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Heroic efforts in fight against fire

Tremaine van Aardt

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A MODEST group of heroes have described their Herculean efforts to save Cape St Frances from a raging fire this week as simply "what was needed at the time".

Choking smoke, 15m-high flames and ever-changing winds threatening to incinerate hundreds of homes in the area did not deter courageous civilians from fighting fire with fire, water and bush.

Three such individuals are helicopter pilot Conrad Maree, 43, of George, landscaper John Elliot, 63, and forestry director Raymond Richie, 59, both of Cape St Francis. Together, they spent more than 100 hours helping to fight the inferno which sparked last Saturday.

While the cause of the fire is yet to be determined, the consequence is evident as hundreds of hectares of once lush fynbos and other indigenous flora surrounding the area were reduced to ash.

Maree, owner of Savannah Helicopters in George, said he had arrived in Cape St Francis with his AS-350 Airbus helicopter on Sunday evening after a friend called for help.

"I got the call at 5.15pm. When I got there I managed to do one load before nightfall. The fire was very widespread and was pushing towards the town. It looked very dire that night," he said.

During his 33-hour flight shift from Sunday to Wednesday, Maree said he had done about 500 round trips, picking up water from residents' pools or the sea and dropping it on

the fire.

"You can't fly straight through the smoke, so you have to judge it according to the fire line, where the fire is moving and so on," Maree said.

On Wednesday, the fire flared up again, causing panic, but was later contained by emergency services and locals like Richie and his team of 18 firefighters who were on site for the duration of the fire.

"When we started we were just checking on it and then we got involved, it was simply what was needed at the time. But everybody rallied together.

"For example, on Saturday night there was a fire threatening to break through one of our firebreaks. Then one guy got into one of his TLBs [trucks] and drove through it repeatedly, with flames higher than his head, and extinguished it. That was the type of dedication from residents," Richie said.

Elliot, whose experience allowed him to direct the volunteers, spent five days fighting the fire.

"The reason I ended up helping was simply because I was head of horticultural services at NMMU for 26 years and I was trained as an industrial and bush fire fighter.

"Everybody just pulled together. There were also people who constantly brought food, water and cold drinks to supply firefighters."

Kouga Municipality spokesman Mfundo Sobeke said yesterday afternoon the situation remained under control.

**United community effort:
Editorial comment Page 11**



DAUNTING CHALLENGE: Working on Fire helicopter pilot Nico Heyns works tirelessly with other emergency services and the community to contain the inferno which threatened the towns of Cape St Francis and St Francis Bay

PHOTOGRAPH: MARK WEST

Workshop to teach disaster management

SHEINA RAZACK

A BACK to Basics workshop will be held in Durban tomorrow and Wednesday to educate the community about disaster management.

The eThekweni municipality and provincial Disaster Management Centre have organised workshops to be held in Umlazi and Bester in KwaMashu.

"The workshops are aimed at educating members of the community

about disaster risk management and how to continuously build community safety and resilience in instances of disaster," the city's head of communications Tozi Mthethwa said.

Mthethwa said the SA Weather Services and Working on Fire, which deals with fire and emergency services, will also be present.

The drought is the most recent natural disaster that continues to have a negative effect in most parts of the city.

"Northern areas which are supplied by Hazelmere Dam are still under severe water restrictions due to the low water levels. About 33 000 water restrictors have been implemented in those areas," Mthethwa said.

The city's senior manager for water operations Ashan Nandlall said if all residents reduced their daily water consumption by 15%, further water restrictions will not be needed.

Tips to reduce water consumption:

- Fix leaking taps immediately. A dripping tap wastes up to 76 litres of water. A bucket can be placed under the tap and the water can be used for other purposes.

- Use a bucket to collect water from the shower while you're waiting for the water to warm up.

- Turn off the tap when brushing your teeth and save up to 6 litres of water a minute.

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Publication: Stanford River Talk

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Page: 4

Veld fire in Stanford



Ready this rumble: Fire fighting services parked at Coffee Corner HQ.

The Stanford fire started on Friday, 8 January 2016. The cause is under investigation. The fire was extremely difficult to contain due to the fuel load, weather conditions and limited vehicle access to the fire through the thick bush. Overstrand Fire Department and Overberg District Municipality responded to the fire and was assisted by ground teams from Working on Fire, Cape Nature and Volunteer Wildfire Services.

With a strong South Easterly behind the fire it managed to spread over the R43, which had to be closed to traffic for brief periods. Fire fighting efforts were concentrated on the flanks of the fire to ensure it did not spread towards Gansbaai or Stanford while the fire advanced towards the ocean. Aerial resources were deployed on multiple occasions to protect houses, farms and infrastructure in the area. By the fifth day of the fire, it entered the Walker Bay Nature Reserve where fire fighters worked to contain the fire in more favourable conditions.

The Overstrand community has once again proved to be highly supportive and generous. Thank you to all those individuals and companies who have kept the fire fighting teams fed and hydrated and provided needed resources to the Fire department. A special thank you to the goFPA, the landowners who made their resources available and the Stanford community for refreshments for the Stanford fire and other fires in the area.

Lester Smith, Chief Fire & Rescue and Disaster Management

Publication: Piketberger, Die
Date: 2016-02-01
Page: 22

Working on Fire in Piketberg



The 26 fire fighters from Working on Fire in the Eastern Cape arrived safely in Piketberg.

26 Fire fighters from Working on Fire (WoF) Eastern Cape recently arrived safely in Piketberg to provide much needed support to the Western Cape as many fires have swept across the province over the past few weeks.

The team has currently been dispatched to assist local fire authorities with a fire that broke out in Citrusdal.

As part of a resource sharing agreement between WoF and the Provincial Disaster Management Centre, the Stutterheim team will be stationed in Piketberg under the supervision of the Greater Cederberg Fire Protection Association.

Since December, the Western Cape utilized just under 800 fire fighters who provided fire suppression services to local fire authorities in battling more than 70 veld fires throughout the province.

Working on Fire, the National Department of Environmental Affairs Expanded Public Works programme is instrumental in fighting veld and forest fires. Today the programme employs more than 750 young men and women who have been fully trained as veld and forest fire fighting and are stationed at over 25 bases throughout the Western Cape.

Article and photo: Lauren Howard,
Provincial Communications Officer - Working on Fire

Publication: Burger (Oos Kaap)

Date: 2016-02-02

Page: 8

Dankie vir hulp om ons dorp te red

At Bouwer, Kaap St. Francis

As pensioenaris en inwoner van Kaap St. Francis ag ek dit my plig om 'n paar mense te bedank, dog ook sekere feite reg te stel.

Eerstens die mense op die grond. Daar is sekere mense van wie ek bewus geword het en wat bedank behoort te word: Trudie Malan, mnre. Ritchie, Elliot en Gumby, die Kraak-familie, Kwaailammie, White en verskeie brandweer-eenhede van die omliggende gebiede.

Daar is tans nie plaaslik brandbeheer-eenhede nie.

Met baie beperkte toerusting het almal ongelooflike werk verrig. Vergewe asseblief diegene wie se name ek nie ken nie en wat ek uitgelaat het. Julle het as 'n span onverpoosd saamgewerk.

Tweedens die lugbystand. Hier het Savannah-helikopters wonderlike diens verrig. Conrad Maree, die eienaar, het van Sondagmiddag tot Vrydag diens gedoen.

Maandag het Conrad met sy helikopter saam met Werk met Vuur (WoF) tot eenuur gewerk, waarna WoF besluit het die brand is in bedwang.

Die brand het Dinsdag weer opgevlam, en Arnold van Savan-

nah-helikopters het van Port Elizabeth gekom. Hy het begin vlieg, en Woensdag het hy die hele dag van ligdag tot donker die aand alleen 'n buitengewone taak verrig.

'n Tweede helikopter van Savannah, deur Mike gevlieg, is van George laat kom, en hy het hom Donderdag by Arnold aangesluit en gehelp.

Ek moet darem WoF bedank vir sy werk die Sondag en Maandag. Vrydag het hulle vir Links gewerk.

My groot bekommernis is oor die lugmag se twee helikopters wat eers Vrydag – vyf dae later – hier opgedaag het. Mag hulle hieruit leer om betyds te reageer en nie vyf dae later nie.

Na my beskeie opinie sou hulle Vrydag slegs afgebrande murasies en bosse gevind het sonder bogenoemde mense se astronomiese werk in die lug en op die grond deur vlamme te blus, voorbrande te maak en te sorg dat mense nie in gevaar gestel word nie deur waarskuwings te rig om hul huise betyds te ont-ruim.

Ons grootste dank is aan ons Hemelse Vader, wat ons gebede verhoor het en ons deur 'n wonderwerk van 'n groot ramp gered het. Nogmaals opregte dank.

