



all Fired up

Lowveld & Escarpment Fire Protection Association Newsletter

Issue 56 September 2020

Greetings,



The Lowveld tends to hop right over spring and launch straight into summer. Not great for landowners anxiously eyeing the sky in hopes of rain clouds as the temperature rises and the earth dries up. September is the start of spring but often seems to be the dustiest, hottest month as we wait for the summer rains to arrive.

There are still 2 warm, dry months to go before the 2020 fire season is potentially over and late season fires are still a risk. Don't take your foot off the pedal yet, find that extra burst of energy as the finale approaches. Until next time.

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LEFPA Chairman's Report

For LEFPA and its members, 2019 was a positive year - the Association enjoyed a strong financial performance against budget with a healthy cash flow and improved reserves. There were zero safety incidents recorded and a new record of 1000 flying hours was logged.

However, there is economic and health uncertainty ahead and our accumulated reserves will become crucial in carrying LEFPA through this crisis. Many state-owned enterprises do not contribute to the FPA although the Act stipulates they must. Without the support from large industry players we would not be able to finance the Association and its additional services.

Currently, there are 1.9 million hectares under LEFPA's jurisdiction and more than 500 paid-up members. These members own more than 980,000 hectares across four municipalities. In addition, LEFPA has the largest concentration of high-risk forestry plantations in the country.

On behalf of the members and the Board, I would like to thank all the staff who put enormous effort into getting things done and who continue to operate through these difficult times. Without their dedication, this organisation will not be in the strong position it is in today. LEFPA's directorship remained stable during the year with the exception of Ferdi De Wet who resigned during the early part of 2020. I would like to thank the Board and the Executive for the hours and dedication they have given LEFPA without remuneration, sacrificing personal time to assist LEFPA to meet its goals.

During 2019 LEFPA's list of accomplishments included:

- Completing the three-year tender for detection,
- Implementing FireWeb,
- Securing funding for the Forestry Support Programme,
- Achieving a 1.37% increase for 2020 on all membership rates,
- The imminent launch of the new Forest Watch online App,
- We continue to work on all weather applications to bring members the best and most relevant weather forecast,
- LEFPA's Risk Assessment was commissioned in 2019 as an ongoing live document to assist as a decision-making tool. Phase 1 was to determine fire risk to place resources including aerial resources in strategic areas to combat fires within the 10-minute flying time. We will continue to work and improve on this during 2020. *(cont on page 2)*

LEFPA Chairman's Report (cont from page 1)

In closing, LEFPA turns 20 this year and is often referred to as the most successful FPA in the country. This is due to the stable support from its members and sound management from the staff and Board over the past 20 years. We will be reviewing the structure of LEFPA and formulate ways to safeguard our assets and the Directors.

The balance of 2020 will not be easy but I assure you that the board and executive will give it our best. Remember we all have one common enemy - fire. By working together we will successfully manage it. As Mpumalanga heads into our pandemic peak, I would like to wish you all good health. I look forward to sitting around the table with you at next year's AGM.



The Forestry Support Programme

We mentioned the Forestry Support Programme (FSP) in our August issue and will be giving regular updates on this new and essential service. Unfortunately, space is too tight this month for more than a brief introduction but in a nutshell, DEFF's, (the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries) forestry plantations are located in remote areas and surrounded by rural communities. The risk of fire is high and proper management critical. Johan Heine, Chairperson of the Working on Fire (WOF) Board and initiator of the Forestry Support Programme (FSP), explained that MTO Forestry, which manages DEFF's plantations, has an exit lease agreement and has already handed back a large portion of these areas to DEFF.

Johan, together with Dr. Guy Preston and Susan Leseke from DEFF, initiated the FSP as an extension of the Memorandum of Agreement between DEFF and Working on Fire to manage these plantations. "Our goal is to upgrade and improve these plantations and we are well ahead in executing this successfully. The FSP maintains, upgrades and improves all existing DEFF plantations in the Southern and Eastern Cape, Kwa-Zulu Natal and Mpumalanga provinces," Johan announced.

Through the various FPAs, FSP will work closely with neighbouring landowners and corporates such as Sappi, Mondi, York Timbers and other forestry operators to comply to the Forestry Act in terms of land and fire management. According to Hein Niemand, of the Eastern Cape Umbrella FPA, "onsite resources for these plantations are minimal and limited. Both forestry and fire prevention activities are not always performed or completed, resulting in plantations that don't comply with general forestry practices...causing high fuel loads that exacerbate veldfires. This also makes firefighting assistance, when calls for help are received, extremely difficult." The FSP supported plantations are able to develop a fire prevention strategy and appoint contractors from local communities to perform various tasks, such as fuel reduction and fire prevention activities. Johan Heine says this helps the local community with employment opportunities and job creation.

Wildfire Today - International Wildfire News



Turning to the international wildfire scene, Andre Scheepers bookmarked two interesting articles featured in Wildfire Today, (www.wildfiretoday.com). First, a report on the staggering number of wildfires in Brazil's Pantanal wetlands. In the first six months of 2020 the Brazil Institute for Space Research identified 2 534 fires. In July, (until 25th), another 1 322 were registered, bringing the total to 3 856 fires in the central-west of Brazil, an increase of 158% on 2019 and the largest number of fires in 21 years. It is estimated that 5100km² have burned in the first 7 months of 2020 and the Pantanal fires led the state of Mato Grosso do Sul to declare a 6 month state of environmental emergency on 24th July. Contributing factors? Our old friends, strong winds, high temperatures and low air humidity.

