Lowveld & Escarpment Fire Protection Association Newsletter **Issue 37 February 2019**

Greetings,

January brought some welcome summer rains after the December heatwave and while February is off-season, it's never too early to begin your fire season preparations and planning. The value of your LEFPA membership in the event of a wildfire on your property is enormous and we remind members to ensure their details are up to date on our system. Pass your copy of *All Fired Up* along to your non-member neighbours - a united block of fire-aware people strengthens your protection and support levels. Until next time.

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LEFPA Goes to the Polls in 2019

2019 is an election year at LEFPA and LEFPA goes to the polls on the 13th June to elect office bearers for the next three years. LEFPA members thus have an opportunity to vote for their representatives in their category:

- **Agriculture**, representing Mpumalanga Cane Growers and Mpumalanga Agri (Nelspruit branch),
- **Conservation**, representing the Mpumalanga Parks and Tourism Agency and Game Farmers,
- **Forestry**, representing DAFF Forestry, Large and Small Forestry and FSA members,
- **Municipal / Residential**, representing Muncipalities and residential estates in the LEFPA area.

The Fire Protection Officer (FPO) position is still vacant at this time, however, Mbombela has advertised the position of Chief Fire Officer and have indicated that the post will be filled before the end of this financial year.

Only paid-up LEFPA members may become members of the LEFPA Executive. In addition, candidates should be involved in his / her ward structure and have attended more than 50% of the Ward and General meetings as well as the SGM and AGM in the last 12 months.

Nomination forms will be available at the LEFPA General meeting on the 11th April and must be submitted to LEFPA Admin no later than 30 days before the AGM as per the LEFPA constitution.

Don't sit back and watch others do it, put your hand up and be counted!

LOWVELD & ESCARPMENT FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATION

Have We Got Your Correct Details?

Over time your contact or property details may change and LEFPA understands that sometimes you may be too busy to let us know of any changes. Often, these things can slip your mind until an event occurs.

Please consider this a nudge to double check that we have your latest details on file.
Call Ivina 013 752 6419 or drop her an email: admin@lefpa.co.za.

Ricinus Comminus - The Nasty Castor Oil Plant

A teaspoon of castor oil was often used as a medicinal threat back in the day and sure to cure any 'get out of going to school' malingering. Johan Louw writes that this is a nasty alien invasive plant too.

IAP Species: *Ricinus communis*

Common names: Castor oil plant, Castorbean, wonder tree (English); kasterolieboom, bloubottelboom, bosluisboom (Afrikaans); mohlafotha (Sesotho); mokhura (Pedi); mufuta (Shona); umfude (Ndebele); umhlakuva (isiZulu); umhlakuva (isiXhosa).

Nemba Category: 1b

Description:

This plant is an annual shrub or small tree with a softly woody stem that grows up to 4m high with leaf and flowering stalks that often have a grey bloom. The shiny, dark green or reddish leaves are paler below and star-shaped with serrated margins. Upper flowers are reddish and lower flowers cream. The seeds are green, brown or reddish, three-lobed capsules covered with soft spines. The entire plant is poisonous.

Origin: Tropical Africa.

Where in South Africa is it a problem?

All provinces in South Africa.

How does it spread?

Seed dispersal.

Why is it a problem?

Ricinus competes with indigenous pioneering species especially in watercourses. It is extremely poisonous.

Does the plant have any uses?

