Wilderness fires

A raging fire propelled by berg winds of up to 48km/per hour left a trail of destruction in Wilderness on the 11th August with four homes lost. At a meeting held on 23rd August in Wilderness with the affected homeowners - George Municipality, Eden District Municipality, SANParks and the Southern Cape Fire Protection Association (SCFPA) again extended their sympathies to those who lost homes and possessions.

A total of 25 separate fire call outs were received by the George Control Centre on Tuesday 11th August and the George Municipal Fire Services Department has subsequently laid a charge of arson under the Veld and Forest Act, specifically with regard to the Wilderness/Hoekwil Fire and investigations into the matter continue.

George Municipal Fire Services has put measures in place to allow for assistance with fire fighting in the Greater George area with a Memorandum of Agreement signed with Eden District (responsible for Veld Fires), the SCFPA and a working collaboration with SANParks. This working relationship was called into action on the 11th August, however Eden Fire Services assisted with eight different fires in the District, Knysna Fire Services, Mossel Bay Fire Services and Oudtshoorn Fire Services respectively were all occupied with fires in their own areas. All backup resources were already deployed at these various fires.

George Municipality, Eden District Municipality, the SCFPA and SANParks met for a debriefing session last week and have agreed to the following in order to improve co-operation and incident response:
- Devise a proactive plan to respond to unforeseen changing weather conditions
- SANParks and the Eden District Municipality will explore the possibility of an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding).
- All authorities will revisit emergency procedures and the better integration of resources
- The FPA and other agencies will kick-start a fire awareness campaign.
- George Municipality will investigate the establishment of a satellite fire station in Kleinkrantz.

The collective authorities have committed to a Public meeting to be held with Wilderness and Hoekwil residents and which date and time will be communicated. The affected homeowners are being kept up to date and a second meeting will be called with them.

October 10th fire in Wilderness again: SANParks deployed resources to assist in fighting a fire in Wilderness (reeds). The chopper was up in minutes and so were the Eden District Municipality's resources.

SANParks says this fire was managed better due to institutional arrangements strengthened after the first incident two months ago. After the last fire authorities (George Municipality, Eden District Municipality, the SCFPA and SANParks) undertook to:

Devise a proactive plan to respond to unforeseen changing weather conditions & also to revisit emergency procedures and the better integration of resources.
Local News

Ecological burn to restore critically endangered Knysna sand fynbos on private land

A team of stakeholders has set a date of the week of the 11th October 2016 for an ecological burn of Portions 39 and 40 of the Uitzigt Farm. ‘It is a collective effort because 85% of the fynbos scheduled to burn has not burnt in the last 30 years’ according to Environmental Planner for the Garden Route National Park, Maretha Alant. Partners include Southern Cape Fire Protection Association (FPA), SANParks, Knysna Municipal Fire Services, Eden District Fire Services - Deputy CFO, PG Bison, CapeNature, Knysna Municipality - Traffic Control and the landowners.’

All are adamant to restore Knysna Sand Fynbos and to provide habitat for species dependent on this ecosystem over the medium to long term. Portions 39 and 40 of Farm Uitzigt 216 are ideally located spatially and are relatively free from alien vegetation thus providing an excellent opportunity to benefit conservation for such a critically endangered ecosystem.

Johan Baard of Scientific Services in the Garden Route National Park adds that ‘many fynbos species only recruit after a fire as fire stimulates seed release and germination. In a landscape where fire is kept indefinitely, fynbos often reverts to thicket vegetation or forest. Without fire, fynbos will lose its true character and species.’

The remaining natural Knysna Sand Fynbos is approximately 1 478 ha (9.6% of the original extent) and falls short of the conservation target of 3 531 hectares.

The period for the proposed burn is from the 10th- 21st October 2016. Alant points out that ‘fire close to an urban area is risky business however there are trade-offs that have to happen to preserve a system that has not had fire for so long.

