

## THABAZIMBI FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATION LAUNCHED

The Thabazimbi municipality launched the Fire Protection Association on 16 August 2007. The Waterberg District Manager of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, Mr Mphahlele officially proclaimed and recognized the Association that had recently registered by the Department.

Men dressed in suits and women in colourfully traditional dresses were all heading up the mountain to the Kumba Cinema Hall.

Among dignitaries who attended the function was Mr Tshepo Malatji, the Director of Forestry Regulation from the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, who is responsible for the implementation and administration of the National Veld and Forest Fire Act nationally.

On the same day the fire protec-

tion officer, the chairperson and executive committee members were inaugurated.

In his address Mr Malatji indicated that the Ministers of Water Affairs and Forestry and of Provincial and Local Government agreed that the only way to optimally control wildfires is through cooperative governance across all spheres of Government, partnership with the private sector and community structures as well as through good planning and adequate capacity and training. This was said after the recently devastating fires that affected the provinces of Mpumalanga, Kwazulu-Natal and Free State.

Mr Malatji commended and thanked all the people who participated in the process of forming the Thabazimbi Fire Protection Association. He also thanked the Fire

Protection Officer of the association, Mr Lefu Johny Motaung and members of the executive committee of the FPA for their tireless effort in making the application and registration of the association a success.

He also thanked all landowners in the area, Government departments and all organizations affiliated to the FPA for their courage and support that they have demonstrated and their sustained dedication to this good course. He further stated that the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry encourages landowners to carry the process forward and save the lives, property, as well as the natural environment within the Thabazimbi FPA.

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Gauteng	15th floor, Sanlam Plaza East Building 285 Schoeman St, Pretoria	(012) 392 1300	(012) 382 1304
KwaZulu-Natal	185 Longmarket St, Pietermaritzburg	(033) 341 2612	(033) 394 1849
Limpopo	Magistrates Building, Magistrates St, Makhado	(015) 516 0201	(015) 516 1062
Mpumalanga	5th floor Prorom Building, cnr Brown and Paul Kruger St, Nelspruit	(013) 759 7300 (013) 759 7385	(013) 755 4003
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## EXCITING DEVELOPMENTS AS DWAF PROCURES CROSS-BORDER FIRE MANAGEMENT AGREEMENTS



Delegates listen to deliberations during cross border fire management between Lesotho and South Africa

The drive to achieve integrated fire management and sustainable forest development within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has intensified as DWAF procures a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Lesotho in July 2007 on the management of cross-border veldfires and cooperation in other forest development programmes.

Negotiations in pursuit of the above objective are still underway with regard to the signing of the Memoranda of Understanding with other countries like Swaziland, Mozambique, Namibia and Botswana.

Exploratory meetings with these countries culminated with the adoption of a discussion document outlining status of fire management in South Africa in terms of the Legislative Framework; resources for fire management that could be shared between South Africa and each of these countries on service level agreement basis; and areas around which cooperation is sought.

The team agreed that although cooperation is not limited to veldfire management, the emphasis of the discussion document would be on cross-border fire management as this is on the priority



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list of the department. This update is therefore biased towards cooperation on veldfire management issues at two levels, namely, (1) Fire Management Planning and (2) Fire Fighting Operations. Draft MoUs are still under consideration by these countries and it is envisaged that signing thereof will take place before end of March 2008.

Observable during engagements with these countries, is the fact that South Africa was found to be advanced in terms of policy, institutional capacity and implementation systems for achieving integrated fire management. Noteworthy was the fact that the South African government has a clear legislative framework for veldfire management, institutions in the form of Fire Protection Associations, the Working on Fire programmes, fire early warning and detection systems, to mention a few. It has emerged during all the engagements undertaken that South Africa is looked upon to support initiatives of its neighbouring countries to implement integrated fire management programmes. After procuring the MoUs the department would facilitate the

process of negotiating operational agreements between the local role players around issues such as incident command or coordination expenses during fire incidences, costs sharing, information and coordination, liabilities, claims and compensation, operating plans/operational guidelines, border crossing and link to disaster management plans of the affected countries.

The negotiation of these operational agreements would involve various stakeholders such as Defense, Home Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Police Services, Municipalities, Agriculture and the Working on Fire programme. It is the view of the department that these agreements would serve as key tools for achieving integrated fire management for the benefit of all countries concerned. Negotiations of this agreement with Lesotho will commence before March 2008.

For more information, please contact Mmaphaka Tau at (012) 336 7392.

## DWAF attends International Conference on Wildland Fire

In a bid to address challenges of Wildland Fire, DWAF attended the 4th International conference on Wildland Fire which aims to enhance international cooperation in fire management worldwide.

A four day conference which was organised by United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) as well as European Commission (EC) took place this year from 14 to 17 May 2007 in Saville, Spain.

The event was well attended. There were more than 80 countries from throughout the world representing Government Organisations and civil society from all regions of the world. South Africa was well represented by the delegation from the Forestry Branch of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF), Working on Fire Programme (WoF), South African National Parks (SANParks) and Cape Nature.

During the conference, participants presented the state of the art papers in fire science, fire management and fire management training in all continents. A commercial exhibition also provided insight into innovative fire management technologies, including fire detection, monitoring, suppression and firefighters' issues, public health and safety issues within the arena of integrated fire management.

As part of the proceedings of the event, a number of organisations and international associations involved in the wildland fire arena held side meetings to find ways on how to enhance the international dialogue.

