

POLICY REGARDING ACCESS TO STATE FORESTS FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION, EDUCATION, CULTURE OR SPIRITUAL PURPOSES

PREAMBLE

This policy replaces policy directives for outdoor recreation in terms of the Forest Acts of 1968 and 1984 and their amendments, and more specifically the outdoor recreation policy formulated in Forest Management Instruction 9/3/1 of 1983, which were applicable to the Republic of South Africa, with the exclusion of former self-governing homelands and the TBVC-States, of the “apartheid era”.

This policy gives expression, and is subject to, policy directions as set out in the 1996 White Paper on Sustainable Forest Development in South Africa, and to which the National Forestry Action Programme of 1997 (and subsequent programmes), and the National Forests Act, 1998 (Act No. 84 of 1998) as amended, give effect. Apart from the democratization of the South African society, the general approach, consistent with that of the global forestry sector, is participatory forest management. This acknowledges that all sectors of the population have a stake in the management of the forests, with emphasis on those whose livelihood is dependent on their benefits and values. These benefits include non-consumptive uses such as recreation, education, and cultural and spiritual fulfilment.

This policy provides a new framework to accommodate changes in the national forest policy, based on international forest policy, as well as current trends and developments in tourism and outdoor recreation.

VISION

The provision of equitable access to State forests and their development and management for recreation, education, culture or spiritual purposes, based on the principles of sustainable forest management, and in accordance with national and international policies, approaches and standards, for the well-being, benefit and enjoyment of all.

MISSION

- *To provide for the outdoor recreation, education, culture or spiritual needs of all sectors of society without conflicting with other management objectives in State forests.*
- *To accommodate the full range of potential recreation opportunities and activities in State forests without conflicting interest.*
- *To actively promote and manage access for recreation, education, culture or spiritual purposes in such a way that harmful impacts to the environment and the users are avoided, minimized or, in exceptional cases, remedied.*
- *To exploit opportunities for optimization of economic benefits by the accommodation of commercial tourism activities and the wise and careful development of facilities, in harmony with, and without compromising the integrity of, the natural resource.*
- *To provide opportunities for the economic upliftment of historically disadvantaged individuals and communities.*
- *To encourage the public, in particular the youth, to understand the non-consumptive use and value of forests through educational programmes and to encourage access to support this.*

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- Access to State forests for outdoor recreation, education, culture or spiritual purposes, is recognised as one of the accepted multiple uses of State forest land.
- The principles contained in the Participatory Forest Management Strategy of DWAF are to be applied in this policy.
- Outdoor recreation and access for education, culture or spiritual purposes are to be subjected to proper planning and assessment of potential impacts, and are conditional.
- Provision of outdoor recreation opportunities and facilities for the broader population, should be needs driven, basic and affordable, and with due consideration of the provision of such opportunities and facilities by other institutions, concerns and individuals in the surrounding region.
- Potential opportunities for developing revenue generating facilities, amenities and commercial activity-oriented ventures, which are compatible with management objectives and in harmony with their surroundings, should be exploited. The financial yields are partly to be used to cross-subsidise the less viable basic facilities made affordable for the broader population, and partly to provide financial upliftment for local disadvantaged communities.
- Where appropriate, the provision, development, operation and maintenance of recreation and tourism facilities should be co-managed with local communities as part of a community forestry agreement, of which any proceeds should be for the benefit of such community.
- Conflicts must be avoided: 1) between outdoor recreation, education, cultural and spiritual activities and other management objectives and activities; 2) between such activities and the environmental quality and ambience, and the principles of responsible ecological management. Where conflicts are unavoidable, the latter objectives should be given preference.
- Zonation is to be applied, 1) for the purpose of providing diverse types of recreation, cultural or spiritual experiences, commensurate with the needs of users/user groups; 2) for avoiding conflicts between users/user groups who exercise different activities, or whose needs for solitude or tolerance of other users differ; 3) for making provision for different management categories, ranging from areas set aside as wilderness or strict nature reserves to areas that are relatively heavily utilised or comprise artificial ecosystems; 4) to distinguish between different densities of recreation types, and 5) to distinguish between areas of varying ecological sensitivity, aesthetic and visual character.
- Both ecological and social carrying capacities are to be taken into consideration. Desirable visitor numbers and use intensities must be determined and laid down in accordance with zonation criteria and categories. Restrictions on visitor numbers are to be applied where required. Where information is lacking, appropriate research should be conducted.
- Visitor usage, and the consequent environmental impacts, should be monitored.
- Although the general principles apply to State forests, owners of private land with natural forests would be encouraged to apply the same principles.