Baard says Fynbos is a vegetation type which is adapted to fire and more so, dependent on fire. Many species only recruit after a fire as fire stimulates seed release and germination. In landscapes where fire is kept out indefinitely, fynbos usually reverts to thicket vegetation or forest. Without fire, there would be no fynbos.’ In addition Fynbos fires should occur at intervals of 10 to 30 years. Natural fires typically occur during warm and dry weather conditions which result in high intensity fires, which is desirable from an ecological point of view.

**There are challenges to organizing such a fire:** Firstly, The burn cannot take place in the burning season as the Knysna Municipality Fire Service, EDEN Disaster Management and the Working on Fire (WOF) teams can’t commit. They have to respond to wild fires. Even on the scheduled day of 11 October to light the fire and the additional days on standby agreed on may not materialize if there is a wild fire. There are many challenges to ecological burns close to urban areas.

Secondly, it is expensive to plan and prepare for a fire, to execute it and to monitor the conditions afterwards with the weather being the critical element.

Thirdly, Fynbos is a fire-driven system and wildlife have adapted to fire. Depending on the weather and wind conditions small blocks will be burnt first to create safe zones and to allow wildlife to move out.

Controlled burning is often referred to as ‘hazard reduction burning.’
Scientists did their bit to educate and inform learners and citizens during this year’s SA National Parks Week 2016. Grade 7 Natural Science learners from Chris Nissen, the Working on Coast team and environmental monitors were given lessons on biodiversity and the significance of conservation nature by scientists Melanie De Morney and Diba Rikhotso. They performed various invertebrate sampling techniques and taught the learners how to use insects to measure environmental health.

Explains Melanie De Morney ‘we ended up having two different groups, a slight deviation from the original plan but everything worked out well in the end! Learners were given a chance to perform various invertebrate sampling techniques and taught how to use insects to measure environmental health.’

They sorted and identified the invertebrates collected in the pitfall traps planted by the various groups. The data collected during lessons will contribute to the invertebrate reference collection and also give some idea of the status of the areas sampled in.

De Morney has thanked Knysna rangers Ruby-Ann, Sabelo, Samantha and Jason for their assistance in helping with the lessons.

Virtual SES Lab (Wilderness)

Professors Dirk Roux (SANParks) and Fabricious from NMMU held a virtual SES meeting at the Wilderness Hotel in August. Attending the workshop was management from the GRNP, scientists, NMMU researchers.

Dr Wendy Anneke from the Cape Region spoke about the state of social research in National Parks.

Stef Freitag –Ronaldson asked if the organisation is reflecting at all with stakeholders as part of an ongoing review and adaptation management.

Dirk says ‘the Virtual SES (social-ecological system) Lab is a space for dialogue and learning about people-nature interactions in the context of conservation. The Garden Route serves as the Lab (laboratory) and we aim to promote feedbacks between management and research.

Meetings/symposia are held to share and discuss relevant initiatives and the latest findings, and in general to stimulate dialogue. ‘ The previous meeting took place on 17 Nov 2015 and focussed on tourism research for national parks.
60 minutes to make a difference

The Knysna section of the Park took 60 minutes and more for Mandela Day to help a colleague whose house had burnt down in June. Nondumiso Ngewnya, the P&C for Knysna says ‘we extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who clubbed in with contributions and support for the two projects we embarked on (Vuyo & the Kennel project).’

Staff in Tsitsikamma tool their 60 minutes for Mandela Day to bake roostekoek and make soup for nearby communities. Technical manager, Andre Peterson says this was both fun and fulfilling, ‘we just all share a passion for food and seeing those who are hungry, fed.’