In order to enhance international cooperation in fire management activities FAO and partners presented progress in the development of a strategy to enhance international cooperation in Fire Management, requested by the Ministerial Meeting in 2005. The event also saw Fire Management Action Alliance being launched which aims to promote implementation of the Volun-

tary Guidelines. At the time of the launch, 35 partners – national agencies, universities and international organizations – signed up the alliance. The strategy is currently being processed through a multi-stakeholder process and it includes a Global Assessment of Fire Management, Review of International Cooperation and Fire Management Voluntary Guidelines.

It was recommended that policies need to be developed cooperatively with all the stakeholders involved in the protection of the environment and the humanity.

In its break away session, participants conducted a self assessment of the fire situation and fire management capabilities of Sub-Saharan Africa which saw representatives from Sub-Saharan Africa came up with key recommendations, that include, the fact that regional collaborators from Southern, Central, East and West Africa, south of the Sahara shall hold a Regional Consultation Session within the next two years under the auspices of the Afrifire Net.

One other important factor was to encourage the incorporation of the Food and Agricultural Organization's (FAO) Fire Management Voluntary Guidelines in national fire management plans. This will also assist the world to highlight the need for skill transfer into communities and community participative approaches to counter the growing number of unwanted fire ignitions.

In conclusions, participants welcomed the offer of South Africa to host the 5th International Wildland Fire Conference, tentatively in 2011.

Papers presented and final documents produced at the conference can be downloaded from [www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/sevilla-2007.html](http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/sevilla-2007.html).

## Ensuring compliance with the NVFFA

It is every South African citizen's responsibility to join hands in ensuring compliance with the provisions of the National Veld and Forest Fire Act, Act 101 of 1998. (The NVFFA)

The NVFFA is designed to fulfil the constitutional obligation by making provisions for the inter alia establishment of Fire Protection Associations that serve as a platform for cooperation towards a common purpose for managing veldfires. The main task of these associations is to craft methods and practices by which veldfires could be managed. Private landowners can voluntarily join these associations. However, the Act makes it compulsory for State entities to join established Fire Protection Associations.

In terms of the NVFFA, landowners (including Government Departments and Parastatals) on whose land a veldfire may start or burn or may spread have a responsibility to create firebreaks to minimise the chances of veldfire from spreading whenever it occurs. Therefore, all landowners on whose property a veldfire may start or spread are expected to prepare and maintain firebreaks, and must have minimum fire-fighting equipments.

The NVFFA also encourages citizens to report transgressions, and on successful conviction of offenders, courts have discretion to award the whistleblower with up to a quarter of what is fined.

The penal provision of the Act makes it an offence to fail to take reasonable steps whenever a veldfire occurs. This implies clearly that since a safe environment is a constitutional right for all, it is our corresponding duty to comply with the provisions of the NVFFA by ensuring a non-harmful environment.

DWAF has to ensure compliance with, and enforcement of this Act. The policy spells it clearly that we have to encourage people and all stakeholders to comply with the provisions of the Act. The Department has put in place measures such as signboards, posters, pamphlets, booklets, board games, publications, radio talk shows and adverts in order to encourage compliance with the provisions of the NVFFA.

Non-compliance is a serious disobedience which put our environment, lives, and livelihood at risk. It is therefore everyone's responsibility to comply with the Act and manage veldfires in an integrated manner in order to ensure a safe environment for the present and future generations.

"Comply with the National Veld and Forest Fire Act, don't be on the wrong side of the law and South Africa will be a better place".

## REGISTRATION OF FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATIONS (FPAs)

In an effort to manage veldfires, the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry has made remarkable strides in the implementation of the National Veld and Forest Fire Act (NVFFA), (Act 101 of 1998, which was passed ten years ago. Chapter 2 of this Act provides information on the formation and registration of Fire Protection Associations (FPAs) by landowners for purposes of predicting, preventing and extinguishing veldfires.

Since the promulgation of the Act, the Department has already registered 101 FPAs countrywide, mostly in the Free State, followed by the Eastern Cape. The following table shows all registered FPAs in the country.

Province	No. of registered FPAs	Fire Risk Classification
Limpopo	6	High - Extreme
Free State	28	Medium - Extreme
Mpumalanga	7	High - Extreme
Northwest	6	High - Extreme
Northern Cape	9	Low
Western Cape	9	Medium - High
Eastern Cape	20	Low - Extreme
Gauteng	8	Extreme
Kwazulu-Natal	8	High - Extreme
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>101</b>	

The land area covered by these FPAs is just above 19 million hectares and approximately 79 percent of registered FPAs are located within high to extreme veldfire risk areas. The Department has further received 142 notices (Form 1 applications) of intent to form FPAs.

Membership of these FPA's is voluntary for private landowners, but at the same time the Act makes it compulsory for owners of State land and municipality with fire service to join the association where these exist or are being formed.

However, the department is reviewing Section 7(a) and (b) of the Act to make it compulsory for all municipalities, irrespective of whether they have fire services or not, to become members of the FPAs where these exist or are being formed.

In order to monitor the functioning of these registered FPAs, they are required to submit an annual report on their activities to the Minister. The Department also conducts performance assessments of all FPAs who have been in operation for a period longer than 12 months. During the past two years, the Department assessed FPAs in seven provinces; North West, Kwa Zulu Natal, Free State, Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape and the Northern Cape.

Currently, the Department is working on a policy on assisting the FPAs financially. Once approved, the policy will enable the Department to give small grants to FPAs and to land owners who prepare and maintain firebreaks on international boundaries. The Department has also deployed qualified Fire Advisors in all its regions to assist landowners on any issue related to the administration and implementation of the NVFFA.