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Page: 2

Eastern Cape wildland fire fighters on high alert

REPORTER

WORKING on Fire, the National Department of Environmental Affairs' programme to help fight veld and forest fires, has been hard at work during the past 2 months as its fire fighters were busy fighting multiple fires across the country.

Since December 2015 in the Eastern Cape alone, fire fighters provided fire suppression services to fire authorities in battling more than 11 "intense" veld fires throughout the province.

The latest fires was at St Francis Bay where two teams from Working on Fire (WoF) in the Eastern Cape namely Longmore and Krom Rivier assisted at the fire that broke out on Saturday at Cape St Francis Bay.

WoF experienced more than a 100 fires throughout the country during December 2015 with a total loss of 39 000 ha and fifty-two teams (1300 fire fighters) were active on these fires.

WoF fire fighters continue to remain on high alert and a national deployment team of fire fighters are ready to be dispatched to the Western Cape and other hotspot areas throughout

the country.

In the Eastern Cape close to 600 wildland fire fighters are stationed in 23 teams across the province and they will remain on high alert given the weather conditions. The Province will also undergo extensive community fire awareness campaigns during the next couple of months to prepare communities for the winter fire season.

Through their partnerships with Provincial Disaster Management Centres', Fire Protection Associations, SANParks, various private and public landowners and local municipalities, they will be able to respond quickly in rendering a highly skilled veld fire suppression service which is unparalleled anywhere in the province.

Working on Fire draws their firefighters from the poorest of the poor. They go through extensive training, and are characterized by their fitness, discipline and exceptional work ethic and bravery.

Thanks to their employment in the Working on Fire programme as an extension of the Expanded Public Works programme of govern-

ment they have been given a work opportunity to earn a living and to put food on the table.

Working on Fire is a national veld and forest fire fighting resource under the auspices of the Department of Environmental Affairs and it has close to 5 000 fire fighters based at 200 bases throughout the country.



Fire Fighters busy putting off fires around the country.
PHOTO:SUPPLIED

WoF team remain on high alert

BECKER SEMELA

WORKING on Fire (WoF), the national Department of Environmental Affairs programme to help fight veld and forest fires, has been hard at work during the past two months.

Firefighters have been fighting multiple fires not only in the Free State but across the country and even internationally.

Free State WoF's Limakatso Khalianyane said since December last year the province had 37 fires which included some intense fires.

"About 80% of these fires ravaged through the central part of the province. From May to December last year, our teams attended and suppressed 385 fires in the province," Khalianyane said.

She said as a result of the drought experienced throughout the country coupled with high temperatures they have had unusual fire activities in the Free State province which experienced 37 fires during December last year and a loss of 23 000ha. In December 2014 the Free State had no fires.

"Our firefighters continue to remain on high alert and a national deployment

team of firefighters are ready to be dispatched to the Western Cape and other hot spot areas throughout the country.

WoF is a national veld and forest fire fighting resource under the auspices of the Department of Environmental Affairs. It has close to 5 000 firefighters and 200 bases countrywide."

Khalianyane said the programme provided veld fire suppression support to the provinces, disaster management centres, fire protection associations and landowners like South African National Parks and more.

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Page: 2

Hawston ECD teachers taught about fire risks

Following the recent Hawston fire, Working on Fire (WoF) Western Cape conducted a fire safety workshop for 12 Early Childhood Development (ECD) teachers of the Hawston community at the Thusong Centre in Hawston.

Fire Awareness training officer Androlene Killian says “the aim of these workshops is to educate and empower teachers with [enough] knowledge to understand and identify fire risks in and around their schools”.

Teachers were also given information on how to conduct training classes in their schools for their learners. It is important that children are taught about the dangers of fires from an early age.

The latest fires in the Cape Peninsula and Overberg region had close

to 400 firefighters from WoF who are active in providing fire suppression services to local fire authorities. In addition, nine helicopters, 10 spotter planes and four fixed wing tractor bombers were active in the suppression of these fires.

Since December 2015 in the Western Cape alone, just under 800 firefighters provided fire suppression services in battling more than 90 veld fires throughout the province.

WoF Western Cape has close to 800 firefighters based at 28 bases throughout the province.

Their programme provides veld fire suppression support to the provinces, disaster management centres, fire protection associations and landowners such as the South African National Parks and CapeNature.

Fire fighters on high alert because of drought and high temperatures



Working on Fire, the Department of Environmental Affairs' programme to help fight veld and forest fires, has been hard at work during the past two months as its fire fighters were busy fighting multiple fires across the country.

Since December 2015 in the North West alone, fire fighters provided fire suppression services to fire authorities in battling intense veld fires throughout the province. "As a result of the current drought experienced throughout the country, coupled with high temperatures we have had unusual fire activities and our fire fighters stay on high alert," said spokesperson Patricia Maanelo.

Working on Fire draws its fire fighters from the poorest of the poor. They go through extensive training, and are characterised by their fitness, discipline and

exceptional work ethic and bravery. Many of these fire fighters who spend days and nights on end fighting these fires come from the impoverished communities.

Thanks to their employment in the Working on Fire programme as an extension of the expanded Public Works programme of government, they have been given an opportunity to earn a living and to put food on the table.

Working on Fire is a veld and forest fire fighting resource under the auspices of the Department of Environmental Affairs and it has close to 438 fire fighters based at 18 bases throughout the province. The programme provides veld fire suppression support to the provinces, disaster management centres, fire protection associations and landowners, like South African National Parks.

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Page: 11

St Francis Bay fires under control

● **Yolande Stander**
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For the first time in more than a week firefighters in the St Francis Bay area have been able to breathe a sigh of relief after a massive veld fire plagued the area since January 23.

On Monday, Kouga municipal spokesperson Mfundo Sobeke confirmed that the fire was under control. "This is the first time we have this status since the fire started," Mfundo said.

Before going to print municipal spokesperson Laura-Leigh Randall said while the status remained, there had been a few flare-ups, but nothing that could not be extinguished swiftly.

Garden Route fire teams have played

a major role in fighting the massive fire, which started in the Ima Booysen Flora Reserve.

One of the standout roleplayers was Knysna pilot Nico Heynes – of the Working on Fire (WoF) programme – who relentlessly scooped water from residents' swimming pools to douse the flames.

Randall said firefighters however remained in the area to monitor the situation, especially in the Rebelsrus area where vegetation was thick. "Because of the thick vegetation and deep-rooted plants, the earth underneath remains very hot and as soon as the wind picks up it could cause a flare-up again," Randall said.

He said fire teams would remain in the area until there was no longer any dan-

ger. "We are just hoping for some rain to wet the earth well."

Mfundo added there were helicopters on standby "in case of the unknown". "Fire is unpredictable and we have to be ready for any eventuality. So we are not totally out of the woods yet."

He also urged residents in the area to cut vegetation – especially trees – growing close to the walls of their homes to prevent fire spreading to their houses.

"This will also assist firefighters with access around the house in case of fire breaking out."

He also urged farmers in the area to start creating good fire breaks on their properties to prevent a quick spread of fire during times of emergency. "Our fire department can be contacted for advice."

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Local firefighters rush to assist in Kouga Municipality

GRAAFF-REINET — The Camdeboo Municipality's Protection Services joined various departments last week in assisting the Kouga Municipality with extinguishing the vegetation fires in the St Francis Bay area. According to Protection Services Manager, Chris Rhooode, several local authorities, including the Camdeboo Municipality, were requested by the Sarah Baartman District Municipality and the Kouga Municipal Fire Services' Joint Operation Centre (JOC) to assist with the out of control vegetation fires. "With the permission of our Municipal Manager, we dispatched our 4x4 Land Cruiser with a skid unit accompanied by myself and firefighters LLJ Meshilinie and TC Blouw," he explained. At approximately 6.25pm that same day, the team arrived at the St Francis Bay Fire Station and was briefed by Kouga Municipality Manager: Fire Services, Dewald Barnard. "We were divided into three groups, each with a 4x4 and a skid unit filled with 500 litres of

water. We commenced with the mopping-up of the smouldering vegetation in the sand dunes close to the houses and the airfield. The Working on Fire team also assisted in the areas where the 4x4 vehicles could not reach due to the density of the vegetation," Rhooode said. The team from the Camdeboo Municipality utilized five water tanks and worked right through the night because the SA Weather Services had predicted that an eastern wind with high humid conditions was expected which could flare the fire up and cause more damage to nearby houses. Rhooode explained that the biggest challenge was the high density of the vegetation between the sand dunes which caused another flare-up when it wasn't properly extinguished. "We used four tanks of water from our skid unit during the day and concentrated mostly on the area near the Airfield. "What impressed me the most was the support we received from various businesses as

well as the local community. They provided food, energy drinks and bottled water for the different fire teams. While we were working, fresh bottled water and energy drinks were delivered every hour at the different sites in order to ensure that the firemen didn't dehydrate while performing their duties."



