

Firebreaks: Act according to the rules

Tisha Steyn

The National Veld and Forest Fire Act 101 of 1998 requires landowners to prepare a firebreak on their side of the boundary where there is a reasonable risk of veldfire.

The Act does not specify requirements for firebreaks because the specific requirements for an effective firebreak vary from place to place.

The SCFPA is currently working on a minimum requirement document on fire brakes, rules and regulations for SCFPA members and will be made available in due course.

A communication strategy/plan is also being developed and will be communicated to the SCFPA members and partners. Firebreaks cannot stop every veldfire, and there will be a time when conditions are so severe that a fire will cross a firebreak. But firebreaks are useful in stopping many fires, in providing a access point to fight the fire or and to do back burns.

Firebreaks can be made by grading, ploughing, disking, hoeing or burning. However, any soil disturbance is subject tot the Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act (Cara Act), and owners should ensure that firebreaks are positioned in such a way as to cause the least disturbance to soil and biodiversity.

Protected plants must however be transplanted, or the firebreak must be positioned in such a way to avoid them.

Neighbouring landowners may agree to change the position of the fire brake because of practical reasons.

They may also agree to share a firebreak and agree to share the cost of maintaining this firebreak. This must be a written agreement signed by both parties for both of these agreements. It is unlawful to have an agreement NOT to have a firebreak.

The Act sets out a procedure for burning firebreaks, and neighbours must agree on a mutu-

ally acceptable date and position on a common boundary, and the neighbour or agent must be present. The Fire Protection Association must be informed. The person making the break should have enough people present to stop the fire from spreading.

If the neighbours cannot reach an agreement, 14 days written notice must be given to neighbours and the FPA of the days on which you will be burning. In some conditions burning cannot go ahead, such as when there is a high fire danger rating;

For more information, contact Dirk Smit of Southern Cape Fire Protection Association at 044 302 6900 (office) or 072 785 2742.

Sunshine? Let's dine!

Susan Botha

"Wow! I could not believe that the good old sun can actually be used to cook food - but seeing is believing!" Martha Claassen, one of the CapeNature volunteers who benefitted from a day-long WESSA training session, was in awe. "I learnt such a lot! I can actually MAKE a sun stove at home using old boxes and newspaper - the only expense is a roll of tin foil!" she exclaims. The South African Ostrich Business Chamber (SA-OBC) utilized some of their Lotto-funded Biodiversity Project's money to "give back" to the farmers who participated in their biodiversity



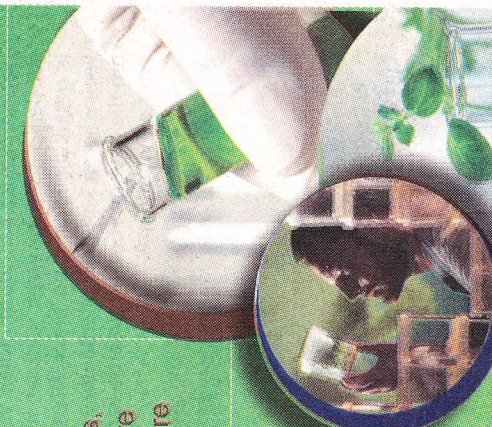
management project. The rationale behind this training is to capacitate farm workers' wives to cook "with the sun" - thus relieving the pressure on our natural vegetation (fire wood), as well as reducing electricity bills to add to a plethora of other benefits for both the farm workers and the environment. Through a strong partnership with the SAOBC, the Community Conservation component secured a number of spaces in this training for volunteers. Says Anita Wheeler, coordinator of the Biodiversity Management project of the SAOBC, "Essentially skills needed to mitigate climate change - be it using sun stoves, recycling, making own vegetable and herb gardens, whatever - can benefit anyone. Through partnering with CapeNature and jointly working on monitoring the use of these stoves, we feed knowledge to more communities than only the ostrich farming community." Participants were also taught to plant vegetables and herbs in used plastic bottles, and making a "vertical garden", using old wire to mount it on existing fences

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