Scientists Dr. Wessel Vermeulen and Jessica Hayes seen below with Area Manager for Knysna, Johan de Klerk took their 60 minutes during Mandela Day to collaborate with the Knysna Animal Welfare Society. Enough money was raised to buy 6 kennels, dog food, bowls and others and donated to needy households.
Join Rangers Day online (GRNP)

This year’s World Ranger day campaign was celebrated in Harkerville, Knysna and was attended by Park Manager of the Garden Route National Park (GRNP), Paddy Gordon who welcomed and introduced the day as significant in the lives of rangers throughout the world. ‘Our work is significant and you are doing good work even against the face of opposition at times' he encouraged rangers.

Guest Speaker, Andrew Campbell, Chairperson of the African Game Rangers Association of South Africa, commemorated 32 rangers in Africa who died in the line of duty.

Demonstrations for the day were from SAPS’ forensic unit. Honorary Ranger, Derick Meintes conducted a water safety awareness and demonstration exercise.

The GRNP has encouraged members of the public to get involved with the campaign about rangers and post messages to #we salute our rangers

Pic1: Andrew Campbell from the African Game Rangers Association of SA
Pic2: Rangers from 3 sections of the GRNP (Wilderness, Knysna and Tsitsikamma) drilling (bottom left)
Pic 3: MC: Owen Govender was the Master of Ceremonies for the event
Right panel: Female rangers: Diane Botha, Chrystal Mortlock, Eugenia Mkhatshwa and Dominique du Toit.
Connecting society

**High tea in the forest**
The high tea held in Goudveld provided a platform for stakeholders to get to know more information about the Wilderness section of the Garden Route National Park (GRNP). Speaking at the High tea, Mayor of Knysna, Eleanor Bouws-Spies encouraged citizens to ‘keep finding creative ways to talk, exchange ideas and move our town, Region forward, putting it on the map as the most desirable destination.’

Speakers at the high tea include Park Manager for the GRNP - Paddy Gordon, Regional Ecologist- Jessica Hayes, Dominique du Toit and Grant Grootboom of the Wilderness section of the GRNP.

Goudveld has a rich cultural history, lots of stories to tell about the gold rush era, woodcutters, giant mammals that once roamed the forest. The message in the 1880s about gold that had been found in Millwood spread fast. A town mushroomed as a result of the influx of opportunistic gold diggers. Millwood soon had 6 hotels, houses, shops and was a thriving town.

**SA Parks Week numbers exceed expectations**
More than 4,900 visitors this year came to join the SA National Parks Week campaign in the Garden Route. This is over 1,500 more than the previous year. The week-long campaign which is financed by FNB and Total SA kicked off with a launch of a cycling route suitable for the whole family (a 7.5 km long route) in the middle of the forest in Goudveld, a few kilometers from the town on Knysna. Stakeholders and guests were treated to a high tea in the forest (Goudveld) as part of an information session emphasizing the significance of protecting ecosystems. Communities in Tsitsikamma yesterday (17th September 2016) came out to enjoy the last free access day of the week through planned soccer and rugby tournaments at the SANParks sportsfield, Storms River Village.

Tsitsikamma communities came out to enjoy the last day of SA Parks Week despite the rain, thanks to Bulelwa Msengi, Eugenia Mkhathshwa and team! Muneer Moses from Wilderness got actively involved with over 120 learners invited to Goudveld after the high tea.
Increase clean up operations to respond to an increase in reported pollution, writes Nondumiso Ngwenya, P&C, Knysna

With an increase of pollution reported in Knysna, the Knysna Basin Project, the Knysna Municipality and other roleplayers have decided to roll up sleeves. This September’s International Coastal Clean-up day (ICC) provided the most suitable platform to demonstrate how citizens can join authorities in cleaning our town ahead of season.

On the 25 of August 2016, The People and Conservation department collaborated with Knysna municipality, EPWP, Brede-Gouritz Catchment Management Agency (BGCMA) and TEDCO. The aim was to raise awareness on rivers and pollution, and encourage communities to take care of their natural resources. Unlike rivers that run through pristine and isolated areas both the Bongani River and the Khayalethu River run through communities. This has become a disadvantage to both rivers. Pollution from both rivers ends up in the estuary which is managed by the Park. The clean-up thus addressed the source of the pollution.