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Wetlands Awareness Campaign

More than a billion people make a living from wetlands. Working on Fire (WoF) celebrated World Wetlands Day (2 February) at Island Lake - Wilderness National Park.

WoF, together with South African National Parks, CapeNature and the Thembalethu Community members, celebrated World Wetlands Day by hosting a wetlands and fire awareness campaign for 60 Tyholora Primary School children and facilitators.

The day was spent learning about the importance of wetlands and the advantages and disadvantages fire has on wetlands. Working on Fire Community Awareness Officer Rayganah Rhoda said, "Fire is both an advantage and disadvantage to wetlands. Therefore, it is important that we protect our wetlands areas as wetlands host a huge variety of life, protect our coastlines, and also provide a natural sponge against river flooding."

Advantage of fire on wetlands

- Fire may trigger seed release and germination in some species
- Fire stimulates the development of new green shoots, roots and rhizomes grasses, providing a food source for wildlife
- Fire may create pools for nesting and feeding waterbirds
- Fire eliminates impenetrable growth of plants such as sedges, rushes and bulrushes

Disadvantage of fire on wetlands

- Fire can lead to loss of seed as a consequence of inappropriate timing of fire
- Fire can lead to increased predation of seed by insects

- Fire can lead to loss of vegetation composition and structure
 - Fire can increase weed invasion and destruction of fauna habitat used for breeding, feeding and shelter
- "Thank you to our stakeholders for a great partnership and pulling together a successful wetlands programme," said Rhoda.

Working on Fire is a national veld and forest firefighting resource under the auspices of the Department of Environmental Affairs and it has close to 800 firefighters based at 28 bases throughout the Western Cape. The programme provides veldfire suppression support to the provinces, Disaster Management Centres, Fire Protection Associations and landowners like South African National Parks and CapeNature.



Tyholora Primary School pupils listen attentively as the importance of wetlands is explained.



WoF, South African National Parks, CapeNature and Thembalethu community members with Tyholora Primary School children and facilitators.

Fire fighters on high alert as high temperatures and drought continues to fan runaway veldfires

Working on Fire, the National Department of Environmental Affairs' programme to help fight veld and forest fires, has been hard at work during the past 2 months as its fire fighters were busy fighting multiple fires across the country.

Since December 2015 in the Eastern Cape alone, fire fighters provided fire suppression services to fire authorities in battling more than 9 "intense" veld fires throughout the province.

The province has 35 vehicles which consist of 13 buses, 4 Samil trucks, 3 Strike Units, 2 Fire Tanker and 13 bakkies

Working on Fire draws their firefighters from the poorest of the poor. They go through extensive training, and are characterized by their fitness, discipline and exceptional work ethic and bravery. Many of these fire

fighters who spend days and nights on end fighting these fires come from the impoverished communities.

Thanks to their employment in the Working on Fire programme as an extension of the Expanded Public Works programme of government they have been given a work opportunity to earn a living and to put food on the table.

Working on Fire is a national veld and forest fire fighting resource under the auspices of the Department of Environmental Affairs and it has close to 570 fire fighters based at 22 bases. The programme provides veld fire suppression support to the provinces, Disaster Management Centres, Fire Protection Associations and landowners like South African National Parks and Cape Nature.

Fire fighters on high alert as high temperatures and drought continues to fan runaway veldfires

'Working on Fire', the National Department of Environmental Affairs' programme to help fight veld and forest fires, has been hard at work during the past 2 months as its fire fighters were busy fighting multiple fires in Gauteng.

Since June 2015 in the Gauteng Province alone 400 veld and forest fire fighters provided fire suppression services to landowners in battling more unexpected veld fires throughout the province.

Our fire fighters continue to remain on high alert and a national deployment team of fire fighters is ready to be dispatched to the Western Cape and other hotspot areas throughout the country.

As a result of the current drought experienced throughout the country, coupled with high temperatures, there has been unusual high fire activity.

The National Department of Environmental Affairs' Working on Fire Programme is instrumental in fighting these fires.

Thanks to their employment in the Working on Fire Programme as an extension of the Expanded Public Works programme of government they have been given a work op-

portunity to earn a living and to put food on the table.

Provincial Communications Officer-Gauteng Province 0738719350



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Hope for All Outreach in collaboration with the Danté Chan Christian Community Centre and Manna for all poverty reduction, held a Christmas party for underprivileged children in children's homes as well as needy families in the community at the Isak Steyl Stadium on December 19. The kiddies had fun activities such as jumping castles, slides, pony rides, face painting, games, etc. They were also treated to a nice lunch, treats and goodie bags. Hope for All Outreach personally wants to thank all the wonderful donors that helped make this day possible as well as their hard-working staff. Mark Hughes is the director of Hope for All Outreach. For more information or donations contact their office on (016) 931 0951(Anca) or (016) 931 0243 (Debby) or 082 620 5760(Donna).



Some of the kiddies having fun.



The awesome gifts everyone was looking forward to unwrapping.

Fire fighters on high alert as high temperatures and drought continues to fan runaway veldfires

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People educated on importance of wetlands

BABALWA NDLANYA

MORE than 60 pupils from different schools and members of Working on Fire, the Department of Environmental Affairs, the police from Nquza Hill Municipality, Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism and San Parks celebrated World Wetlands Day at Mhlanga Junior Secondary School in Flagstaff last week.

The main purpose of the day was to educate everyone about the importance of wetlands as well as the advantages and disadvantages of fire on wetlands.

Environmental officer Luyolo Sheyi said wetlands were important because they reduced the severity of droughts and floods by regulating stream flow.

“We should not destroy wetlands or turn them into dumping sites as they provide livelihood resources to the rural poor in the form of drinking water,” Sheyi said.

Community fire awareness officer Wongama Copiso from Working on Fire said one of the disadvantages of fire on wetlands was that it could lead to loss of seed if it occurred at the wrong time.

“It can also lead to loss of vegetation composition and structure,” Copiso said.

Pupils performed poems that emphasised the importance of the wetlands.

Working on Fire is a national veld and forest fire fighting resource under the auspices of the Department of Environmental Affairs and it has close to 600 fire fighters based at 22 bases throughout the Eastern Cape.

The programme provides veld fire suppression support to the provinces, Disaster Management Centres, Fire Protection Associations and land owners like South African National Parks and Cape Nature.

There were 27 schools who attended this event, among them was Hlabathi J.S.S, Mkhankomo J.S.S, Mkambathi S.P.S, Mat-



Working on Fire Workers attended an event at Mhlanga J.S.S where they taught people and learners about the importance of wetlands.
PHOTO: BABALWA NDLANYA

hambo S.P.S, Ginyindlovu S.P.S, Mkamela J.S.S, Gebhuza J.S.S, Edolophini J.S.S, Kwa Mhlanga J.S.S, Darkly Finiza J.S.S, Kwa Qonda Full Service School, Mpingana S.S.S, Izimisele J.S.S, Mtomntsasa J.S.S, Kwa Mbono J.S.S, Mgwili S.P.S, Luphondo J.S.S, Gebuza J.S.S, Ngwenyeni J.S.S, Singembeni S.P.S, Ntabezwe J.S.S, Holy Cross J.S.S, Khabingele S.P.S, Kwa Velile J.S.S, Zwelibongile S.S.S,

Jikindaba S.S.S.

The winner of National Championships in Environmental Awards, Nobulali Ndungane (a teacher from Hlabathi J.S.S) said they were happy to get such an education. “As educators we were not aware of the importance of wetlands until last week. The stakeholders made us aware that wetlands are very important because they give life to others,” said Ndungane.

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IHLM hosts Wetlands Day

LWANDO NONKONYANA

INGQUZA Hill Local Municipality and Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency held a Wetlands Day last Tuesday at Mhlanga Junior Secondary School in Flagstaff to educate and outline the importance of keeping both natural and artificial wet areas safe.

Learners from Mhlanga school and the surrounding schools under Mkhambathi Environmental Education and Awareness Forum, parents, teachers, traditional and political leaders attended the event.

Also forming part of the gathering were representatives from the Department of Education, Department of Environment Affairs and Tourism (DEAT), SAPS, Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), Working on Fire (WOF) and the Department of Economic Development, En-

vironmental Affairs and Tourism (DED-EAT).

Councillor Bambezakhe Goya, on behalf of IHLM Mayor Pat Mdingi, highlighted the importance of conserving these areas. He said everyone must own this and school children are a relevant crowd to be educated on this subject.

