SANParks CEO, Fundisile Mketeni, Managing Executive (ME): Parks, Property Mokoena and Acting ME for Conservation, Danie Pienaar, took time to meet with volunteers and visit affected areas shortly after the devastating Knysna fires in June.

Sadly, a number of SANParks personnel lost their homes in the fire. Park management immediately intervened to assist these staff members to get their lives back on track with regards to rebuilding their homes.

“Investigations are currently underway to determine the cause of the fire. The spread of the fire was of such a nature that no landowner is likely to be found to have been negligent as per the requirements of the National Veld and Forest Fire Act, simply due to the fact that the weather conditions at the time were described as extreme,” said Garden Route Implementation and Planning Manager, Len du Plessis. “Firebreaks, trained personnel and equipment would not have been effective in preventing the spread of the fire. We ourselves undertook extensive back-burning operations over the three-day period to save property and plantations. We provided resources in addition to manpower such as boats used to ferry people, fire trucks and others,” he said.

On 6 June about eight fires were reported in the Knysna area in the Southern Cape. The fires ravaged through the town and peri-urban areas as well as plantations, destroying an estimated 500 houses and which led to more than 7 000 people being evacuated. An estimated seven people have died as a result of the fire.

Wind conditions were severe and estimated at more than 60km/h. By far the greatest impact was to the residential areas in and around the town of Knysna.

A Joint Operating Committee (JOC) was set up to pool resources from multiple fire combating agencies including the Knysna Municipality, the Southern Cape Fire Protection Association, Working on Fire and others. On day three of the fires, the JOC was escalated to Provincial status and the South African National Defence Force was requested to assist. Multiple fires were raging in the area and the fire line had extended across a 300km area west to east. Some 1 016 fire fighters and volunteers assisted by the end of day four.SANParks assisted as follows:

- SANParks was involved with the fighting of the fires in the Knysna area over the period 6 to 10 June and assisted in protecting numerous properties from Sedgefield to Knysna.
- Park rangers with official vessels helped to evacuate fire victims stranded on the Brenton side to Thesen Island.
- As SANParks has Geographic Information System (GIS) competency, we offered our assistance to the Knysna Municipality in determining the extent of infrastructure damage and the exact number of houses that were destroyed.
- The SANParks Fire Management specialist formed a critical part of joint fire operations and the effective deployment of SANParks resources.
Addo Elephant National Park

- You have a wonderful curious shop! There is something for everyone.
- Great ‘smaller’ park that has the wildlife but can be visited in three to four days. Amazing number of up-close wildlife experiences and great variety of wildlife. Lodging is excellent!
- The staff at Castle Barron in Addo were extremely helpful and friendly. Thank You!

Camdeboo National Park

- The staff were really professional and friendly. Excellent on a tourism level.
- Lovely, peaceful campsite. Privacy of sites very nice. We shall visit again for longer.
- We enjoyed every moment in the Park and the staff was friendly and helpful. We will definitely visit the Park again.

Garden Route National Park

- We just want to thank all of the staff for their friendliness and professionalism. The vibe amongst themselves is refreshingly happy and healthy. Diepwalle boskamp did our souls good. THANK YOU sincerely. (Knysna)
- Loved every second of the Otter Trail. We were all impressed with the state and qualities of the facilities and trail – brilliant! Can’t wait to do it again. (Storms River)
- I am most impressed with the excellent service of Grant Groothoom and his front office team at Ebb & Flow. Many thanks. (Wilderness)

Karoo National Park

- What a nice surprise! We have always camped here, but the Karoo National Park cottages are awesome! The cottages are well-maintained and very clean. Even DSTV for the avid rugby and Kyknet enthusiast. On top of everything – a hearty breakfast included in the price! This Park and its staff really need a nice award.
- Having visited all national parks in South Africa with the exception of Marakele, which we hope to do soon, we want to congratulate the management of the Karoo National Park on the excellent upkeep of its camping facilities, which is by far the best of all parks.
- I want to thank Lorrian at Reception for sending my Bible and three steak knives that we forgot to the entrance gate where Markus handed it to me five days later on our way back from Cape Town! She phoned me to tell me that they found my ‘lost stuff’. I actually forgot it in the house when we left. Good work!

Mountain Zebra National Park

- Our guide was friendly, knowledgeable, attentive and professional.
- The gent that assisted us in your shop was fantastic. We needed rolls for our supper. He had none, but made a plan with the kitchen to supply us. So friendly and helpful. He is an asset to your establishment.
- The staff at Mountain Zebra were great as usual. They remembered us from previous visits and made us feel like ‘family’.

