

Multi-million waste fleet to wrestle municipal litter



Above: One of the 22 Waste Collection and Landfill Management trucks that are being handed to struggling municipalities. Minister Creedy handed over the truck to Merafong and Rand West Local Municipalities.

Through its waste management fleet handover campaign, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment (DFFE) has literally taken the fight against litter to the road. The Department has used R42.4 million of its own budget to provide 22 vehicles to 19 municipalities that are battling unsightly litter across the country. The vehicles include skip loader trucks, front end loaders, compactor trucks and other trucks required to transport waste within the municipal area.

"Our municipalities are struggling to provide regular and consistent waste collection services. Once dumpsites develop, these are not regularly cleared and a number of our landfills do not meet regulatory compliance standards," says Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment Minister, Ms Barbara Creedy.

The National Waste Management Strategy was revised in 2020 and focuses on: improving household waste collection; diverting waste from landfills; promoting a circular economy and promoting community awareness of the effects of illegal dumping on their own health and on the environment. "To improve waste management in municipalities, the department is assisting in the development of their integrated waste management plans, and training on sustainable waste management practices," says Minister Creedy.

Among the greatest threats to the health of the environment and people is waste pollution. "Throughout our country, we are plagued by littering, illegal dumpsites and the scourge of plastic waste that enters our river systems, our wetlands and ultimately our Oceans," says Minister Creedy. While the country has made sig-



Above: Municipalities are struggling to provide regular and consistent waste collection services. Once dumpsites develop, they are not regularly cleared, and a number of landfills do not meet regulatory compliance standards.

nificant strides in improving waste management since 1994, almost a third of households still do not have regular weekly household waste removal services. Households are sometimes forced to find their own solutions to waste management... solutions that are often damaging to the health of communities and the well-being of the environment.

The National Waste Management Strategy was revised in 2020 and focuses on: improving household waste collection; diverting waste from landfills; promoting a circular economy and promoting community awareness of the effects of illegal dumping on their own health and on the environment. "To achieve the goals of this strategy all of us must play our part: national and provincial government must support municipalities to develop local integrated waste management strategies. We

must ensure our landfills comply with the regulatory environment and waste does not leach into ground water or into the soil. We must invest in the yellow fleet and every year we must ensure more and more homes have access to safe waste disposal," says Minister Creedy.

Government has set up the regulatory environment for extended producer responsibility schemes to promote re-cycling in the packaging, electronics and lighting industries with recent regulations gazetted for new sectors such as used oil and pesticides. The regulations for organic waste treatment, and organic waste composting, have also been published for implementation in order to divert waste away from landfills and create new industries. "Communities must begin to separate their waste at home so that waste reclaimers can undertake

their work in a dignified manner.

Households must teach family members not to litter and must work with their neighbours to prevent illegal dumpsites. All of us must participate in regular clean up campaigns to beautify our communities and protect our environment," says Minister Creedy. In addition, the Department has also co-operated with National Treasury and the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) to change the Municipal Infrastructure Grant Policy so that municipalities can access the grant to fund their yellow fleet.

"Government and the private sector must work with waste reclaimers so that we build a dignified waste, reclaiming industry that promotes waste diversion from landfills, promotes the circular economy and gives a decent livelihood to the tens of thousands of men and women who do the daily back-breaking work of the recycling industry," urged Minister Creedy.

Trees are our treasure!

Historically, South Africa did not have a culture of tree planting, and it was in the 1970s that a real need to promote tree planting was recognised. The concept of National Arbor Day ensued from the 1973 Green Heritage Campaign. To date, the campaign has graduated to Arbor Month, which is a national campaign initiated to celebrate South Africa's trees and to raise awareness about their importance.

HOW CAN YOU HELP TO PROTECT OUR INDIGENOUS FORESTS?
Our forests are under threat from people who are careless with our heritage. Never cut down a tree in a natural forest and do not remove an animal or living plant without permission. Explain to others the importance of protecting our natural places.

WHY MUST WE PLANT TREES?
Many places in South Africa are barren and lifeless because they do not have trees, gardens or plants. In the past, trees were not planted in township areas while suburbs have usually had trees growing for many years. We have to plant trees in every town, city and school in South Africa. We need to plant a tree with every new home. We need to ensure that every clinic has trees. You can help by planting trees at home or working with your school, church, or local government to plant trees. Integrating fruit trees in your food garden can address household food security. Remember we are a water-scarce country, so use methods that conserve water to irrigate your trees.

Champion Trees Project
The purpose of the Champion Tree Project is to identify and protect trees that are of national importance and worthy of special protection, due to their remarkable size, age, aesthetic, cultural, historic or tourism value. Similar projects have been established in several other countries, but this is the first of its kind in Africa. Nomination forms with guidelines for the nomination process are available from the DFFE. Every nomination cycle starts on 1 August each year, and ends on 31 July the following year. The oldest planted tree in South Africa is a Saffron pear, brought from the Netherlands and planted in the Dutch East India Company's gardens in Cape Town more than three centuries ago. Trees and Climate Change It is now well known that global climate is changing and that it is likely to continue changing for many years to come. Climate change brings about unusual weather, droughts, floods, melting of the permanent ice of the north and south poles, as well as rising ocean levels. All this is the result of air pollution caused by human activities.

Why are trees important?



