

Cape Argus ... Wednesday, September 3, 2008

Researched, written and co-ordinated by Carole Knight • 021 855 2982 • [www.caroleknight.com](http://www.caroleknight.com)

## Forestry on the African continent

In a bid to generate concrete gains from governance reforms and decentralised forest management on the African continent, an International Forest Governance and Decentralisation Conference was held in Durban in April of this year. This South African-led initiative was in support of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) and was attended by more than 30 countries.

Recommendations to the UNFF included urging countries to promote the decentralisation of forest management, providing support for the empowerment of relevant stakeholders, while stimulating their participation in forest management decision-making process at all levels.

Countries were requested to eliminate barriers and improve the access of local communities to markets, as well as to the revenue generated by the sustainable management of forests, through the better distribution of fiscal resources. Countries were also urged to promote national dialogue involving all relevant stakeholders, the purpose of which is to develop norms and standards to facilitate benefits to local people.

Recommendations generated at the conference also encouraged the forest sector to make the best use possible of the mechanism provided by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Countries were invited to take a proactive role in setting up trust and high standards of sector governance to make best use of new means of implementation.

### Forests in South Africa

From the Mopane woodlands of the Kruger National Park to the Knysna-Tsitsikamma forests of the southern Cape, South Africa has been endowed with a rich diversity of forests and woodlands.

Indigenous forests constitute only 0.5% coverage of the country, yet with more than 1 300 plant species, 37 mammals and 313 species of birds, biodiversity is far greater in these forests than would be expected. Woodlands similarly are rich in biodiversity with 5 900 plant species, 175 mammals and 540 bird species.

As biological wealth is a national resource of great importance, indigenous forests and woodlands are an indispensable part of our country's heritage. For an estimated nine million households they are also a source of medicinal plants, construction timber, fodder, fruit and nuts.

In 1996 there were no certified plantations in South Africa. By March 2007, however, more than 36 155 hectares of plantation forestry land (planted and conservation areas combined) had been certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

This represents the second-largest area in the southern hemisphere after Brazil. It also gives us the distinction of having the highest proportion of environmentally certified forestry estates in the world, and as such is a major step towards the sustainable management of our forests and related biodiversity.

### Transformation in forestry

The Forest Sector Transformation Charter was finalised in November 2007 after more than two years of work by the Forest Sector Charter Steering Committee and its Working Groups.

Based on the Sector commitments in the Charter, key outcomes of the Forest Sector transformation process can be summarised as follows:

- A weighted black ownership profile of 30% for the Sector as a whole within 10 years;
- A weighted black women ownership profile of 12.6% for the Sector as a whole within 10 years;
- Afforestation of a minimum of 100 000-hectare net increase in planted area over the next 10 years, mostly in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, through black-owned forestry enterprises that underpin further growth in the timber-processing, value-adding and marketing sectors;
- Increased participation of black people in forestry value-adding industries, such as sawmilling, paper production and charcoal production;
- Appropriate funding mechanisms identified to support forest enterprise development involving both industry and state funding; and
- Annual expenditure by the industry of at least R67.2 million in enterprise development.

This will result in more than 390 new jobs and 30 to 50 new small businesses annually; rehabilitation and transfer of 46 000 hectares of state plantations to black communities; and annual expenditure on skills development sufficient to add about 1 750 new learners into the tertiary education system, and more than double this number of other trainees and learners at lower educational levels.

### In our hands

Wilderness and forests constitute the last biotic frontier. Conservation initiatives across the globe have begun the work. But they will have little impact on saving forests and biodiversity unless we each dramatically reduce our carbon footprint in order to slow down the rate and extent of global climate change and its impact on forest ecosystems.

The destruction of forests and biodiversity is not inevitable. The future of many of the earth's species is in our hands. Meeting the challenge will require a changed global mindset. It will require different priorities, values and ethics.

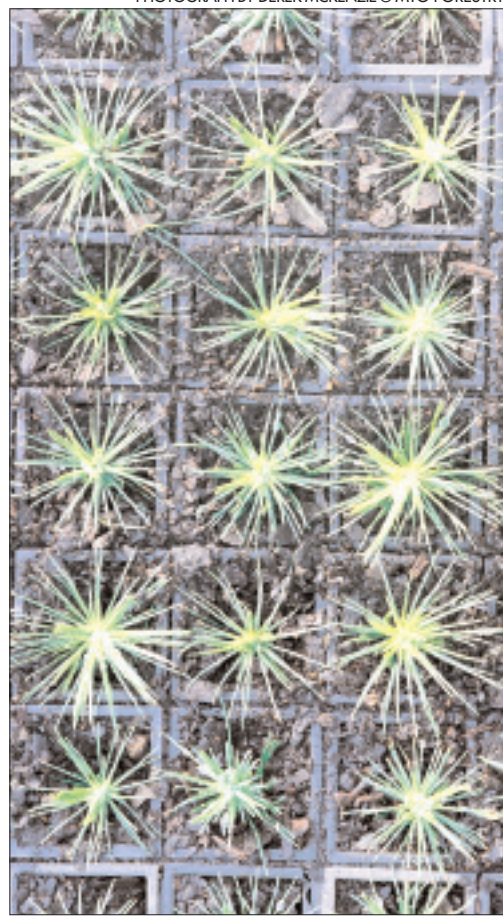
It will require a shared vision and an unparalleled degree of co-operation, across national boundaries and between national leaders and among nations' citizens. May we meet this challenge wisely and timeously.