“We should embrace these wetlands as it is our responsibility as communities to conserve them.

“People should make it a point that they educate their children against destroying places like lakes, springs, swamps, etc. as they all contribute to a lot of living inhabitants,” he said.

All speakers urged the communities to take it upon themselves in making sure wetlands are protected.

It was an eventful day with drama, poetry and coral music being performed by Working on Fire and Field Rangers



Learners from Mhlanga school attending the Wetlands Day event held at their school last Tuesday.
PHOTO:LWANDO NONKONYANA

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Hot stuff: The Working on Fire team in Robertson wait to be called out (left) while Christalene da Kella (right) runs through the basics of training

In these fires, new lives are forged

'Working' programmes give hope to those who would otherwise be discouraged jobseekers

Sipho Kings

I started out with nothing. No degree and no job, living in a small town where there was no hope for me," says Christalene da Kella. Originally from Riversdal, her fortunes have changed since joining the Working on Fire programme.

"It took me out and gave me a place to work, and a chance to lift myself up," she says.

She joined the local firefighting team so she could stay close to her parents, but with some training she was promoted to work in the Cape Town sector, where the fires are the worst in the country.

Teased for her small stature, she soon shut up her teammates by carrying more and hiking further than anyone else — teams often hike 15km up mountains to get behind a fire.

Her parents weren't happy. "I had to phone my parents before every fire. They were so worried."

Further training followed and she moved to a desk job — to her frustration. These days she uses her hands for emphasis, driving home points when talking to some of the 200 Working on Fire teams dotted around the country. Her emphasis is on ensuring people get training.

"We really can make people's lives better, and how many jobs can be better than that?"

Her story is not unique in a subset of government programmes that have grown to have a huge footprint. At the 2015 State of the Nation address, President Jacob Zuma said: "Our environment programmes have created more than 30 000 work opportunities and aim to create more than 60 000 during the financial year. The environment department has been given R2.4-billion this financial year from the Expanded Public Works programme to achieve this target."

The programmes that the department manages trace their heritage back to 1995, when then water minister Kader Asmal started the Working for Water programme. With a budget of R25-million, this had the twofold objective of creating jobs in areas that had little else in the way of



Runway pat: The Working on Fire teams carry out controlled burns and are sent around the country to put out runaway blazes. Photo: David Harrison

industry, and providing the labour needed to clear out invasive plant species. Since then, more than a million hectares of wattle and other invasive species have been cleared — allowing more water to flow into South Africa's rivers and dams.

The programme's Christo Marais, says this started a series of environmental programmes: "Historically, conservation was considered a nice thing for the rich just to have. It was thought poor countries didn't have the money. Working for Water showed a healthy environment can be the bread and butter of the poor."

These programmes expanded to include Working for Ecosystems, Working for the Coast, Working for Land, Working for Wetlands, Working for Waste and Working on Fire. The department of environ-

mental affairs says the programmes created 65 500 "work opportunities" and 34 000 "full-time equivalent jobs" this financial year.

The success of the most dangerous of these programmes — Working on Fire — can be traced in the fires that do not happen. Lashers and controlled man-made fires clear strips to contain possible fires. When a fire does burst out of its constraints, the 25-member teams use beaters to smother flames while they cut paths to send them into a dead zone.

Their industrial yellow trucks — packed with firefighters in their blue pants, crisp yellow shirts and polished black shoes — crisscross the country as teams from different provinces support each other when the fire seasons start. Fitness is critical. To get into Working on Fire, a person has to do 40 push-ups, 40 sit-ups and run 2.4km in 12 minutes. They also need to pass a fitness test to ensure that asthmatics and people who shouldn't be near a fire are kept out.

The programme's firefighters conduct themselves with an almost foolhardy level of bravado, except they are trained to keep every situation under control. The *Mail & Guardian*

spent a day with the Robi Hotshots team — based outside the small wine town of Robertson in the Western Cape — three years ago and has kept in contact with them ever since.

In that hot February the whole Western Cape was on fire, with the team hunkering down in their rickety bunk beds after an exhausting 48-hour battle with one stubborn fire. The team were still shellshocked from fighting fires that swirled around them and on a few occasions cut off their escape routes.

Albert Snyman, rubbing his wrinkled face, says some on the team only escaped by jumping into a dam.

"The fire boiled the water on the surface," he says. A handful had to go to hospital to have minor burns treated. "It was the demon that came that day."

The teams get regular counselling for this severity of incident. They also spend their days talking to each other and working through issues — while doing constant fitness drills. Snyman, like his peers, says the job has taken him away from a potentially troubled life.

"When you don't have work there are so many paths you can take. Your friends do drugs and struggle to

make it through. This — Working on Fire — gives you structure and something to work for."

Many members of other "Working For" groups to whom the *M&G* has spoken share this conviction — that in these programmes they have found the opportunity to uplift themselves.

Patricia Molope, wearing the blue overalls of Working for Water, says that programme gave her "the only chance" to get out of her job on a farm and start working in the Free State town of Ficksburg. A shy woman, she moved away from her team members to talk about how she had finished high school since she started working. "The money isn't much, but it gives you a chance to do better in your life."

That money — the programmes started off paying people R35 an hour and now pay about R70 an hour — has come under sustained criticism over the years. The focus on numbers above all else has also drawn criticism.

Robert McCutcheon, a researcher on the expanded programme, says the overriding focus on the number of temporary job opportunities created has been to the detriment of training. "In the infrastructure component of the programme, nowhere near as much employment was generated per unit of expenditure as could have been achieved using proper labour-intensive methods."

Where the wider Expanded Public Works Programme has a problem with numbers — only some 12% of its budget goes into salaries — the Working For programmes tend to be closer to the best practice goal of a 50% spend on salaries.

The effect of the Working For programmes has seen them hailed as best practice. Working for Water is used by the United Nations as an example of mixing ecological management with work creation in rural areas. It is replicated in South America and elsewhere in Africa.

For the dozens of people — wearing orange, blue or yellow uniforms — the programmes are often the only income supporting an extended family. Maria Shiluvani, a heavy-set truck driver for Working on Wetlands, says the few thousand rand a month feeds six people.

"I enjoy the work because I am making my province [Limpopo] more beautiful and, if I work harder, there is training so I can one day go and start my own business."

Temperatures and drought: fire fighters on high alert

Working on Fire, the National Department of Environmental Affairs' programme to help fight veld and forest fires, has been hard at work during the past 2 months as its fire fighters were busy fighting multiple fires across the country.

Since December 2015 in the Free State 115 fire fighters provided fire suppression services to fire authorities in battling 37 fires which included some of intense fires. 80 Percent of these fires ravaged through the central parts of the province.

From May 2015 to December 2015, our teams had attended and suppressed 385 fires in the

province.

As a result of the current drought experienced throughout the country coupled with high temperatures we have had unusual fire activities in the Free State province which experienced 37 fires during December 2015 and a loss of 23 000 ha. (In December 2014 the Free State had no fires)

Our fire fighters continue to remain on high alert and a national deployment team of fire fighters are ready to be dispatched to the Western Cape and other hotspot areas throughout the country.

Working on Fire is a national veld and forest fire fighting resource under the auspices of the Department of Environmental Affairs and it has close to 5000 fire fighters based at 200 bases throughout the country. The programme provides veldfire suppression support to the provinces, Disaster Management Centres, Fire Protection Associations and landowners like South African National Parks and more.

Limakatso Khalianyane
Bloemfontein

Publication: Pondo News
Date: 2016-02-12
Page: 6

Kufundiswe uluntu ngokubaluleka kwemigxobhozo



La ngamalungu ecandelo i-Working on Fire kunye namalungu esebe lolondolozo lwendalo.

LUSIKISIKI: Bangaphezulu kwamashumi amathandathu abafundi bezikolo ezohlukeneyo abathe badibana kwisikolo iMhlanga J.S.S kutsha nje nalapho bebeyekuxhotyiswa ngolwazi.

Aba babafundi banikwe ulwazi ngokubaluleka kwemigxobhozo kwindalo. Oku kwenziwe licandelo iWorking on Fire, isebe

lolondolozo lwendalo, umasipala Ingquza Hill kwakunye ne-Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism. Igosa ebelisuka kwisebe lolondolozo lwendalo uLuyolo Sheyi uthe, imigxobhozo ibalulekile kuba inciphisa ubungozi obenziwa yimbalela. “Mayingajongelwa phantsi imigxobhozo kuba inika amanzi anempilo khonukuze umntu asele amanzi

acocekileyo”, utshilo uSheyi. Kusenjalo Wongama Copiso oligosa lakwaWorking on Fire uvakalise ukuba umlilo ungonakalisa imigxobhozo utshise iingcambu lonto ikhokhele ekubeni umhlaba wonakale.

