



all Fired up

Lowveld & Escarpment Fire Protection Association Newsletter

Issue 86 April 2023

Greetings,



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Well, Freddy (or Frikkie, as Andre likes to call him) proved to be the unwanted gift that kept on giving and just wouldn't give up and go away.

But as we've seen in the past, something good comes out of disaster and in the case of Frikkie, the joint response team formed by various agencies in the LEFPA operational area is a very good result indeed.

Jacques Benade's letter of appreciation praises the value LEFPA's infrastructure played in the successful set up and running of the multi-agency team. We'd like to give Andre Scheepers a huge shout out, LEFPA's GM dreams big and his vision is guiding the bigger picture. Until next month.



Quick Reads



Patch Burns: due to favourable conditions in many places, members seized the opportunity to use patch mosaic burns and reduce fuel load prior to the new fire season. Thanks to La Niña and Frikkie, fuel load is going to be one of the season's challenges so this was a smart move by members. 'How to' patch mosaic burn was covered in the March and April 2021 issues of *All Fired Up*.

Act Amendment: The National Veld and Forest Fire Amendment Bill, seeking to amend the National Veld and Forest Fire Act, 1998, to provide for the facilitation of fire protection association formation by municipalities, to compel all organs of state owning land to join fire protection association and to extend the powers of entry, search seizure and arrest to peace officers has been recommended by the Portfolio Committee to the National Assembly for approval.

Refresher Training: Refresher training during the Joint Operational Command provided opportunities to sharpen skills and work together in a multi-agency environment. LEFPA's Dispatcher Pleasure Nkosi took part in the hoisting exercise at FANS. Pleasure is always the first to volunteer for adventure, and his face is a picture to behold!



Letter of Appreciation Floods and Cyclone Freddy Incidents

Andre and his team are walking around the offices with massive smiles on their faces after receiving a letter from Jacques Benade, Deputy Director: CoGTA Mpumalanga. Disaster Management (Immediate Intervention, Special Events and Fire Services Co-Ordination) early in March. Jacques writes:

“Since February 8th the province was severely affected by extreme rains, causing devastation in the Ehlanzeni District and other municipalities. This resulted in infrastructure damages, lives lost and disruption of services and this was echoed across the country. The pressure on government to respond was tremendous as calls from the affected kept streaming in. It was for this reason that the close cooperation from all stakeholders was harnessed to achieve success and ensure more lives were not lost.

In real terms, the establishment of a multi-jurisdictional TAC-JOC able to operate from a heli-spot would have been a stretch, were it not for the forward thinking of LEFPA. The necessary facilities were built and equipped at the old Nelspruit Airfield by LEFPA years ahead of Freddy.

In addition, LEFPA, a Fire Protection Association, made available their Ops room, Dispatch Centre and access to staff to support the TAC-JOC operations.

On a personal note, the welcome, the after-hours availability and support as well as the always-fresh coffee made it an absolute pleasure to work under very stressful and demanding circumstances.

Thank you so very much.”

The establishment of the multi-jurisdictional TAC-JOC with access to the facilities and support of LEFPA is a game-changer for disaster and emergency response and tactical services. Disastrous weather events are becoming regular features as climate change continues to evolve; this co-ordinated multi-agency approach provides the resources, skills and knowledge required to swing into action at speed when needed.

“Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean.” – Ryunosuke Satoro

WoF Mpumalanga Newsletter Features LEFPA News

Andre Scheepers was invited to submit a piece about LEFPA, who we are and what we do for the WoF Mpu newsletter. **Here it is: From the desk of LEFPA Manager, Andre Scheepers**

The Lowveld Escarpment Fire Protection Association (LEFPA) is the largest fire protection association in the province and is a member of the Mpumalanga Umbrella Fire Protection Association (MUFPA). We deal with all aspects of fire detection, prevention, suppression, rehabilitation, and awareness. We provide firefighting aircraft, groundcrews, issue burn permits, a Dispatch Centre, fire detection, fire awareness, weather forecasting and updates, GIS Mapping and related training, legal advice, and assistance. At the moment, we are busy preparing for the 2023 winter fire season.

Adding one more team from Working on Fire

When Working on Fire Mpumalanga contacted us with regards to adding more teams to our roster, LEFPA consulted its members and resolved to seize the opportunity. Thus preventing the closure of bases, the loss of experienced firefighters and providing additional assistance to our members - Mpumalanga Tourism Parks Agency, the Forestry Support Programme and the community at large within our area.