- Trees are important because:**
- They supply oxygen that we breathe and they take in carbon dioxide which we do not need.
 - They provide shade for humans, houses, animals, birds, and smaller trees or shrubs.
 - They provide food for domestic animals (goats, cows, donkeys) and wild animals (giraffes, impalas, elephants, etc). Humans also eat fruits from the trees.
 - Trees are used for firewood which is used for cooking and heating in winter; Many indigenous trees are used as medicine to cure diseases.
 - They protect the soil from erosion and shelter our houses from the wind.
 - They provide timber for furniture, houses, paper, fences and tools.
 - They are used to produce ornaments (craft and sculptures).

One of the main pollutants responsible for this phenomenon is the greenhouse gas Carbon Dioxide (CO₂). Greenhouse gasses have the ability to trap the sun's heat in the atmosphere and so prevent the earth from cooling down. Green plants are a vital defence against climate change because they have the natural ability to remove CO₂ from the atmosphere and store the carbon as biomass. Trees are especially valuable because they produce wood, in which large quantities of carbon is locked up for many years. To put this into perspective; one hectare of forest growing at the rate of producing 10m³ of wood per year will be removing carbon to the equivalent of 14 million m³ of air. One can visualise this as a column of air 1.4 km deep over an area of forest the size of two soccer fields. Do keep in mind that trees do not all grow equally fast, and all forests are not equally productive as carbon sinks. Trees in urban environments and commercial forestry plantations are generally quite fast growing and are therefore active carbon sinks. Under favourable conditions some plantations can achieve average annual growth rates of 20m³ per hectare. Forests and the Economy According to Forestry South Africa, forestry is estimated to contribute about 150 000 jobs, predominantly in rural areas where there are high levels of unemployment. This translates to about 11.5% of job losses in the sector due to factors of production affecting profitability throughout the value chain. The contribution to the economy is estimated at R 45.5 billion. This translates to 7.7% of Manufacturing GDP and 25.5% of Agricultural GDP, including Pulp and Paper. It is through commercial plantations that timber is produced for construction, mining, furniture, paper production and other beneficial timber related enterprises.

Forest beneficiation key to combating climate change



The Lehana plantation in Mount Fletcher is 89.44 ha and is currently a woodlot in need of a lot of work.

Salome Tsoka

Trees, more especially forests play a significant role in climate change as both of these are inextricably linked together. Research by the Nature Climate Change found that the world's forests provide a "carbon sink" that absorbs 7.6 billion metric tonnes of carbon dioxide per year. These trees are able to absorb carbon dioxide when standing or regrowing and thus help reduce greenhouse gases. However, when the trees are cut down or deforestation happens, all of this carbon is released back into the atmosphere.

This is why historic plantation transfers back to the community that the Deputy Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment led on 30 June 2022 in the Eastern Cape are so important. Working with communities ensures that deforestation does not happen as communities are taught to harvest trees sustainably which also ensures that forests and plantations are able to help fight climate change.

The transfer of these plantations comes after the Makhoba Traditional Council and Batlokoa Traditional Council made an offer to enter into a Community Forestry Agreement (CFA) in terms of Section 29 of the National Forests Act, 1998 (Act 04 of 1998). The Makhoba community and Fort Usher and Lehana communities represented by the Makhoba Traditional Council and Batlokoa Traditional Council respectively are now the managers of the Makhoba plantation, Fort Usher plantation and Lehana plantation all with the combined size of approximately 363,31 hectares.

Part of the transfer includes continued support by the Department to the communities to help them manage the plantations. This support will include offering the communities capacity building interventions, linking communities with strategic partners, providing seedlings and educating communities on sustainable harvesting as well as the importance of the plantation on climate change.

Deputy Minister also planted trees at the Batlokoa Royal Place in Mount Fletcher in the Eastern Cape as part of the ten million trees programme, to signify the future growth of the plantations, the communities and to also signify the importance of trees in the plantation in the fight against climate change.

By transferring the plantations into the management of the community dependent on them, this allows the community to take fully responsibility of their environment. The plantations in the Eastern Cape have become woodlots which have been mismanaged with the dangers of deforestation looming. However, working with the Department, the communities will receive ample support and guidance on how to better manage the plantations for the well-being of the community and for the mitigation of climate change.

For years researchers and scientists have warned governments, politicians, industries and society as a whole about climate change and today, the environmental warnings of rising temperatures, extreme weather phenomena and more are being experienced all over the world including South Africa.

Some of the effects of climate change felt around the country in recent months include the recent floods which greatly affected the KwaZulu-Natal province as these floods damaged infrastructure, property and displaced thousands of people in the province. While other provinces such as the Northern Cape, Free State and Eastern Cape have been experiencing droughts with the Western Cape also seeing an increase in wildfires.

Trees are able to absorb carbon dioxide through their leaves through the process of photosynthesis. Researchers have found that more trees are able to absorb carbon however the cutting or burning of these trees releases the stores carbon back into the atmosphere further contributing to climate change.

The South African government through the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment has committed to the 10 Million Trees Programme which is a project that aims to plant at least two million trees each year, for the next five years. This programme is a national call from the Presidency of the Republic of South Africa with the aim of attaining environmental sustainability and protection, and to realise socio-economic benefits for South Africans. The Department is calling on members of society, the private sector, government organizations, non-government organizations, schools as well as community based organizations take part in the planting of the Ten Million Trees by celebrating each milestone with a tree planting for the next five years.

Each of us can **reduce** the amount of **plastic** we buy and ensure we discard our waste responsibly.

To learn more about recycling visit www.dffe.gov.za

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We must refuse to use single-use plastic when going shopping. Take your reusable shopping bags. **Do not demand new plastic bags.**

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