand Prix under a 10-year deal starting in the early 2030s.[1] This will be the first F1 race on the continent since the 1993 South African Grand Prix at Kyalami.[2] The Republic of South Africa ("**South Africa**"), however, has not abandoned its own ambitions. Its Formula 1 Bid Steering Committee ("**Committee**"), which ran a separate process to identify potential promoters, has completed its initial evaluation of expressions of interest and is now working to secure financial guarantees and corporate backing.[3] Notably, the Committee's tender places particular emphasis on public transport and renewable energy as a means of meeting F1's sustainability criteria.[4] Sports Minister Gayton McKenzie congratulated Rwanda but insisted that "*SA will get F1, even before 2030*".[5] That is an ambitious promise, particularly as it falls within the same decade in which F1 has committed to reaching net zero.[6] The question, therefore, is whether South Africa's legal and regulatory framework is ready to support a bid that must pass both a commercial and an environmental test. Cost has defeated every previous revival attempt, but on sustainability South Africa may hold an underused advantage: an existing circuit at Kyalami.

What F1 has promised

F1 has committed to net zero by 2030, cutting emissions by at least 50% against a 2018 baseline and offsetting the remainder.[7] Roughly two-thirds of its footprint is travel and freight. These commitments are formalised in F1's Sustainability Policy Statement, October 2022 ("**F1 Policy**"), which ties F1's activities to the international event-sustainability standard[8] and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, alongside wider ambitions to leave[9] "*a legacy of positive change wherever we race*" and build a more diverse and inclusive sport. In practical terms, F1 undertakes to manage energy and resource use, reduce emissions (particularly from logistics and freight), encourage partners to adopt biodiversity plans, build sustainability into procurement, comply with environmental law and report on its performance. Since 2022, it has also issued sustainable-event guidance to promoters covering renewable power, waste, water, fan transport and social impact.[10]

F1's guidance to promoters operates through private hosting contracts. The F1 Policy itself applies only to the F1 group companies and those working for them; partners are "*encouraged*" rather than bound, and F1 reserves the right to modify the F1 Policy at any time in its sole discretion. A host's sustainability obligations are therefore whatever the promoter agreement says they are, backed up by the host country's own environmental laws. That makes the domestic legal framework a central part of any bid, not an afterthought.

South Africa: three venues, one legal framework

South Africa has three main venue options, and each raises different legal and sustainability issues. First, Kyalami is an existing circuit, and the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile has approved its plans for the upgrades needed for Grade 1 status.[11] It has the lowest new land use impact of the three options, although the upgrades may require environmental authorisation where they trigger listed activities under the National Environmental Management Act 107 of 1998 ("**NEM Act**"). Second, the proposal for Cape Town is a 5.7 km temporary layout around the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront and DHL Stadium. The main issues are municipal approvals, road closures and the City's exposure under the Local Government Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2003 ("**MFM Act**"). Third, Swartland (Blue Mountain Racing) is a new private precinct targeting a race by 2031, with capacity for about 125,000 spectators. As a greenfield project,[12] it would need a full environmental impact assessment and rezoning, and would face significant water and traffic impacts.

Whatever the venue, South Africa's environmental and climate legislation will shape the bid. That framework already mirrors much of the F1 Policy, which commits F1 to complying with environmental law, cutting emissions, managing energy and resources, and encouraging partners to protect biodiversity. A promoter that complies with domestic law, and can prove it, will already meet much of what F1 expects. The key statutes are the following —