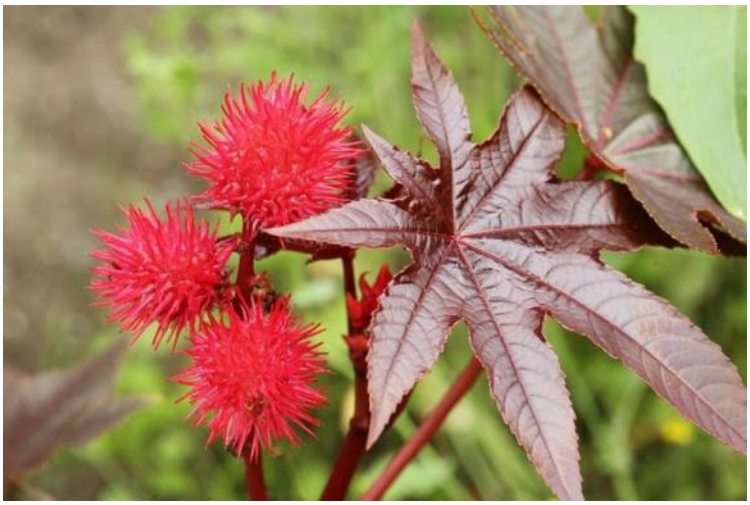
Used as an ornamental plant and for castor oil. Ricin, which can be extracted from the beans, is highly toxic and has been used in homicide cases. Castor oil has more benign uses as a soap and as vehicles or carriers, emollients or solubilizes for toiletries and cosmetics and is used for cleansing and conditioning the skin. The plant has medicinal properties and it is gaining popularity as a biodiesel crop.

Control:

The best form of invasive species management is prevention. If prevention is no longer possible, it is best to treat the infestations of weeds when they are small to prevent them from establishing (early detection and rapid response). Controlling the weed before it seeds will reduce future problems. Control is generally best applied to the least infested areas before tackling dense infestations. Consistent follow-up work is required for sustainable management.

Ricinus communis can be controlled through cultivation and mowing or physical uprooting. Herbicides can be effective as cut stump treatments or basal bark applications (painting herbicide onto the bark).

When using any herbicide always read the label first and follow all the instructions and safety requirements. If in doubt, consult an expert. Fire may be used as a management tool, but usually in combination with other methods. Fire alone may actually increase *R. communis* densities by plant regrowth and enhanced seed germination.

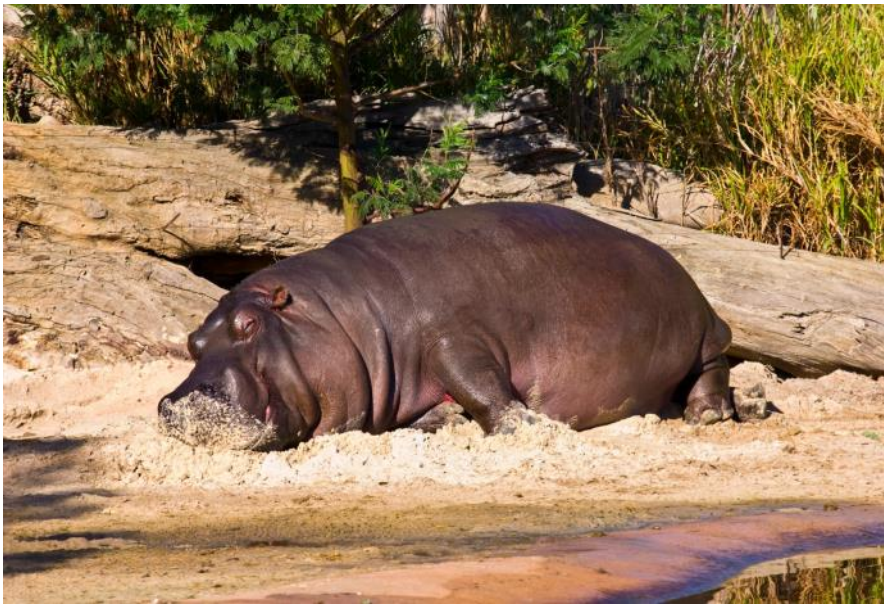


References

Global Invasive **Species** Database online data sheet. *Ricinus communis*. **www.issg.org/database**. Henderson, L. (2001). **Alien** weeds and invasive plants. A complete guide to declared weeds and invaders in South Africa. Plant Protection Research Institute Handbook No. 12, 300pp. PPR, ARC South Africa. Invasive Species of South Africa. *Ricinus Comminis*. Available at: **http:// invasives.org.za/component/k2/item/326-castor-oil-plant-ricinus-communis**.