Ukanti abafundi bathe babonakalisa izakhono zabo ngokuthi benze imibongo egxininisa ukubaluleka kwemigxobhozo.

Publication: Home Ads News (Mossel Bay)

Date: 2016-02-16

Page: 4

Working on Fire educates on wetlands

More than a billion people make a living from wetlands. Working on Fire (WoF) celebrates World Wetlands Day at Island Lake - Wilderness National Park.

WoF together with South African National Parks, Cape Nature and the Thembaletu Community members celebrated World Wetlands Day by hosting a wetlands and fire awareness campaign for 60 Tyholora Primary School children and facilitators.

The day was spent learning about the importance of wetlands and the advantages and disadvantages fire has on wetlands.

"Fire is both an advantage and disadvantage to wetlands, therefore it is important that we protect our wetlands areas, as wetlands host a huge variety of life, protect our coastlines, and also provides a natural sponge against river flooding," says Working on Fire Community Awareness Officer, Rayganah Rhoda.

Advantages of fire on wetlands:

- Fire may trigger seed release and germination in some species
- Fire stimulates the development of new green shoots, roots and rhizomes grasses, providing a food source for wildlife
- Fire may create pools for nesting and feed-

ing waterbirds

- Fire eliminates impenetrable growth of plants such as sedges, rushes & bulrushes

Disadvantages of fire on wetlands:

- Fire can lead to loss of seed as a consequence of inappropriate timing of fire
- Fire can lead to increased predation of seed by insects
- fungal attack on seeds
- Fire can lead to loss of vegetation composition and structure
- Fire can increase weed invasion, and destruction of fauna habitat used for breeding, feeding and shelter.

"Thank you our stakeholders for a great partnership and pulling together a successful wetlands programme," says Rhoda.

Working on Fire is a national veld and forest fire fighting resource under the auspices of the Department of Environmental Affairs and it has close to 800 fire fighters based at 28 bases throughout the Western Cape.

The programme provides veldfire suppression support to the provinces, Disaster Management Centres, Fire Protection Associations and landowners like South African National Parks and CapeNature.

Publication: Heidelberg Nigel Heraut
Date: 2016-02-17
Page: 3

All must help to remove invasive alien plant (Pompom)

HEIDELBERG - The Working on Fire teams (WoF) are battling an invasive plant in Gauteng and are asking the assistance of land owners and the public in general to assist them in this fight. According to biodiversity experts the alien invasive plant called *Campuloclinium Macrocephalum*, popular known as Pompom, is the biggest threat to vegetation and



grass- and wetlands especially in the Gauteng province where it is highly visible. Teams have been hard at work removing this invasive plant that causes the extinction of indigenous plants and eventually can lead to soil erosion. It is especially nature reserves and farms that are highly affected by this plant.

Thulani Nkosi (fire fighter from Roodeplaatt) is one of the participants that are trained to identify and remove alien invasive plants. "Since the beginning of the year, our team has been focusing on removing the Pompom in the Roodeplaatt Nature Reserve. My work is to apply herbicide after my colleagues have cut off the flowers of the plant."

He said the team is guided by biodiversity officers of the reserve on the methods of removing the alien plant. Alien plants consume a lot of water, thus threatening the existence of indigenous plants.

Thulani explains that the WoF team's primary mandate in the nature reserve is to help with fire breaks, grass slashing and fire suppression before and during fire season. "We normally help the reserve with the removal of all types of alien invasive plants during the off fire season."

WoF is asking people to assist them with this cause and not to plant alien invasive plants in their gardens, even if it looks like a beautiful flower. "Pompom is unpalatable to livestock and it spreads rapidly when it is dry. We are advised not to burn it because in that way it will multiply and spread fast. We cut it and then wrap it in big plastic bags," Thulani concluded.

Stephen Boyes (WoF general manager: Gauteng) confirmed a commitment of the province on biodiversity management through removing invasive alien plants. "Our firefighters are instrumental in protecting the environment," he said.

The Working on Fire team is committed to remove an invasive alien plant in Gauteng known as Pompom and ask the community and land owners to assist them.

Publication: Hermanus Times
Date: 2016-02-18
Page: 2

What the fires in the Overstrand area cost

JAN-HENDRIK COETZER

Throughout the fire season in the Western Cape, from November 2015 to January 2016, the Overstrand Fire Department together with Disaster Management attended to a total of 250 fire incidents in the Overstrand region.

This was down from last year, which saw a total of 330 incidents, however, this year it was costing more.

During these outbreaks, ground support was called on from Working on Fire, Vulcan Wildlife Management and Volunteer Wildfire Services.

According to Neville Michaels, director of Protection Services at the Overstrand Municipality, it was the first time the Overstrand Fire Department had worked with the Vulcan Wildlife Management and Volunteer Wildfire Services.

"At one stage no aerial support was available from the usual service provider due to other fires elsewhere, and aerial support was obtained from the Cape Winelands District Municipality," Michaels said. "The Overberg District Municipality was the only municipality that assisted with additional crew and vehicle resources."

The Overstrand Fire Department attended to a total of seven large fires during December and January, which occurred in Fernkloof, Preekstoel, Leopard Rock, Stanford, Hawston, Pearly Beach and Uitsig.

Michaels said that since the

start of the fire season, just over R1,3 million was spent on aerial and ground teams alone. This was about R27 000 more than last year.

"This involves only the use of aerial and ground support teams during the large and extended fires," he said. "The longest running fire was at Stanford on 8 January."

According to Michaels, R1 650 and R550 will be charged for services rendered for the extinguishing of structural and veld and bush fires respectively, as per the approved tariff structure for 2015/16.

"The cost is determined per hour for all vehicles attending to the incident. The total cost of extinguishing these fires was R364 100, and R16 500 for extinguishing fires at structures. During the fire season at least R300 800 overtime was paid to senior officials and fire fighters."

Overstrand Municipality is deeply grateful to the community and organisations for the generous donations that were received during the fight against this disaster crisis.

"Just over R50 000 was spent on food and refreshments for the fire fighters and other services," Michaels said.

"With the current staff compliment, many staff members had to work above normal hours in order to extinguish the fires. One also has to keep in mind that the big fires from last year only started in February, and that there are still two months left in this fire season."

Publication: Kokstad Advertiser
Date: 2016-02-18
Page: 6

Wetlands Awareness in Lusikisiki

*Issued by Eastern Cape provincial Communication Officer,
Nthabsieng Mokone*

More than 60 school learners from different schools together with Working on Fire, Department of Environmental Affairs, SAPS, Nquza Hill Municipality, Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism and Sanparks celebrated World Wetlands Day at Mhlanga JSS on the 2nd of this Month.

The main purpose of the day was to educate everyone about the importance of wetlands as well as the advantages and disadvantages of fire on wetlands.

Luyolo Sheyi the environmental officer said that wetlands are important because they reduce the severity of the droughts and floods by regulating stream flow.

"We should not destroy wetlands or turn them to be the dumping sites as they provide live hood resources to rural poor in the form of drinking water," Sheyi emphasised

Wongama Copiso the Community Fire awareness officer from Working on Fire said that one of the disadvantages of fire on wetlands is that it can lead to loss of seed due to wrong timing of fire.

"It can also lead to loss of vegetation composition and structure," Copiso added

School learners performed the poems that emphasized the importance of the wetlands

Working on Fire is a national veld and forest fire fighting resource under the auspices of the Department of Environmental Affairs and it has close to 600 fire fighters based at 22 bases throughout the

Eastern Cape.

The programme provides veld fire suppression support to the provinces, Disaster Management Centres, Fire Protection Associations and landowners like South African National Parks and CapeNature.



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Mookgophong produces first female driver for Working on Fire Limpopo



Working on Fire Limpopo's first female driver Sekie Lekalakala of Mookgophong. Photo: Lizzy Bapela

Lizzy Bapela

"If it has four wheels, then Sekie can easily drive it." A dream came true for Working on Fire Limpopo's driver Sekie Lekalakala of Mookgophong when she was crowned the first female driver for WoF in the province.

Lekalakala joined WoF as a firefighter in September 2010. She heard from her friends that the programme was recruiting firefighters and she promptly applied. She sailed through the recruitment process at WoF which secured her a spot as a firefighter.

She said that she was motivated by the women who were driving Samil trucks during the wildfire congress held in Rustenburg in 2011, and knew immediately that she also had to be behind the steering wheel. She saw herself in that position. She had a Code 10 driver's licence, and had driven a truck before.

She said that her colleagues laughed at her when she first told them, but when they saw how serious she was they became supportive.