- the NEM Act. Building or materially altering a circuit is likely to trigger listed activities requiring environmental authorisation, with public participation, before work starts.[13] The constitutional right to an environment that is not harmful to health or wellbeing sits behind this process,[14] so fast-tracking approvals to meet an F1 deadline would invite review applications. The duty of care in section 28 of the NEM Act continues after authorisation, requiring the promoter and venue owner to prevent and remedy pollution on every race weekend;
- the Climate Change Act 22 of 2024 ("**CC Act**"). The CC Act, which commenced on 17 March 2025 (though not all provisions are yet in force), sets South Africa's national climate response and provides for sectoral emission targets and carbon budgets.[15] Provinces and municipalities must adopt climate response plans, so the host province and city will need to show that the race fits them. The CC Act also gives civil society a clear benchmark for scrutinising a government-backed event;
- the Carbon Tax Act 15 of 2019 ("**CT Act**"). On-site fuel combustion, such as diesel generators at a temporary circuit, can attract carbon tax where the thresholds in Schedule 2 of the CT Act are crossed, creating a direct incentive to plan for grid or renewable power instead;
- the National Environmental Management: Waste Act 59 of 2008 ("**NEMW Act**"). A race weekend generates large volumes of packaging, food, hospitality and construction waste. The NEMW Act's waste hierarchy and the extended producer responsibility regulations for packaging give a legal basis for F1's waste commitments and require waste to be handled only by authorised contractors;
- the National Water Act 36 of 1998. Water is scarce, particularly in the Western Cape. A greenfield precinct such as Swartland is likely to need water use authorisations, and any venue will need to show how it manages demand during a high-attendance event; and
- the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act 10 of 2004, the National Heritage Resources Act 25 of 1999 and the National Environmental Management: Air Quality Act 39 of 2004. Depending on the site, these statutes may all be engaged in respect of biodiversity, heritage and air quality impacts. Because the F1 Policy encourages partners to develop biodiversity plans, a promoter can turn a statutory assessment into a positive commitment in its bid.

On sustainability alone, Kyalami's existing-venue model is arguably the most defensible option. Upgrading infrastructure that already exists avoids most of the embodied carbon and land-use impact of a new build, an advantage South Africa's bid could use far more explicitly.

Domestic law sets the floor; the F1 Policy sets the direction. The F1 Policy binds only the F1 group, but its objectives will reach a South African promoter through the hosting contract and F1's event guidance. The promoter should therefore be able to show F1 how it meets each objective, on energy, emissions, waste, water, biodiversity, procurement and reporting, through a mix of legal compliance and contractual commitment. Running the event under ISO 20121, the standard F1 itself follows, would make that much easier.

Public money and process

Cost, not the environment, has sunk every South African F1 revival attempt since 1993.[16] Hosting fees are unpublished but reportedly run into tens of millions of United States dollars a year, usually backed by a state or city guarantee.[17]

In 2025 South Africa established the Committee and issued a public request for expressions of interest to promoters and venues.[18] Cabinet later approved a Kyalami-based bid. Though slower than direct negotiation, this process better fits South Africa's constitutional and public finance framework. National funding or guarantees engage the Public Finance Management Act 1 of 1999 ("**PFM Act**"); a Cape Town street race would engage

the MFM Act, including its rules on multi-year commitments. The sustainability and financial cases overlap: a 10-year hosting contract is a long-term public commitment, and without a legacy plan a venue idle for 51 weeks a year wastes both public money and carbon.[19]

Aligning South Africa as a race promoter

F1 contracts not with a country but with a race promoter, which holds the hosting rights, pays the fee, runs the event and carries the sustainability obligations.[20] Its structure will largely determine whether a bid is credible. Options range from a state-owned or municipal entity to a public-private partnership, to a private promoter backed by a government guarantee. A state or municipal vehicle engages the PFM Act or MFM Act and potentially Regulation 16 of the Amendment of Treasury Regulations in terms of section 76 of the PFM Act, published under Government Notice R225 in *Government Gazette* 27388 of 15 March 2005, on public-private partnerships.

The promoter agreement with F1 will be the main source of sustainability obligations, which the promoter must pass down through venue, energy, catering, waste, transport and hospitality contracts.[21] Back-to-back drafting, measurable targets and audit and reporting rights prevent the promoter carrying commitments it cannot enforce against suppliers. Because F1 may amend the F1 Policy at any time in its sole discretion, the agreement should also address how changes are passed on and who bears their cost over a multi-year term.[22]

Grid reliability remains a concern despite the easing of load-shedding.[23] The removal of the embedded generation licensing threshold and the Electricity Regulation Amendment Act 38 of 2024 make it far easier for a promoter or venue to contract directly for renewable power through embedded generation and private wheeling.[24] Long-term solar and storage at Kyalami would address both reliability and the generator-related carbon tax exposure noted above.

A South African round should fit F1's regional clustering, for example alongside Middle Eastern or Southern Hemisphere races, with sea freight where possible.[25] With Rwanda confirmed, the bid may need to argue for a second African race or a rotation, modelling the logistics of either. Kyalami's location between Johannesburg and Pretoria helps only if fans can reach it without multiple car trips. The bid should include park-and-ride, Gautrain-linked shuttles and integrated ticketing, supported by agreements with the Gauteng provincial government and relevant municipalities.

