



WORKING ON FIRE

Leaders in Integrated
Fire Management

*Saving Lives, Protecting the
Environment, Restoring Dignity*

2020



EcoBurn

Special Publication



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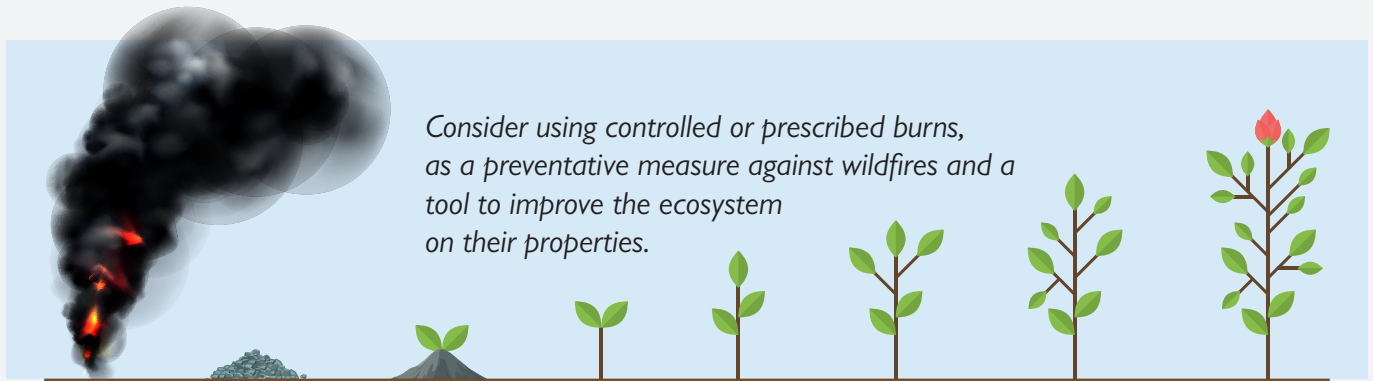
KISHUGU
FOR THE GREATER GOOD



EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME

Using fire to improve the quality of the vegetation

The Working on Fire programme, funded by the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF), encourages landowners to:



Consider using controlled or prescribed burns, as a preventative measure against wildfires and a tool to improve the ecosystem on their properties.

Working on Fire (WOF) has, over the past 17 years, demonstrated its ability to successfully implement integrated fire management (IFM) exercises, through block burns, prescribed burning, and fuel load reduction projects. Recently, IFM exercises were conducted by

Working on Fire, in Limpopo: Working on Fire firefighters and management showcased their specialised skills and knowledge and highlighted why this Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) has been hailed as one of the best EPWPs in South Africa.

Ditholo Wildlife Estate Game Reserve (Bela-Bela)



Working on Fire conducted a prescribed burn exercise at the Ditholo Wildlife Estate Game Reserve, outside Bela-Bela in Limpopo. The exercise began on 24 September 2020 and aimed to address some of the reserve's challenges which included shrubs and small trees taking over the grass vegetation that serves as grazing for the wild animals. Due to the lack of controlled burning and the reserve not experi-



encing any wildfires since 2006, the grass vegetation was also posing a threat of soil erosion.

Wildfires serve as the ecological balance for the ecosystem and assists some of the plants in regenerating their seeds.

Bush encroachment, which happens if there's

no circulation of the vegetation on the land, leads to the vegetation getting old, unable to regenerate the seeds, and becoming stagnant, which prevents the reproduction of vegetation.

“Bush encroachment, which in our case, was caused by a lack of burning for the past several years, was threatening the grass vegetation. So, we called in the Working on Fire crew to come and assist us because the vegetation is vital and serves as grazing for the animals,” Gerda Barnard, the Managing Agent at Ditholo Wildlife Estate Game Reserve, said.

Working on Fire firefighters, from the Limpopo Sekororo team, were joined by other firefighters from various bases in Limpopo, and worked extensively in extreme weather conditions, as they conducted the burning project.

According to Working on Fire Managing Director, Trevor Abrahams, the block burn - as part of integrated fire management - allowed Working on Fire to demonstrate how the quality of grazing can be improved for the game.

“These exercises lead to an overall better ecological management of land, which helps with regrowth and germination, which doubles the indigenous plant populations”.

“We successfully showed local farmers, here in Limpopo, what a controlled burn does in improving the overall quality of their land for future use,” Abrahams added. Due to the lack of the implementation of the block burns or

prescribed burns at Ditholo Wildlife Estate Game Reserve, the Working on Fire firefighters had to work strategically, as the results of soil erosion were beginning to show.

During the burning, there were patches of grass that were no longer growing, which resulted in the firefighters working twice as hard to ensure the smooth burning of the grass without causing any damage to the soil or the game.

“Working on Fire has equipped us with the necessary specialized skills and we have been conducting block burns for the past 17 years, so this was nothing new to us.

However, this project was challenging, in that there were animals roaming around the game reserve and we had to exercise caution and protect them from being harmed during the burning exercise,” Tonic Matlhare, Crew Leader Type I at Rooiberg Base, said.

The week-long burning at Ditholo Wildlife Estate Game Reserve was declared a success, with the Nature Reserve experiencing their first rainfall after the completion of the project, a timely occurrence as it will expedite the needed growth of the new vegetation.

“The service we received from Working on Fire was very impressive and the whole team demonstrated a high level of professionalism and skill and the results have been amazing,” Robert Wilson, General Manager for Ditholo Wildlife Estate Game Reserve, said.



Bushveld Hunting Safaris Game Reserve (Lephalale)

The Working on Fire teams subsequently conducted another burning project at the Bushveld Hunting Safaris Game Reserve on 28 September 2020, outside Lephalale. Here they had a similar challenge of shrub vegetation taking over the game farm.

“Prior to holding consultations with Working on Fire, we considered other bush clearing techniques, which turned out to be expensive and not safe for the environment,” Pieter Engelbrecht, Co-owner and Manager of Bushveld Hunting Safaris Game Reserve, said.

Engelbrecht praised Working on Fire for their high level of professionalism, extensive knowledge, and experience, which was demonstrated in the quality of work conducted at the

game reserve.

“It is difficult to trust anyone with my property, however, I will gladly recommend Working on Fire to landowners and I will use them again at any given time,” Engelbrecht said.

The Working on Fire programme, through its integrated fire management services, continues to live by its objectives of protecting the environment and saving lives.

Through successful partnerships, with various stakeholders and partners, the programme has, in the past 17 years, gained valuable experience and sought-after skills, which has shown Working on Fire to be one of the global leaders in the integrated fire management field.



For more details on our integrated fire management services please contact us on: +27 87 352 4880