"Sekie applied to be a driver on 24 September 2014 and went through the necessary training which she passed without any hassles. She proved that she was born to drive a truck," said WoF Limpopo spokesperson Matema Gwangwa

"She passed her probation in February 2015 and was authorised to be a Samil truck driver," she said.

Lekalakala said that her highlight moment was driving the fire truck as if she was driving a bakkie, which earned her some respect among her male colleagues. Her only challenge, she says, is working far away from home and from her two lovely children, but she is lucky because her sister looks after them in her absence.

"I am very blessed to have a supportive family and colleagues who always encourage me to look beyond my capabilities and work harder towards reaching my dream of being the first woman to drive a Samil in the province," she said.

Lekalakala would like to see herself as a transport manager one day and she believes she will be able to get there through hard work, determination, respect and her willingness since everything is possible with WoF, offering support to its beneficiaries.

Publication: New Age, The
Date: 2016-02-19
Page: 7

Firefighters on high alert despite heavy rains

SIBONGISENI MAPHUMULO

DESPITE the heavy rains in the province for the past couple of days the Working on Fire (WoF) organisation remains on high alert.

WoF, a national Department of Environmental Affairs' programme to help fight veld and forest fires, said the danger of wild fires was still high due to the drought and scorching temperatures.

The organisation's spokesperson, Nompilo Zondi, said it had an unusual number of fires as an early start to this fire season.

WoF teams responded to seven fires in December and last month.

"The province experienced fires as early as April and the WoF teams responded to 261 fires," Zondi said.

She said the winter fire season tended to officially start in May ending in November.

"WoF has had an early start to this fire season, they have been hard at work during the past two months, as its firefighters were busy fighting multiple fires in the province."

Most of the firefighters who work for the organisation come from rural and impoverished communities, the most affected areas by wildfires.

WoF has close to 5 000 firefighters based at 200 bases throughout the country.



HIGH ALERT: The drought and scorching heat has led to an increase in wild fires in KZN. PICTURE: WO F

"Our firefighters continue to remain on high alert and a national deployment team of firefighters are ready to be dispatched to the Western Cape and other high risk areas throughout the country," Zondi said.

provinces@thnewage.co.za

Publication: Vanderbijlpark Ster
Date: 2016-02-23
Page: 31

Fire fighters on high alert as high temperatures and drought continues to fan runaway veldfires

'Working on Fire', the National Department of Environmental Affairs' programme to help fight veld and forest fires, has been hard at work during the past 2 months as its fire fighters were busy fighting multiple fires in Gauteng. Since June 2015 in the Gauteng Province alone 400 veld and forest fire fighters provided fire suppression services to landowners in battling more unexpected veld fires throughout the province.

Our fire fighters continue to remain on high alert and a national deployment team of fire fighters is ready to be dispatched to the Western Cape and other hotspot areas throughout the country.

As a result of the current drought experienced throughout the country, coupled with high temperatures, there has been unusual high fire activity.

The National Department of Environmental Affairs' Working on Fire Programme is instrumental in fighting these fires.

Thanks to their employment in the Working on Fire Programme as an extension of the Expanded Public Works programme of government they have been given a work opportunity to earn a living and to put food on the table.

Provincial Communications Officer-Gauteng Province 0738719350



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Wetlands Day celebrated

LEARNERS of schools and representatives of organisations who attended the Wetlands Day celebration.

Photo: Supplied

BETHLEHEM. – The Dihlabeng Local Municipality celebrated Wetlands Day on Thursday (19/02) at the Captain Charles Dam.

A number of organisations took part in this celebration.

Amongst those who attended the celebrations were representatives of Working on Fire, the Expanded Public Works Programme, Tholoana – an environmental consultant organisation, and the Department of

Environmental Affairs.

The purpose of the day was to educate the public and more especially learners of schools about preservation and informing them about what wetlands are.

According to Mpho Motaung, Dihlabeng environmental scientist, a wetland is a land area that is saturated with water, either permanently or seasonally, such that it takes on the characteristics

of a distinct ecosystem.

“The primary factor that distinguishes wetlands from other land forms or water bodies is the characteristic vegetation of aquatic plants adapted to the unique hydric soil.

“Wetlands play a number of roles in the environment, principally water purification, flood control, carbon sink and shoreline stability,” Motaung said.

Working on Fire raises wetlands awareness

BECKER SEMELA

WORKING on Fire (WoF), the Department of Environmental Affairs' programme to help fight veld and forest fires celebrated Wetlands Day in Bethlehem on Friday.

The celebration at Captain Charles Dam in Bohlakong near Bethlehem was in partnership with the environmental affairs office in the Dihlabeng local municipality as well as the regional environmental health office from the Thabo Mofutsanyana district municipality.

WoF provincial spokesperson Limakatso Khalianyane said grade 5 and 6 pupils from Rehopotse and Nthute Primary Schools were also part of the celebration.

She said the aim of the day was to raise awareness about the importance of wetlands and how it benefits communities.

"Pupils from both schools were taught about the importance of protecting and ensuring that wetlands are not contaminated," Khalianyane said.

She said all the stakeholders involved share the same message.

"During the month of February our firefighters visit schools as usual, however, this month they focus on teaching pupils about wetlands and their importance and how fire can be used as a management tool for our wetlands."

Khalianyane said the activities of the day included the cleaning of the banks of the Captain

Charles Dam and members of the public who attended the event collected garbage around the dam.

Mpho Motaung, an environmental officer from Dihlabeng local municipality emphasised the importance of saving the environment.

"Our wetlands give life to the surrounding communities and they prevent soil erosion, if it wasn't for the wetlands our surrounding houses are going to be flooded with water," Motaung said.

"We should not litter in the wetlands because life in our wetlands would die."

Grace Ramokotjo, an environmental health practitioner in the Thabo Mofutsanyana district municipality, appealed to pupils to refrain from littering and polluting the wetlands.

"We want to relay a message that our wetlands need to be preserved and conserved in such a way that it helps the living and non-living factors such as bird life and fish among them," Ramokotjo said.

beckers@thenewage.co.za



AWARE: WoF highlights the importance of fire and wetlands.

Dad tells how WoF saves his life

AT 25 YEARS Petros Tshwari of Ratanda township outside Heidelberg has never worked in his life. He is a father of two.

Tshwari's young life was saved by fire and here is his story.

"In my life I had never tasted the fruits of employment up until I was employed by the Working on Fire (WoF) programme's Heidelberg base in December 2015," an emotional Tshwari said.

He said that one day he saw a Working on Fire advertisement in the local shop whereby they needed to employ six young people.

"I had already lost hope in life", Tshwari said when recollecting memories of his trials and tribulations in the build up towards his employment.

He said people who turned up for the recruitment were more than 150 on the day. Tshwari said he was anxious because he had the pressure of feeding and clothing his kids at home.

According to Tshwari, he wanted to change his life for the better by securing a job opportunity at Working on Fire.

"I recall waking up in the morning washing and walking from Ratanda to Heidelberg which is about 10km to do fitness tests of 2.4km, pushups and sit-ups at the WoF sta-

Analysis PARAPARA MAKGAHLELA

tion to be recruited" Tshwari said.

He said the recruitment process was challenging and tough because it was very competitive. "Four people were taken from my group which I led by obtaining first place".

Tshwari said: "Other people did not succeed, it hurt me because I know the pain of being unemployed."

According to Tshwari, his recruitment as a firefighter meant life was never the same again.

The WoF programme is funded by the Department of Environmental Affairs as one of the extended public works programmes

"I had second thought of quitting after being employed because of the toughness of the training, but who was going to care for me if I did quit?" he said.

"After receiving and using my first stipend at the end of the month, any thoughts of quitting changed irrevocably," Tshwari said.

He said that he was able to pay his bills and put food on the table for himself and family.

General manager Stephen Boyes of the Working on Fire programme in Gauteng province said that he was proud to have saved a young life using fire.

"WoF draws its firefighters from the poorest of the poor.

"They go through extensive training and are characterised by their fitness, discipline, work ethics and bravery.

"Many of the firefighters who spend days and nights fighting fires come from impoverished communities," Boyes said.

Thanks to their employment in the Working on Fire programme as an extension of the expanded public works programme of the government they have been given a work opportunity to earn a living and to put food on the table.

"Through our partnerships with provincial disaster management centres, fire protection associations, SANParks, various private and public landowners and local municipalities, we will be able to respond quickly in rendering a highly skilled veld fire suppression service which is unparalleled anywhere in the province," Boyes said.