Roleplayers embarked on a door-to-door campaign, to encourage citizens to come out and join the clean up. This was a wise move since a group of about 80 people collected about 260 bags full of litter in total.

The Department of Education (DoE) set the day to coincide with Hornlee Primary School’s annual Spring Walk. During the walk more than 300 learners were taught about the effects of pollution on our coasts. The learners then picked up litter as they strolled along playfully. The DoE then ran a marine themed Holiday Programme for learners where they were taught about the ecology of the marine system. This made the learners understand the detrimental effects of pollution to marine life.
Blue Flag status for Wilderness and Natures Valley

WESSA’s announcement of beaches awarded Blue Flag status include those in the Garden Route National Park (GRNP). The 2016/2017 list includes the Wilderness beach and Natures Valley beach. Blue Flag is an international annual accreditation managed by WESSA and is given to beaches that comply with legislation and regulation around safety, amenities, cleanliness, environmental information and environmental management:


The news about Blue Flag beaches was received at the start of National Marine Week which begins on the 10th – 14th October 2016, a week set aside to raise awareness about the sea and marine life. While authorities work at protecting the sea by minimizing population among other interventions, there is a need to do more to protect estuaries and their surrounding wetlands which are bodies of water usually found where rivers meet the sea. They are home to unique plants and animals which are vital for the reproduction of birds, fish, and other animal species. In fact, estuaries are known as ‘nurseries of the sea’ because they are ideal for fish to reproduce.

Take small steps to help protect estuaries and ultimately the sea:

Gardening and landscaping with indigenous plants. This reduces the need for watering and fertilizing gardens. Fertilizers can be harmful to the environment.

Fish sustainably by practicing ‘catch and release’ to keep more fish alive in the sea.

For environmentally friendly boating, observe posted speeds limits.

Make sustainable sea food choices (http://wwfsassi.co.za)!

Become an ocean-friendly pet owner and walk dogs in demarcated areas and not where birds might be breeding.

Leave the beach clean ‘what you bring in you collect philosophy

This will be without doubt an excellent achievement for Wilderness and contribute a great deal to confirm Wilderness as a prime tourism destination. Blue Flag status is highly regarded by both local and international visitors who put a premium on clean, safe beaches.

Where the Grootrivier estuary meets the sea

Congrats to the Segway Tours team who recently clinched a Regional Lilizela Award for 2016! Well done team!

Picturesque, sandy Wilderness beach
Gold nugget cycling route in Goudveld

The gold nugget cycling route was launched today, the 11th September 2016 in Goudveld, Millwood to kick start SA National Parks Week 2016. The Park Manager for the Garden Route National Park, Paddy Gordon says ‘we’re finding creative ways to make people feel more welcome in the Park during SA National Parks Week. If cycling is the new golf, then we have found ways to upgrade existing trails to suit the entire family.’

The Park’s motto is ‘adventure is in our nature’ which is in line with the SANParks mandate of connecting society to National Parks. 75 cyclists tested the gold nugget route today, the race was divided into (5km, 7.5km and 10km). There are already 10 trails in the Park mainly in Harkerville for experienced riders and the gold nugget targets junior riders as well as beginners. It’s scenic and beautiful set in the middle of the forest with ocean backdrops and fynbos. Goudveld is an old mining town in the middle of the forest.