Six WOF teams on our roster

The High Altitude Graskop team was transferred and is now the Graskop Airfield team, partnered with LEFPA. It is based at the Thaba Cheu Local Municipality airfield. This brings to a total of six ground teams within LEFPA's Operational Area - Waterval Boven, Lomati (Mlambongwane), LEFPA Nelspruit, Graskop Airfield and two Forestry Support Programme teams (Injaka and Salique).

Good luck with the Winter Fire Season preparations

On behalf of LEFPA management, I wish all the winter fire season teams a safe season. A heads-up for the upcoming Yellow Card refresher training camps - work hard and prepare now! Above all, remember “safety comes first”.

It is also the time for landowners and communities to prepare fire breaks and action fuel load reduction as most regions had above-normal rainfall this summer and fuel loads are high. Use fire responsibly. Report the fires and support your local fire protection association.



The Graskop Airfield team

Invasive Alien Plants - Pesky Pereskia

Mbombela Nature Conservation Officer Johan Louw is a long-time friend of LEFPA and *All Fired Up* is grateful for another expert article from him about invasive alien plants. In this issue he tells us all about Pereskia, beautiful but pesky.

Common name: Pereskia

Scientific name: *Pereskia aculeata* (Cactaceae)

Alternative common names: Barbados gooseberry; blade apple; leafy cactus, lemon vine, primitive cactus; Spanish gooseberry (English), Pereskia; barbadosstekelbessie (Afrikaans), uqwaningi (isiZulu)

Description: A spiny, clambering vine with long slender branches, grows 2-10m or higher, superficially resembles a bougainvillea. Young stems and leaves are semi-succulent with pairs of short, hooked spines in the leaf axils. Older stems are woody with clusters of hard, straight spines 30-40mm long. Bright green to yellowish, lance-shaped leaves. Flowers March - July, bearing white, cream or yellow lemon-scented flowers, followed by succulent berries about 20mm across, initially green then turn yellow. Invades forest margins, clearings and plantations.

Where does this species come from? West Indies and South America (Brazil and Argentina).

What is its invasive status in South Africa? Existing legislation: CARA 2002 - Category 1 NEMBA - Category 1b.

Where in South Africa is it a problem? Mostly in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, as well as scattered parts of Gauteng, Mpumalanga and Limpopo Provinces.

How does it spread? Spreads by seed dispersal.

Why is it a problem? It overtops and smothers other species, including large forest and plantation trees. Obstructs access to forests and plantations.

Flowers: White, cream or yellow flowers appearing from March-July and lemon-scented.

Fruit/Seeds: Succulent berries about 20mm across, initially green then turning yellow.

Does the plant have any uses? Used as an ornament and for security hedging.

Control: Pereskia is difficult to control. In terms of the Alien and Invasive Species Regulations (AIS), National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (Act No 10 of 2004), Pereskia was declared a category 1b species, which necessitates its control or removal and destruction if possible. No trade or planting is allowed.

Pereskia smothers indigenous plants and even kills large forest trees. As the plant grows in ecologically sensitive and hard-to-reach areas, control using herbicides and physical removal is difficult. It can reproduce from fragments, which means that follow-up operations are required almost indefinitely. In addition, whether herbicides or physical removal are used, it is impossible to avoid killing surrounding vegetation as the weed intertwines itself with other plants.

One reason Pereskia is a problem in South Africa is that no insects feed on the plant here. In its native habitat, insects and pathogens feed extensively on it, and it never reaches high densities. The Pereskia stem-wilter is one example; this sucking bug destroys the growing tips of the cactus, stunting growth and reducing its ability to compete with other plants.

Research into the biological control of Pereskia has been carried out intermittently since the 1980s. A leaf-feeding flea beetle species, *Phenrica guerini*, was released during 1991 and became established in various coastal sites in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape provinces. Although it can cause considerable damage to leaves, it has not exerted any significant degree of control on a large scale. Ongoing research at Rhodes University recently resulted in the release of a stem-wilter, *Catorhintha schaffneri*. Contact person for this agent and future research: Dr Iain Paterson, E-mail: i.paterson@ru.ac.za.

On 20th January 2023, Daleen Strydom, the Biodiversity officer from DFFE released 150 stem-wilter bugs (*Catorhintha schaffneri*) and 40 leaf feeder beetles (*Phenrica guerini*) on a Pereskia site behind Delta on the Kanyamazane road.