Parapara Makgahlala is provincial communication officer in the Gauteng Working on Fire programme

KEY POINTS

» At 25 years Petros Tshwari of Ratanda township outside Heidelberg has never worked in his life. He is a father two. Tshwari's young life was saved by fire and here is his story

» 'In my life I had never tasted the fruits of employment until I was employed by the Working on Fire programme's Heidelberg base in December 2015,' an emotional Tshwari said

» He said that one day he saw a Working on Fire advertisement in the local shop whereby they needed to employ six young people

» 'I had already lost hope in life,' said Tshwari when recollecting memories of his trials and tribulations in the build up towards his employment

» He said people who turned up for the recruitment were more than 150 on the day. Tshwari said he was anxious because he had the pressure of feeding and clothing his kids at home

» According to Tshwari, he wanted to change his life for the better by securing a job opportunity at Working on Fire

» 'I recall waking up in the morning washing and walking from Ratanda to Heidelberg which is about 10km to do fitness tests of 2.4km, pushups and sit-ups at the fire station to be recruited,' Tshwari said

Editorial

Shortly before this edition was completed, I was invited to attend the Jonker Sailplanes' celebration in Potchefstroom of the roll out of the 100th edition of the now world famous JS1. The feature is published on page 98. This event reminded me of just how many excellent South African aviation products have made their mark in international markets. Apart from Jonker Sailplanes there is the significant success story of the Sling 2 and Sling 4, both of which have flown around the world several times and have taken the world's Light Sport Aircraft industry by storm. We also have MGL Avionics, which manufactures special aircraft avionics in Cape Town. Many of the company's products are to be found in many of the world's sport aircraft and MGL is making inroads into the international avionics business. At AAD2016 at Air Force Base (AFB) Waterkloof in September, African Pilot will once again plan several aerial photographic sorties to photograph as many of South African designed aircraft and drones as possible the weekend before the exhibition starts.

This edition contains our annual Grand Central Airport survey starting on page 46. This is probably the most comprehensive survey of Grand Central Airport that has ever been undertaken in part due to the excellent relationship my team has with the management at the airport as well as most of the businesses based at the Midrand airfield.

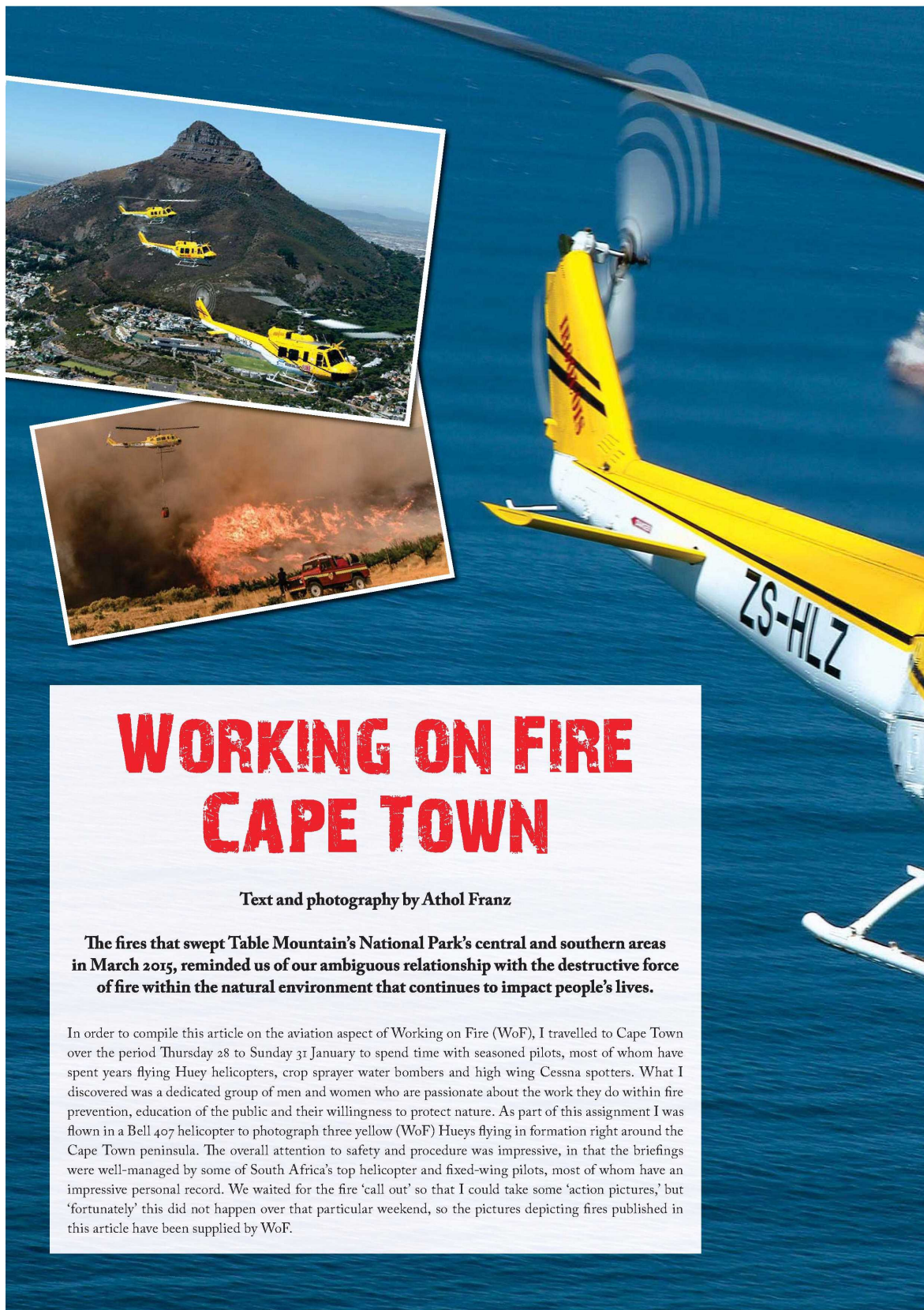
Once again we have presented our annual Business Jets' survey starting on page 60 of this edition. This has been an interesting

exercise as there have been many changes in the BusinessJet market over recent years with some types coming out of production, whilst other types have been shelved altogether. We have included some of the 'start up' Business Jets, some of which have been around for several years, but have yet to make that first flight.

Our considerable coverage of Working on Fire (WoF) was prompted by the need to tell the success story of this significant group of people who regularly risk their lives in an attempt to control wild fires, many of which have been deliberately set by careless and uneducated people. The cover feature starts on page 40 of this edition and we will be giving away a beautiful coffee table book: 'The Cape Aflame – Cape Town's Dance with Fire' as this month's cover prize. Please refer to the competition on page 4 of this edition to enter.

Finally, the Commercial Aviation Association of South Africa's (CAASA) call for examples of where the South African Civil Aviation Authority (SA CAA) has been 'off side' in the manner in which technical and other matters are managed at the regulator, has borne fruit in that many complaints submitted by the aviation industry are being processed by CAASA in order to develop the dossier that will be tabled before the Director of Civil Aviation (DCA) in due course.

Please enjoy this edition and fly safely,
Athol Franz



WORKING ON FIRE CAPE TOWN

Text and photography by Athol Franz

The fires that swept Table Mountain's National Park's central and southern areas in March 2015, reminded us of our ambiguous relationship with the destructive force of fire within the natural environment that continues to impact people's lives.

In order to compile this article on the aviation aspect of Working on Fire (WoF), I travelled to Cape Town over the period Thursday 28 to Sunday 31 January to spend time with seasoned pilots, most of whom have spent years flying Huey helicopters, crop sprayer water bombers and high wing Cessna spotters. What I discovered was a dedicated group of men and women who are passionate about the work they do within fire prevention, education of the public and their willingness to protect nature. As part of this assignment I was flown in a Bell 407 helicopter to photograph three yellow (WoF) Hueys flying in formation right around the Cape Town peninsula. The overall attention to safety and procedure was impressive, in that the briefings were well-managed by some of South Africa's top helicopter and fixed-wing pilots, most of whom have an impressive personal record. We waited for the fire 'call out' so that I could take some 'action pictures,' but 'fortunately' this did not happen over that particular weekend, so the pictures depicting fires published in this article have been supplied by WoF.

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What happened in 2015?

During the 2015 Western Cape summer fire season, tragically whilst fighting simultaneous fires within the Muizenberg and Cape Point regions, the fires tested the hundreds of firefighters involved, whilst the tragedy of the loss of life of one seasoned Huey helicopter pilot Hendrik Marais, had far reaching implications on WoF. As a government-funded, job-creation programme, WoF focuses on integrated fire management in South Africa. Whilst WoF fire fighters are recruited from marginalised communities and trained in fire awareness, education, prevention and fire suppression skills, these young men and women are grouped together to form veld and forest fire fighting ground crews, stationed at bases around the country to help stop the scourge of wildfire which costs the South African economy billions annually. In the western Cape, firefighters are based at the following places: Bredasdorp, George, Porterville, Stilbaai, Knysna, Swellendam, Newlands Forest and Stellenbosch.