KEY POLICY ISSUES

Access to State forests, access conditions, rules and maps

- The provisions of sections 19 and 20 of the National Forests Act, 1998 (NFA), as amended, are relevant in this regard.
- All people have the right to reasonable access to State forests, for the purposes provided for in this policy, but subject to conditions and restrictions.
- All managers of State forests are required to provide visitors to these areas for recreational, educational, cultural and spiritual purposes, with access maps and a set

of access rules or conditions, which regulate access, and which may be enforced in terms of the provisions for offences and penalties in the NFA.

- Managers of State forests must also place proper signage at strategic locations to guide visitors in their use of the State forests.
- Access maps, conditions and signage must be standardized as far as possible, to aid visitors and to avoid confusion.
- Reference is to be made to the "Guide to the Management of Access to State Forests" for detailed guidelines in this respect. (Appendix A)

Planning and development of recreation and access

General planning considerations

- Outdoor recreation guide plans are to be drawn up per Forest Area, or, if required, per Forest Estate, to guide the planning and management of outdoor recreation/tourism, and access for educational, cultural and spiritual purposes, providing for recreation zonation and determination of carrying capacities as outlined under the heading "General Principles" above. These plans should not be in conflict, but ideally be integrated with the broader management plans for the forest estate.
- In State forests, particularly in regions where the tourism sector is well established, planning for recreation is not to be done in isolation, but all stakeholders, including other concerns involved in the tourism sector, and local communities, are to be involved in the planning process. Recreation planning should be linked to the broader tourism planning for the region, and should be reflected in the Integrated Development Plans (IDP's) of the municipalities in which the particular forest estates are situated.
- Where possible and appropriate, the full range of potential outdoor recreation opportunities and activities, from wilderness type recreation to amenity based recreation, is to be provided for in a particular forest management or recreation planning unit.
- When planning outdoor recreation, preference should be given to making available a package of various opportunities in any given forest management unit, or recreation planning unit, instead of providing for individual recreation types in isolation.
- The following should be avoided when considering the planning and opening up of areas for development of recreation and access for other non-consumptive uses: 1) Ecologically sensitive areas; 2) research areas; 3) conflicts with other land uses; 4) conflicts with other forest management activities; 5) conflicts between recreation activities; 6) conflicts between access for cultural/spiritual fulfilment and access for recreation.

Planning for exclusive access needs for cultural/spiritual purposes

- Where applicable, provision is to be made for exclusive access to certain limited areas or sites, by specific communities for cultural/spiritual purposes, if creeds, traditions and taboos require this, without however, compromising any principles of access, or sustainable forest management. Also refer to Appendix A.

Development of facilities

- The development of recreation facilities is to be based on a proper assessment of recreation needs, on the recreation potential of the area, on the economic viability thereof, and on the suitability of the site or area for a particular activity. For detailed guidelines see "Guidelines for the Planning of Outdoor Recreation and Other Non-consumptive Uses" (Appendix B).
- Any intended development of facilities is to be properly planned, with proper consultation of all interested and affected parties (stakeholders) and subjected to at least an internal environmental scoping exercise, including a documented study on potential impacts and proposed mitigation measures, before submitting plans for approval in principle by the appropriate level of delegated power. Additionally, if

required by other environmental laws, e.g. the Environment Conservation Act, 1989 (Act No 73 of 1989) it is to be subjected to the required integrated environmental management procedure (IEMP), which may include a full environmental impact assessment (EIA), before being approved by the relevant authority. See Appendix B.