Adopting recognised standards from the outset, such as ISO 20121 and independent carbon accounting, lets a promoter report credibly to F1, funders and the public, and improves access to sustainability-linked or green finance for venue upgrades.[26] Commitments on local procurement, broad-based black economic empowerment, skills development and motorsport participation programmes give substance to F1's social objectives and strengthen the public interest case for any state support.

Conclusion

South Africa may be the backmarker in this round, but the podium is not out of reach. On sustainability, an upgraded Kyalami, run by a well-structured promoter with clean power, low carbon logistics and measurable commitments, may be a more credible fit for a sport committed to net zero by 2030 than any new circuit. Cost, however, has put every revival attempt since 1993 into the wall, and the environmental case will not carry a bid that cannot also justify its public funding.

Kyalami's sustainability advantage, as an existing circuit that can be upgraded rather than built from scratch, only counts if the framework is legal by design and clears scrutineering. Environmental authorisations, climate budgets and public-finance rules do not retire a viable F1 bid. Used well, they are the pit-wall data that make a South African Grand Prix defensible to F1, taxpayers and courts.

For promoters, venue owners, funders and municipalities, the message is clear — build sustainability compliance into the bid from day one by securing environmental authorisations upfront, aligning the event with provincial and municipal climate budgets and plans, and including appropriate and measurable sustainability obligations in every supplier contract that do not leave you stranded in the gravel.

The chequered flag will come down on whether South Africa's legal and regulatory framework is genuinely able to support a commercially and environmentally viable bid to host an F1 race in the next few years. The lawyers will be in the paddock long before the cars.

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[2] Ibid.

[3] K Mokoena, 'Gayton McKenzie ropes in Ramaphosa to help with 2028 F1 bid', published on 15 October 2026, available on https://sundayworld.co.za/sports/more-sports/gayton-mckenzie-ropes-in-cyril-ramaphosa-to-help-with-2028-f1-bid/#goog_rewarded (accessed on 6 November 2026)

[4] Department of Sport, Arts and Culture (DSAC) Formula 1 Bid Steering Committee, 'Request for Expression of Interest (RFEOI) Hosting of FIA Formula 1 Race in South Africa', published on 17 January 2025, available on https://www.dsac.gov.za/sites/default/files//2025-01/Request-for-Expression-of-Interest-Formula-BID.pdf (accessed on 3 November 2026)

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[8] See 'ISO 20121: 2012 – Event sustainability management systems standard (Edition 1, 2012)', which has been revised and replaced by 'ISO 20121: 2024 – Event sustainability management systems – requirements with guidance for use (Edition 2, 2024)' (collectively, "**ISO 20121**")

[9] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 'The 17 Goals', available on https://sdgs.un.org/goals (accessed on 4 November 2026)

[10] Formula 1, 'Formula 1 Sustainability Policy Statement', published on 31 October 2022, available on https://corp.formula1.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/F1-Sustainability-Policy_17-October_Approved-SD-signed.pdf (accessed on 3 November 2026)

[11] W Van de Putte, 'The path to Formula 1: Kyalami's upgrade to FIA Grade 1 standards', published on 18 June 2025, available on https://iol.co.za/capeargus/motoring/2025-06-18-the-path-to-formula-1-kyalamis-upgrade-to-fia-grade-1-standards/ (accessed on 3 November 2026)

[12] The Cambridge Online Dictionary defines a *"greenfield project"* as *"an activity in a completely new area of work"*

[13] See the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations Listing Notice 1 of 2014, published under Government Notice R983 in *Government Gazette* 38282 of 4 December 2014.

[14] See section 24 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996

[15] See the Preamble to the CC Act

[16] N Saunders, 'South Africa's Kyalami circuit's return to F1 hampered by current hosting costs', published on 7 February 2018, available on https://africa.espn.com/f1/story/_/id/22356997/south-africa-kyalami-circu-return-f1-hampered-current-hosting-costs (accessed on 3 November 2026)

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[25] Formula 1, 'The beginner's guide to the F1 calendar', available on https://www.formula1.com/en/latest/article/the-beginners-guide-to-the-formula-1-grand-prix-calendar.VEmteiTb3F3tE95A7qke7 (accessed on 6 November 2026)

[26] Formula 1, 'Formula 1 reports on sustainability and social progress across 2024 season', available on https://corp.formula1.com/formula-1-reports-on-sustainability-and-social-progress-across-2024-season/ (accessed on 6 November 2026)



Natalie Scott

Head of Sustainability

View Profile



Janice Geel

Associate

View Profile