Knysna fires: Damage in the National Park

Initial findings after the devastating fires in Knysna indicate the iconic Knysna forest was not affected by the fire. From Goudhout to Diepwalle, the forest is accessible and was not at all affected by the fire. The Knysna forests are South Africa’s largest portion of Southern Afrotemperate Forests, spanning across 40 500 hectares of land, from George to Tselekomma in the East.

The fynbos areas in the Park (Harkerville) were affected. The Kranhoek Viewpoint and picnic areas were gutted by the recent inferno.

The fire in Hoekwil on Tuesday 13 June was very close to Ebb & Flow North but teams were out to extinguish the fire and it never jumped over to the Park. Some ablutions were affected at the Kranhoek picnic site and viewpoint of the Knysna Section.

SANParks staff, Dr. Wassell Vermeulen and Melanie de Morney from the Scientific Services Department joined various animal welfare groups in Knysna to assist with stranded animals (pets and wildlife found in the nearby peri-urban areas) as a result of the fire.

Rangers rescue two people from Brenton-on-Lake

The Knysna fires had residents brought to their knees at the beginning of June. On the afternoon of 7 June, three rangers Phumlani Qabe, Jeffrey Sekatane and skipper Gordon Roberts took to the raging seas to search for survivors in the Featherbed and Brenton-on-Lake areas.

At Brenton-on-Lake they caught a glimpse of a woman, known as mama Kholeka, trying to attract their attention. When they got to her she was with her male colleague, tata Eric, who worked in the area. They informed the rangers that their employers, an elderly couple, were stuck in their home. They had requested the two to run to the jetty to wait for help.

Rangers rushed to the aid of the couple but soon realised that the flames were way too high and it would be impossible to get to them. They returned for mama Kholeka and tata Eric waiting at the jetty, who refused to leave their employers. After multiple attempts at convincing them to be taken to safety they eventually conceded. Over rough seas and thick smoke, the group made their way back to the SANParks jetty.

The Sea Rescue team went back for the couple and reported that the gentleman had unfortunately died of a heart attack, but that the woman was saved and taken to a place of safety.

SANParks sends condolences to everyone who lost loved ones in the fire, and well wishes to those who suffered damages as a result.
After experiencing problems while looking through incomplete curriculum vitae’s received for vacancies in the Park, Mountain Zebra National Park’s Human Capital and Admin Officer, Andiswa Beki and People and Conservation Officer, Mxolisi Fulumente, decided to educate the local youth about CV writing ahead of Youth Day this year. They say some of the CV’s received did not even contain contact details, so they had no way of getting in touch with the applicants.

On 15 June the two spent time with the final year class at Sofunda Adult School, guiding them on CV writing and interview preparation – both of which could mean the difference between finding employment or not.

CV tips from Mountain Zebra National Park

1. Opening windows, blinds, curtains and doors allows sunlight and natural air to flow through homes and classrooms, giving it a more relaxing, natural atmosphere.
2. Visiting a national park: This offers a unique insight into what mother nature at her most natural looks like, with MZNP right on their doorstep, given as the perfect example.
3. Observing: By spending time outdoors every day, we may begin to notice things about our environment we had never seen before, which increases our awareness of our surroundings.
4. Going for a walk: Exercising, especially outdoors, is good for our health and strengthens our connection with nature. Fresh air and sunlight are just a couple of examples of how walking each day can improve our connection to nature and our overall health.
5. Visiting bodies of water: Although the term ‘body of water’ usually refers to oceans, seas and lakes, it also includes small pools of water such as ponds, wetlands or more rarely, puddles. Water is the fundamental basis of all life on earth and natural bodies are absolutely beautiful and the sound of water naturally soothing.
6. Going camping: A camping trip with friends or family is a great way to bond not only with each other but also with nature. Escape from everyday life and find yourself amidst trees, stars and fun campfire stories.
7. Starting a garden: Growing a garden is a fascinating experience that exposes us directly to the work of nature as we watch our plants grow.

Knysna forest ready for Oyster Festival (7 - 16 July 2017)

Initial findings after the devastating fires in Knysna indicate the iconic Knysna forest was mostly not affected by the fire. From Goudveld to Diepwalle, the forest is accessible and was not at all affected by the fire.