Sweltering Through the Hottest Summer in 30 Years

Some disturbing news has come through from the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) regarding the summer we are currently sweating through. Yes, you are right, it is very much hotter than last year; in fact, this is the warmest summer in 30 years. Phew!



On a regular basis *All Fired Up* mentions climate change and the effect it is having on wildfires across the world.

According to an article in *Landbou,* the summer of 2018 / 2019 has given us more heat wave days and higher average temperatures than normal. A weak El Niño weather phenomenon has made forecasts more difficult but as stated in the DAFF weather advisory for 2019, 'Overall higher temperatures are still expected moving towards the late-summer and early-autumn periods. There is a particularly confident forecast for above normal maximum temperatures over the northern parts of the country.' It's official, then. The heat isn't dissipating any time soon.

Data from the ARC weather stations show that the September to December 2018 maximum temperatures in parts of South Africa rose up to 5°C higher than usual, especially in Limpopo province. That's a staggering figure, affecting every living organism. We therefore have to plan for increasingly dry, hot weather and DAFF has the following advice for veld fire prevention:

- The provinces and farmers are advised to create and maintain firebreaks. An owner of the land who is obliged to prepare and maintain a firebreak must ensure that, with due regard to the weather, climate, terrain and vegetation of the area, the following is taken care of in terms of preparing firebreaks (Chapter 4 of the National Veld and Forest Fire Act No. 101 of 1998):
- It has to be wide enough and long enough to have a reasonable chance of preventing a veld fire from spreading to or from neighbouring land.
- It does not cause soil erosion.
- It is reasonably free of inflammable material capable of carrying a veld fire across it.
- Firebreaks may be temporary or permanent.
- Firebreaks should consist of fire-resistant vegetation, inflammable materials, bare ground or a combination of these.
- Firebreaks must be located in such a way as to minimize risk to the resources being protected.
- Erosion control measures must be implemented at the firebreak.

<u>Firebreaks can be made through the following methods</u>:

- Mineral earth firebreak: through ploughing, grading or other earth movement.
- Use of herbicides.
- Use of animals to overgraze specifically to minimise fuel.
- Plant fire-resistant plants.
- Plant species selected for vegetated firebreaks must be non-invasive and capable of retarding the spread of fire.

<u>Maintaining firebreaks</u>:

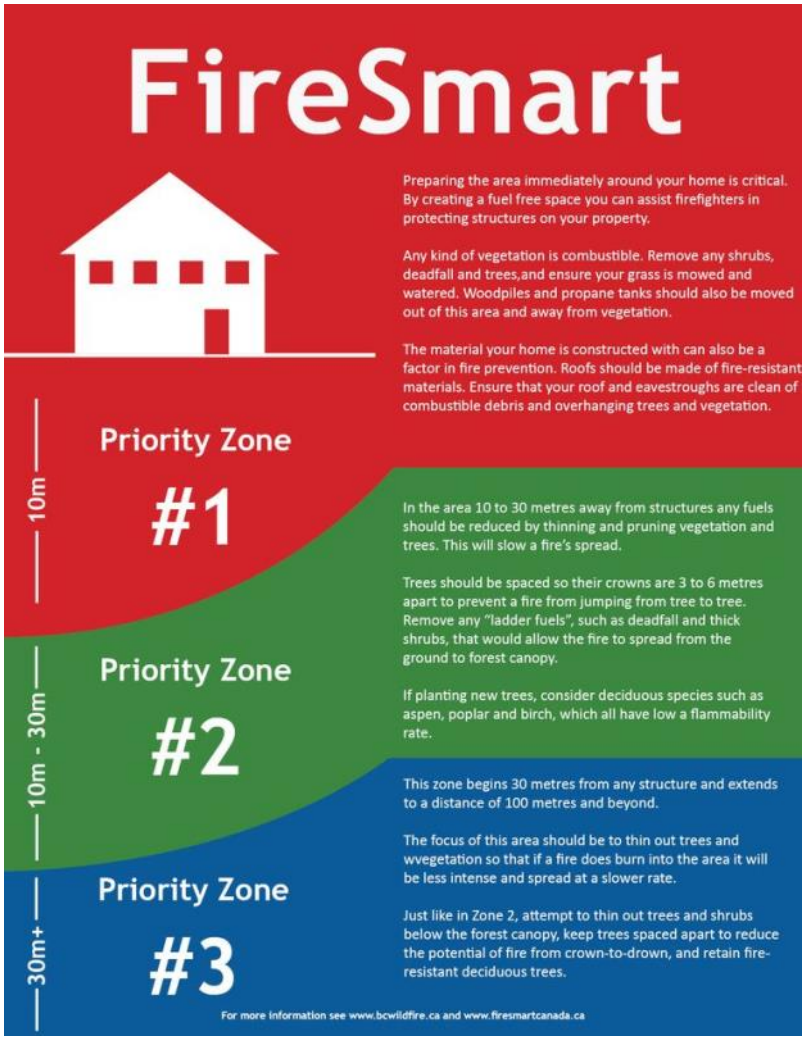
- Mow, disk, or graze vegetative firebreaks to avoid a build-up of excess litter and to control weeds.
- Inspect all firebreaks for woody materials.
- Inspect firebreaks at least annually and rework bare ground firebreaks as necessary.
- Repair erosion control measures as necessary.
- Access by vehicles or people must be controlled.
- Bare ground firebreaks which are no longer needed must be stabilized i.e. sow grass, mulch.