Management of recreation and access

Recreation management

- The quality of outdoor recreation facilities and sites is to be maintained at the highest possible standard. Where this is not possible owing to a lack of resources, they should be closed down, especially in areas which are important for tourism.
- Recreation facilities developed, operated and maintained for use by the broader public, are to be made available at affordable fees, and the costs of these should be funded partly through cross-subsidization by revenue from financially viable recreation developments.
- Visitor access to State forests should only take place through designated entry points, which may be manned or unmanned.
- Where practically feasible and economically justifiable, visitor entry points are to be manned, and affordable nominal fees levied (in accordance with an official tariff of fees), for access by the general public.
- Unmanned access points, or access points that are periodically unmanned, are to be provided with a set of access conditions, either paper based or in the form of a notice board
- Activity and adventure oriented commercial recreation/tourism ventures, providing for an affluent market segment of society, and which are often conducted in exclusive areas, are to be subjected to licences providing for fees that are in relation to their turnover or realisation of profit. Refer to Appendix C: "A Mechanism for Handling the Various Forms of Outdoor Recreation and Eco-Tourism Opportunities, Activities and Facilities on State Forest Land".
- Where applicable, appropriate and feasible, public private partnerships (PPP's) as provided for by the Treasury Regulations, should be entered into when developing, operating and maintaining financially viable capital-intensive eco-tourism facilities. A proportion of the proceeds, as contractually agreed, are to directly and indirectly benefit not only the State, but also local disadvantaged communities. These PPP's can form part of community forest agreements. Refer to Appendix C.
- DWAF should undertake a regular review of the benefits of public private partnerships.
- Where feasible, and without compromising quality standards, consideration should be given to outsourcing the operation and maintenance of general recreation facilities to members of local disadvantaged communities, in the form of a service contract, which can be part of a community forestry agreement. Refer to Appendix C.
- Developed facilities and opportunities are to be properly marketed and publicised.

Education and awareness raising

- Education and awareness raising about forests in general, and natural forests in particular, are important functions to be actively promoted. Provision is to be made to accommodate school and other youth groups in this regard, by environmental interpretation boards, talks and conducted tours in the State forests, and also by making available very basic, affordable accommodation, e.g. forest hostels in State forests.
- All school and other organised educational groups entering State forests are subject to the same conditions and rules as visitors for recreational purposes, except that they may, on merit, be exempted from the payment of fees. Such groups must apply in advance.
- At national level, assistance with efforts to raise the environmental awareness of visitors through publications, environmental interpretation boards or interpretive

trails, will focus on areas of high educational importance, including popular tourist areas.

Management of access for cultural/spiritual purposes

- Access for cultural/spiritual purposes is subject to the standard access conditions applicable to a particular State forest, and where specific communities have specific needs for exclusive access, this is to be negotiated through participatory mechanisms, without compromising any important policy principles.

National Forest Recreation and Access Trust

- The National Forest Recreation and Access Trust (NFRAT) may be accessed for funding of selected projects and initiatives promoting the objectives of access for non-consumptive use for all sections of the population. For policy see “Policy and Guidelines for Managing the National Forest Recreation and Access Trust Fund” (Appendix D).

Monitoring and application of measures to adapt to trends and counteract negative impacts

- Statistics on visitor numbers, recreation usage and access for educational, cultural and spiritual purposes are to be kept and fed into a national (and, where possible also a local) database, for monitoring, national reporting and study purposes.
- Carrying capacity, environmental and social, is to be monitored, and arbitrarily determined restrictions on visitor numbers are to be supplemented by research, in order to refine the determination of carrying capacity.
- Regular monitoring of all sites and facilities to assess environmental impacts, is mandatory, and where degradation (e.g. soil erosion) has occurred, appropriate rehabilitation measures should be implemented, restrictions placed on visitor numbers, or in serious cases sites or facilities closed temporarily or permanently, if necessary.

Specific restrictions

- Activities of a competitive nature (forest marathons, cycle races, motor rallies, etc.) will not normally be allowed on State forest land, but may be considered as a temporary or seasonal event in exceptional circumstances, with the proviso that motor and motor cycle rallies are as a rule not acceptable in natural areas, like indigenous forests.
- Where circumstances pose a danger either to the forest environment or the visitors, any area may be closed for access at any time, for as long a period as is necessary, for example during adverse climatic conditions causing floods, extreme cold spells or high fire hazard.

APPENDICES: DETAILED GUIDELINES

Appendix A: A Guide to the Management of Access to State Forests

Appendix B: Guidelines for the Planning of Outdoor Recreation and Other Non-consumptive Uses

Appendix C: A Mechanism for Handling the Various Forms of Outdoor Recreation and Eco-Tourism Opportunities, Activities and Facilities on State Forest Land

Appendix D: Policy and Guidelines for Managing the National Forest Recreation and Access Trust Fund