Wilderness Fire - Suppress or Manage?

Bill Gabbert set the cat amongst the pigeons with his article featuring a video produced by the Northern Rockies Fire Science Network - do you pour money and effort into suppressing a fire or pick a spot you need to protect and let the rest burn? Managing fire as a resource tool may be contrary to everything you believe but take 12 minutes to watch the film and make up your own mind. The video features interviews with 22 experienced fire practitioners - quoted here is Dick Bahr, National Park Service Program Lead for Fire Science and Ecology:

"We have really good modelling now... If you're not comfortable with where it's going to get or you're concerned about what it's going to burn up - do you take on the fire, or do you ... let the fire do what it's supposed to do. You're going to win a few, you're going to lose a few. And it's OK to lose, but you've got to learn from them."

www.wildfiretoday.com/2020/07/31/wilderness-fire-suppress-or-manage-it/

We'd like to open up the discussion amongst our members - what are your thoughts on this concept?

Last Drop for Bomber 14ZS-OTY

It's always hard to bid a team member farewell and it's with some sadness that LEFPA waves bomber pilot Hylton Taylor goodbye and good luck as he takes off for Australia.

The outpouring of affection and regret at his leaving is testament to the respect and esteem in which he is held by his colleagues and friends. Hylton has featured in several previous issues of *All Fired Up* as the recipient of many annual awards but not only is he a fine pilot, he is a mate and we love the sketch Mark Jackson has drawn in his honour! Hylton wrote in to *All Fired Up*:

"After 22 seasons of firefighting, mainly in the Nelspruit area, although I have also been based at Warburton, Piet Retief, Kwamonambi and Melmoth, the time has come to spread my wings further afield. I have accepted a full-time crop spraying position in Queensland, Australia, where I will be flying both fixed wing and helicopters. My wife and our two children will share this new adventure with me.

My crop spraying career began in 1998, when I was just 20 years old. A year later, in June 1999, I joined the Forest Fire Association as a bomber pilot flying Dromaders. In November 2001 I moved to Aerial Farming Services, flying Bomber 14, an Ayres Turbo Thrush. When LEFPA was formed in 2008, we moved over and I flew for LEFPA until the end of July 2020. I have a helicopter licence with an instructors rating and work as an instructor part time - between my LEFPA duties, instructing and crop spraying there isn't much time left for anything else. Over the years I have flown approximately 1400 firefighting hours and have around 8000 hours on planes and helicopters.

Making a big change like this is not easy and I will greatly miss my fellow pilots and mates at LEFPA. I wish them everything of the best, it's been an honour to be part of the team and I thank one and all for the past 12 years."



Rob Taylor makes a final drop on behalf of Hylton on Thursday 6th August. Photo credit Hennie Homann



The aerial team gather to say farewell
© Hennie Homann

Birchanger Farm Says “Thank You”

Andy Dalrymple from Birchanger Farm in the Lou’s Creek area sent Andre and Queen a lovely thank you note after LEFPA assisted him with a planned burn.

“I would just like to say thank you very much for the assistance on Saturday. It was a real pleasure to watch the professionals at work and I am extremely grateful we had you out to help, I do not think we would have managed it without your assistance. The crews were excellent in all aspects, professional, helpful and thorough, a real credit to yourselves and to Working on Fire.”

What a lovely letter to receive - kudos to Queen and her crew for another job well done.

Non-Compliance Concern

Mike van Rensburg raised a concern with regards to the compliance of non-members, State entities and redistributed land in our areas. The complaint is duly noted by LEFPA and we will strive to assist where possible. This is a national problem - most local authorities don’t have by-laws and enforcement procedures in place, which puts the onus on landowners to be proactive.

All Fired Up recommends that Mike and other concerned members follow the commendable example featured in the August issue. Hein Niekerk took the bull by the horns and approached LEFPA to assist in sorting out the problem prior to the yearly fire season. Getting in touch with your local LEFPA Ward structure to do this in your area will reduce the fire risk on your own land.



August By Numbers

LEFPA Fire Stats - 2020 Fire Season										
	Fires				Ha Burned		Fire Suppression Hours			
	Total Fires	Aerial	Ground	Aerial &	Plantation	Veg	Total Hours	Spotter plane	Bomber	Chopper
Totals 2019	135	71	55	9	11815	5383	1001,93	284,64	369,93	347,36
Totals 2020	104	37	59	8	1 764	3166,85	458,58	106,34	190,97	161,27
May 15 - 31	3	0	2	1	60	50	8,03	2,73	5,30	0,00
June	11	9	2	0	136	250,35	51,68	13,86	19,03	18,79
July	29	15	12	2	745	2491	165,26	38,77	61,11	65,38
August	60	13	42	5	823	375,5	233,61	50,98	105,53	77,10
Aug-19	18	4	14	0	6	969	56,20	12,70	27,40	16,10
FSP	38	0	38	0	0	488,5	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00

Activities for the Month - September

- Attend LEFPA meetings regularly.
- Check airstrips on a weekly basis.
- Distribute your standby rosters to all neighbours.
- Advise all staff of call-out and dispatch protocols.
- Obtain FDI forecast on a daily basis from LEFPA.
- Study weather systems and check forecasts on the internet.
- Perform daily and weekly checks of all equipment, using Checklists.



Important Note:

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