www.netwerk24.com/landbou/Nuus/die-2018-19-somer-is-die-warmste-in-30-jaar-se-lnr-20190117

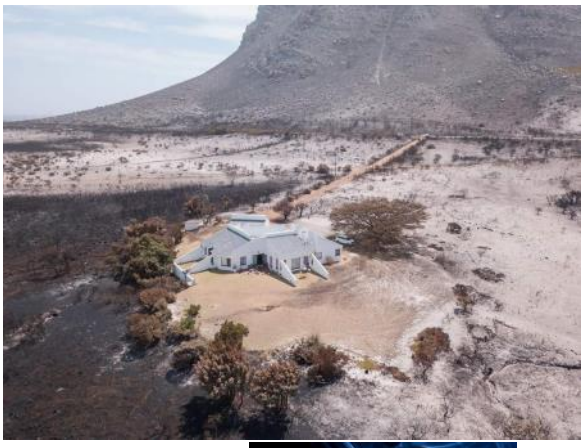
www.daff.gov.za

Have **You** Got Clearance?

The New Year fires that ravaged Betty's and Pringle Bays have shown a clear picture of the value of proper clearance and the establishment of Priority Zones around your property. Is your property #123 Fire Smart?

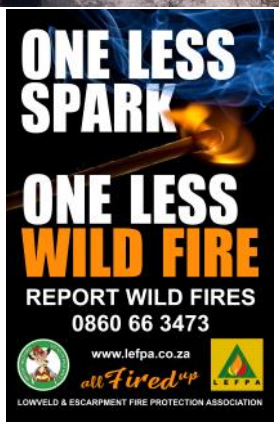


Guess who has clearance around their property and who didn't?
Don't be caught out like this! Establish the recommended Priority Zones on your property.



Activities for the Month - February

- Mow airstrips.
- Prepare chemical tracer belts.
- Attend LEFPA meetings regularly.
- Train your employees in fire management.
- Finalise a firebreak agreement with your neighbours.
- Draw up an action plan for non-conforming firebreaks.
- Slash burning allowed if weather permits - get a burning permit from LEFPA.



Important Note:

- Basic Firefighting Training is available to LEFPA members. Interested parties should contact the LEFPA office.
- FDI weather emails and SMSs are available to LEFPA members, contact Ivina for more information.
- PLAN YOUR TRAINING NEEDS EARLY!
- **SUCCESS cannot be spelt without U. Attend and participate - we need your contribution!**