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF TREES SOUTH AFRICA



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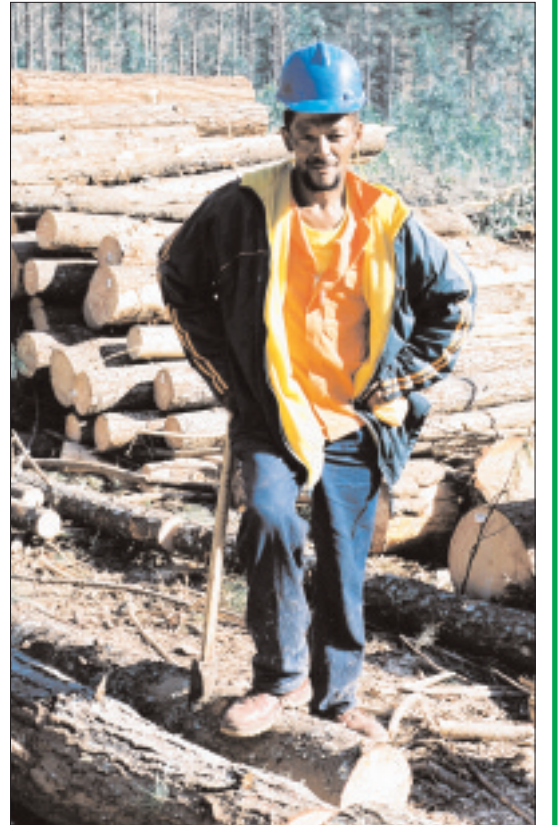
## What YOU can do!

- Think before you do anything and consider the environmental consequences of your actions.
- Do everything possible to reduce your carbon footprint. For more information on how to reduce your carbon footprint log onto <http://caroleknight.com/white-rock-communications/> (see Energy Security Feature)
- Join or support an environmental organisation.
- Support your local Botanical Garden as they are living museums, playing a vital role in the conservation of plant biodiversity.
- Explore a wetland and tell others about the importance of wetlands and other natural areas.
- Save water by planting fynbos or other indigenous plants in your garden.
- Use organic products in your garden as pesticides are highly neurotoxic and all are designed to kill – by killing insects, birds are also killed as they feed on the poisoned insects.
- Avoid using harmful substances, such as rat poison for rodent control as rats that die from rat poison can kill owls and other predators. Rather contact pest control professionals.
- Avoid killing snakes on your property. Rather contact Sean Macleod of Snake Catch and Rescue on 082 532 5033 or email Sean at [snakes.inc@telkomsa.net](mailto:snakes.inc@telkomsa.net) for relocation of snakes and other reptiles. For baboon information, education and relocation, contact Jenny Trethowen of Baboon Matters on 021 782-2015 or 084 413 9482.
- Avoid disturbing animals in the wild and don't bring tortoises and other small creatures home after a picnic or hike.
- Take only photographs and leave only your footprints.
- Don't pick plants when picnicking, walking or hiking.
- Use litter facilities provided in picnic areas or take litter home with you.
- Never light illegal fires or throw burning cigarettes or matches out of car windows.
- Join a hack group and help to remove alien vegetation.
- Clear vegetation from the area immediately around buildings if there is a risk of fire as fires pose a threat to life, biodiversity and property.
- Plant trees during National Arbor Week, September 1 to 7. Trees chosen for 2008 are the Wild Plum (*Harpephyllum caffrum*), Bladder Nut (*Diospyros whyteana*) and Bell Bean Tree (*Markhamia zanzibarica*).

- Instead of felling trees in order to create space for other purposes, rather rescue and relocate them by contacting Dag Willems of Trees South Africa on 021 842 0003, so that they can be sold on and replanted.
- Be aware of what wood you are using for your weekend braai as 47 species of trees are protected under the National Forests Act. This means that trees from these species may not be cut, damaged or sold without a licence. For a list of protected tree species, go to [www.dwaf.gov.za](http://www.dwaf.gov.za)
- Invasive alien plants increase the intensity of wildfires by greatly increasing the fuel to burn. They also consume large amounts of water; displace indigenous Fynbos species impacting on biological diversity; reduce the agricultural potential of land; and increase the speed of water run-off and contribute to the congestion of water-courses, which can lead to erosion and flooding. Remove invasive alien plants, such as Port Jackson (*Acacia saligna*), Rooikrans (*Acacia cyclops*), Long-leaved wattle (*Acacia longifolia*), Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*), Black wattle (*Acacia meamsii*), Silky Hakea (*Hakea sericea*), Stinkbean (*Paraserianthes lophantha*), Australian Myrtle (*Leptospermum laevigatum*), Cluster Pine (*Pinus pinaster*) and Spider Gum (*Eucalyptus lehmannii*) by engaging an experienced alien-clearing team. For more information, contact the Table Mountain National Park on 021 701 8692.
- Avoid buying non-certified hardwood timber products. In the interests of sustainable forestry only buy wood products that are FSC certified – for more information, go to [www.fsc.org](http://www.fsc.org)
- Avoid buying uncertified paper products from particularly Asian sources.
- Be aware that woods, such as the African Cherry/Kanda Stick/Red Stinkwood (*Prunus africana*) are CITES-listed and that the Bastard Quiver Tree (*Aloe pillansii*), Cape Cedar/Clanwilliam Cedar (*Widdingtonia cedarbergensis*) are IUCN-listed.
- Take heed of traffic control signs (to regulate speed) and warning signs (to warn of potential hazards such as wild animals) when visiting state forests and other natural areas.
- Get permits. Avoid sensitive areas and leave pristine areas as you found them.
- Buy wine products with the Biodiversity & Wine Initiative (BWI) label.



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF WWF



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THE NEXT FEATURE IN THE SUSTAINABILITY SERIES WILL BE ON WASTE MANAGEMENT. FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT CAROLE KNIGHT ON 021 855 2982.

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