Hit The Road, Frikkie!

Cyclone Freddy, which began on February 6 and was a named storm for 34 days, may be the longest cyclone ever recorded. The current record is a hurricane that raged for 31 days in 1994. Freddy “crushed another record for rapid intensification...rapidly intensified seven different times... three more times than any previous tropical cyclone of record. This means it gained at least 35 mph of wind intensity in 24 hours or less.” (www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/19/cyclone-freddy-death-toll-in-southeast-africa-surpasses-500)

The death toll has risen to 522 in south-east Africa, with Malawi reporting 438 deaths. But as always, it's the plight of the survivors causing the greatest concern. Homes, schools, shops, businesses, vehicles, factories, farm land and pretty much everything else that lay in Freddy's path was damaged or destroyed by the storm that came through once, moved off then turned around and came back. Food, shelter, potable water and medical facilities are in short supply as rescuers continue their work, finding people still perched in trees and on rooftops. “Accurate early warnings by National Meteorological and Hydrological Services and coordinated disaster management on the ground prevented even greater loss of life, underlining the paramount importance of Early Warnings for All.” (www.public.wmo.int/en/media/news/tropical-cyclone-freddy-may-set-new-record)

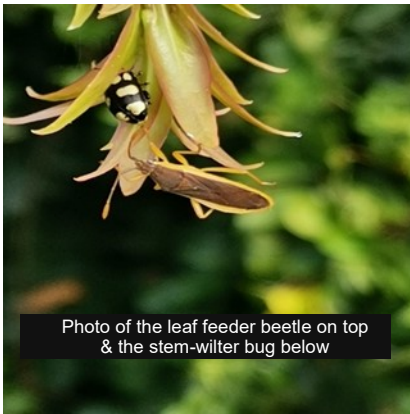


Photo of the leaf feeder beetle on top & the stem-wilter bug below

Seasonal Climate Watch March to July 2023

Continuing the National Agro-meteorological Committee (NAC) Advisory we began in our February issue, minimum and maximum temperatures are expected to be above normal and above normal rainfall anticipated in autumn and early winter. Notwithstanding the damp weather forecast, remain alert and prepared for veld fires in winter fire season areas.

Landowners are legally obliged to prepare and maintain firebreaks in accordance with Chapter 4 of the National Veld and Forest Fire Act No. 101 of 1998:

Firebreaks can be made through the following methods:

- Mineral earth firebreak: through ploughing, grading, other earth movement,
- Use of herbicides, or use animals to overgraze specifically to minimise fuel,
- Strategic placement of burned areas, not to be done on days with fire hazard (windy and dry/hot),
- Plant fire resistant plants. Species selected for vegetated firebreaks must be non-invasive, capable of retarding the spread of fire.

Maintaining firebreaks:

- 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 annually and rework bare ground firebreaks as necessary,
- Repair erosion control measures as necessary; control access by vehicles or people,
- Bare ground firebreaks, which are no longer needed must be stabilized i.e. sow grass, mulch.

What to do when conditions favourable for veld fire are forecast:

- Prohibit fires in the open-air during periods of high fire hazard and establish a fire control committee,
- To control fires, an alarm system, firefighting teams, and beaters must be organized in advance and plans prepared,
- Livestock should be moved out of grazing land to a safe place.

What to do during a veld fire:

- Water is generally not available in sufficient quantities or at adequate pressure for the control of major fires; sand or other loose mineral soil material can be an effective method of control,
- Tree branches can be used to beat fire.

Activities for the Month - April

- Check all radios.
- Prepare manual tracers.
- Attend LEFPA meetings regularly.
- Obtain LEFPA rules and regulations.
- Train your employees in fire management.
- Check that water points have adequate supply.
- Burn open areas on rotational burning programmes.
- Implement a daily vehicle checklist to ensure fire readiness.
- Match your fire-fighting resources based on the fire risks identified.
- Prepare roads bordering open areas and firebreaks that will be burned.
- Obtain LEFPA standard operating procedures related to high FDI periods.
- Slash burning allowed if weather permits - get a burning permit from LEFPA.
- Implement procedures to ensure the availability and supply of fuel, rations, etc.
- Enact operational procedures to ensure a quick response to provide medical and mechanical protection and other services.



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!