Creating jobs for South Africans

The multi-million-rand programme is primarily geared towards assisting government to fulfill its job creation and social upliftment promise to the people of South Africa. Presently there are more than 6000 beneficiaries in the programme, 85% of whom are young people of which 29% are female (the highest level in any comparable fire service in the world). On average, some of 54% of the government funds are spent on wages with an additional 24% spent on indirect employee costs such as training, personal protective equipment (PPE) and transport. In addition, WoF is mandated to implement Integrated Fire Management, which includes supporting the development of the Fire Protection Association (FPA) structure under the National Veld and Forest Fire Act of 1998. The multi-partner WoF programme is implemented by the FFA Group of Companies, a leading supplier of Integrated Fire Management Services (IFMS) in South Africa.

WoF covers the whole of South Africa

Working on Fire has more than 200 firefighting bases in fire-prone areas across the country. Each base, under the direction of a base manager, is manned by a team of 25 qualified people, called a hotshot crew. These hand crews use mainly hand tools to fight fires, but can call on aerial support should the fire danger escalate. Bases have a strong working relationship with a range of local partners such as Cape Nature, SANParks and other stakeholders in respective areas. Each base is in constant radio communication with a local dispatch centre, which are in turn linked to Provincial

co-ordinating centres and a National co-ordinating centre (Incident Command Centre) that co-ordinates WoF's resources and actions. Fire awareness education and communication are key components of Integrated Fire Management.

I was fascinated to learn that more than 90% of unwanted fires are caused by human negligence or arson. However not all fires are bad, because fire is required to maintain eco-system functionality and under controlled conditions, can be used as an efficient land management tool in most of South Africa. This is the type of valuable information distributed to communities to address myths, change negative perceptions and alter behavioural patterns. WoF runs fire awareness programmes in schools and communities making use of fire fighters, as professionals who fight fire first-hand, to talk to students.

Each province has a community fire awareness officer who is allocated a number of fire-fighting crews, whose job is to assist crews in designing and implementing a local fire education and awareness strategies for their area. The provincial community fire awareness officer is under the guidance of the national fire awareness programme manager for strategy, communication policy and fundraising support.

What is Kishugu?

Kishugu identified the need for a more advanced and all-inclusive solution for its clients, including large scale commercial forestry operations, farmers and FPA members, called Integrated Fire Management Services (IFMS). In addition, risks to its clients are increasing in terms of legislation as well as a result of climate change. WoF manages an information programme that covers most of South Africa and includes more than 200,000 ha of plantation forestry. It includes all aspects of Information Fire Management Systems (IFMS), including fire management planning, detection, prevention, suppression, dispatch and coordination, as well as fire prevention advocacy for the whole country. Kishugu also manufactures and supplies most of the clothing, tools and equipment needed to provide the integrated service. Research shows the system is presently the most effective in the world and is one of the key building blocks for risk mitigation and prevention of large scale fire damage.

When not fighting fires, the WoF teams work full-time implementing the Fire Management Plan. Activities, depending on the plan, can include cutting fire breaks, prescribed burning (understory, aerial ignition, high intensity), mechanical fuel load



Left to right: Keith Whitehead – RPFO, Johan Heine – Kishugu CEO, Francois Weyers – Cape regional flight operations manager, Koos Kieck – responsible manager flight safety and security, Nic Vallengood – group chief pilot Kishugu
Missing from picture: Gerry Broberg – RPA, Ryan O'Malley – quality assurance manager, Mike Assad – National operations manager, Charel Louw – National logistics and legal compliance manager



Left to right: Etienne du Toit – Western Cape Provincial Disaster Management, Dale Nortje – Winelands Fire Protection, Colin Deiner – Disaster management, Willie Olivier – Cape Nature, Reinard Geldenhuys – Overberg District municipality fire chief

reductions, alien invasive vegetation clearing and community education through fire awareness programmes. Ground and air bases are coordinated by regional operations and detection centres which also handle dispatch and forecasting.

When fire is detected, either by manned watch towers or camera detection systems, WoF teams are deployed according to Incident Command System Protocols. WoF's response time is minimised due to a central Command and Control infrastructure controlling and deploying all detection systems, ground crews and aerial firefighting operations.

Kishugu Training is ground based training and practical implementation of safe, cost effective fire risk, firefighting and management training. Since 2003, a total of 24,000 students have been trained and 80,000 individual courses completed. The company offers accredited and non-accredited training courses aimed at developing the skills of delegates in their working environments that translate into management efficiencies during the operation. All courses focus on instilling operational principles through theoretical and practical integration during the training. At the same time all courses are aligned with the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) and the National Qualification Framework (NQF). The Incident Command System (ICS) was initially developed to address problems of inter-agency responses to wildfires in the United States, but is now becoming a component of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) in South Africa. It is a pattern for similar approaches internationally. Courses focus on capacitating the all hazard incident management organisations in South Africa.

Wildland fire management

Climate change, the growth of communities into rural areas and the build-up of flammable vegetation have made managing fire riskier and more complex. To meet the challenge, the National Veld and Forest Fire Act requires organisations and stakeholders to cooperate in a new strategy to effectively manage fire. The strategy has three parts; ecosystem restoration, community preparedness and fire response.

Meeting some members of the WoF team

Gerhard van Niekerk (ground operations' manager) manages 30 teams of 25 men and women in each team throughout the Western Cape. Most of the teams are based near nature reserves such as SAN Parks and Cape Nature who are the main land owners.

Linton Rensberg (communications officer WoF) previously worked 11 years with the office of the Presidency and has been with WoF for the past three and a half years. Although based in Cape Town, Linton says his department has reached more than two million people with fire education especially within the urban interface with nature. He told me the first hour of detecting the fire is critical so that the fire suppression teams can get to the outbreak to extinguish the fire as soon as possible. Last year 50 fire fighters were sent to Alberta and British Columbia in Canada to be part of an international consortium fighting coastal wild fires and that this was a highly successful exercise. The Western Cape aerial firefighting group meets with provincial government representatives every two weeks on a Friday.

Colin Deiner (head of Western Cape disaster management and fire services) told me that 80% of his work is in the planning for the risks that the community faces which may be drought and fire amongst others. There are more than 30 aircraft involved in the fire control programmes from bombers, spotters to the Huey helicopters.

There are 31 airfields where bombers can replenish their water and to date he reckons WoF has a 97% success rate. His section also works very closely with the SAAF Oryx helicopters based at AFB Ysterplaat when the disaster situation requires additional resources. Colin said the success of the programme was working with strategic

partnerships where everyone was within the system. The desire is to improve the awareness programme every year especially with schools as part of fire education.

Tony Marshall (Fire Protection Association) explained that the Western Cape has five regional Fire Protection Associations that are closely aligned with the various district municipalities. In many instances the WoF teams were based at the local fire stations within any given municipal region during the summer fire season. To date the association

had cut 4700 kilometres of fire breaks which have assisted in reducing the number of fires.

Willie Olivier (divisional commander City of Cape Town) explained that the Western Cape was home to one of six floral kingdoms of the world and that the interface of where the mountain meets the urban interface is a critical zone. He explained the 'airshow' problem where mostly children wanting to see an airshow would deliberately light a fire so that they could see the spotters, bombers and helicopters in action.

Dale Nortje (winelands fire protection association) has been responsible for educating those wine farmers that interface with the wilderness areas of the surroundings mountains. The cutting of 20 metre fire breaks where the Cape fynbos was slashed back was of paramount importance in protecting the particular vineyard when a fire was out of control. Dale explained the importance of protecting the mountain fynbos so as to prevent erosion and secure the quality of water for the future.

The Cape Aflame – Cape Town's dance with fire

Those who tirelessly and in many instances give of their time and special skills to perform an essential service benefitting South Africans often lack the money and equipment to undertake their jobs safely and successfully. Therefore, motivated by the spirit shown by their fellow citizens in controlling a necessary sometime natural phenomenon capable of pitting Capetonians against their natural heritage set out to record the disastrous fires of 2015 as well as to record their collective history in the face of adversity. The photographers, writers, project leaders and the publisher of 'The Cape Aflame' will not benefit financially from the proceeds of the coffee table book produced. These funds will go towards the constant need for resources to continue maintaining the delicate ecologies of a modern world-class city within a pristine natural environment. They lead by example. The book costs R350 and is available from African Pilot e-mail: subscribe@africanpilot.co.za or call 0861 001130 (local) or +27 11 466-8524/6 (international). 📄