The fynbos areas in the Park (Harkerville) were affected. The Kranshoek Viewpoint and picnic areas were gutted by the recent inferno. The Knysna estuary was used to ferry people across from suburbs affected by the fire, and is also operational and ready for the Knysna Oyster Festival.

Other activities in the forest include camping spots, cycling and hiking trails, forest excursions (segways, scootours and ziplining). There are two museums in the Knysna forest – with the Legends Museum in Diepwalle with the history of the Knysna forest by far the most popular.
World Oceans Day (8 June) is an annual event during which individuals and communities from all walks of life come together to celebrate their oceans. They take action to help clean, protect and also educate others about the importance of this day and marine resources in general.

The theme of this year’s day was ‘Our Oceans, Our Future’. This year, Garden Route National Park’s People and Conservation Office ran a creative writing and art competition across ten primary schools in Knysna, Plettenberg Bay and Rheenendal. The topic, targeted at Grade 5 to 7 learners, was ‘Why should we protect our oceans?’.

Learners were given the choice of either writing an essay or designing a poster related to the theme. The purpose of the competition was to raise awareness on oceans, with emphasis on the Knysna estuary as it is in close proximity to the learners and is highly utilised by local residents and tourists.

Learners were expected to use their knowledge of the Natural Sciences CAPs curriculum learning area to cover but not limited to the below chapters:  Grade 5 - Plants and animals on earth; food chains, life cycles, fossils, etc.  Grade 6 - Photosynthesis; ecosystems and food webs, soluble and insoluble substances, water purification, etc.  Grade 7 - The biosphere, biodiversity, variation, tides, etc.  They were also expected to look at environmental challenges in the area that affect oceans as well as other factors that are reasons oceans have to be protected.

The competition received good support from the schools as it was in line with the CAPS curriculum and served as revision for Grade 7 and a preparatory assignment for Grades 5 and 6. A total number of 87 entries were received. Due to the large number of entries as well as the high quality of the essays and posters received, the Park decided to select five winners instead of one.

The panel of judges judged the essays/posters based on three criteria: content, creativity and relevance. What emerged was that the major concerns for learners regarding marine life are pollution, poaching and fishing transgressions. The below is what they successfully showcased in their essays and posters:

- The services oceans provide to humans, wildlife and plants - food, shelter, transport, education, aesthetics, etc.
- Natural processes found in the sea - photosynthesis, tides, ecosystems, food chains, food webs, etc.
- Listing the threats faced by oceans - pollution, poaching, over-harvesting, climate change.
- Linking how these threats affect marine life processes - how humans are tied to marine life and how humans end up being affected at the end of the day.
- Listing solutions to these problems – humans should adopt positive attitudes towards waste management and the environment.

After some lengthy discussion and debates, the judges selected these five winners, two of which are shown above:

- Athule Kiewiels – ChrisNissen Primary
- Athule Mlomo – ChrisNissen Primary
- Dylan Harker – Sunridge Primary
- Duwayne Moses – Sunridge Primary
- Nikita Grooboom – Sunridge Primary

Their prizes! Each winning learner will bring a friend along to enjoy a boat trip with SANParks Rangers to the Knysna Heads and back through the beautiful Knysna lagoon. They will have some time to chat to Rangers and other SANParks officials while learning more about the organisation.

All learners who submitted their work to SANParks have automatically been added to the list of learners selected to participate in the Park’s holiday programmes this year. Further details will be sent to all schools who participated.

SANParks would like to take this opportunity to convey a message of thanks to all the principals, teachers, parents and librarians who supported our young leaders with this project. It is highly appreciated!

Addo vs Shamwari friendlies

Shamwari Game Reserve hosted Addo Elephant National Park’s soccer and netball teams to a game drive on 10 June before meeting up at the Paterson sport grounds for some friendly matches.

The day was planned not as a competition, but more in an attempt to unite and socialise with people in the same industry as well promote team spirit among our the two groups of staff members.

Addo was triumphant in both sporting codes, beating Shamwari 4-2 in soccer, and 13-11 in netball.

The Addo teams hope that such events continues as it is a great way to promote team spirit as well as employee wellness.

Karoo’s Kids in Parks

“It’s moving, it’s moving!” The look on this little girl’s face when she felt the tortoise moving around on her hand was priceless!

The photograph was taken during this year’s Kids in Parks programme in Karoo National Park. The People and Conservation Department hosted a total of 175 learners and 22 educators during their ninth annual Kids in Parks programme this year, which ran from 3 May to 7 June.

This year 15 schools participated, with Murraysburg Primary joining for the first time.