**Winners for 10km race**
- Brendan William (Knysna Sports School)
- Dr. Rudi de Wet
- Paul Micklewood

**Winners for the 5km race**
- Jermain Jafta (Knysna Sports School)
- Collin Leen (Knysna Sports School)
- Charlize Klaasen (Knysna Sports School)

**Winners for the 7.5km race**
- Ian Jantjies
- Michelld Tilburn
- Eddie Tilburn

Key ranger in Goudveld, Dominique du Toit says Goudveld is fascinating for its biodiversity and its rich history. ‘Back in 1876 gold was discovered by James Hooper along the Karatara River. Later in 1887, more discoveries were made in the nearby Millwood area. Millwood in those days had hotels, a church, a shop, a surgery, a bank, school and a Post Office.'
Events in the Park

**Writes Jeff Ayliff, SOX:** The 2016 RCS Southern Cross (SOX) trail run organised by Trisport goes into its 5th year on the weekend of August 6th, 7th and 8th, with runners this year being offered a Lite option, which totals 50km instead of 80 km over 3 days. A record field of 350 runners will line up on day 1, with 250 athletes taking on the full, and 100 runners starting the ‘RCS Sox-lite’.

In the full, Day 1 sees the runners take on 30.8 km and 1634 meters of climbing into the beautiful Outeniqua mountains between Karatara and Farleigh, inland from the beautiful Garden Route coastline.

On day 2, the lush, green Knysna forests await, with 30.73 Km’s, 1147m of climbing, some technical single track sections and an ever-present possibility of encountering the elusive Knysna elephant.

The final stage takes the runners and their tired legs onto the final challenge, 19.59 Km’s of pristine coastal running along the magnificent Wilderness coast, with a beautiful mix of rocky sea cliffs and single track forest that takes runners alongside the Touw river enroute to the ocean, and the finish at the Fairy Knowe Hotel.

**Karoo to Coast 2016**

The Pennypinchers Karoo to Coast Mountain Bike Challenge is a 100km off road race from UNIONDALE to KNYSNA via the Prince Alfred's Pass. The route is scenic, challenging and riders are encouraged to train sufficiently for this event in order to maximise the enjoyment of the experience.

**Otter trail run 2016**

Everyone is waiting eagerly to see if the record can be broken? Last year’s record holder Marc Lauenstein ran the 42 kilometer race in 03:59:29 and Emma Roca in 05:07:37.

Watch this space!
Marionette Scholtz, the HR Manager has confirmed the Garden Route Netball team played against the Knysna Provincial traffic department as part of women's month celebrations on the 17th of August and won 10 / 6! Go ladies!

Paddy Gordon is the new Park Manager for the GRNP and he took time to meet staff in the Regional Office. He also recently called all staff in C &D bands to present the organisation’s security plan.

The new Frontier-Garden Route Cluster managers recently met to talk about functions and Regional structures and layout. This happened in Tsitsikamma (Storms River Boardroom), the next meeting is in Addo next.

Well done to the team from the GRNP which represented the Frontier Region and won the soccer challenge for SA Parks Week 2016 held in Addo! Well done boys!
The Garden Route National Park honoured staff yesterday, the 12th August 2016. The event was held at the Cattle Baron Restaurant’s deck in Tsitsikamma where 140 people attended including the Chief Operating Officer of SANParks-Ms Lize McCourt, Senior General Manager-Jill Bunding-Venter, GRNP Park Manager- Paddy Gordon and other guests. 68 rangers qualified as Environmental Management Inspectors according to NEMA’s Section 31 B and C of 2008. Speaking at the event, Ms Lize McCourt said this gives rangers skills to ‘investigate by questioning witnesses, inspect and remove articles, inspect by entering premises to ascertain whether legislation is being followed and seize evidence. administrate by issuing compliance.’

Senior General Manager for Strategy and Business Processes, Jill Bunding Venter congratulated both EMI recipients and Award winners for Excellence in the Workplace. Park Manager, Paddy Gordon welcomed guests and confirmed the poaching of indigenous plants and small sea creatures is as serious as the poaching of any large mammals.’ Thus the handing over of certificates yesterday is symbolic of the organisation’s contribution to law enforcement, whilst increasing awareness and allocating resources integral to the execution of the function.

27 recipients of the Excellent Performance in the Workplace Award were given a medal in line with the theme of the year ‘excellence is a habit and not an act. It takes practice and perseverance.’

The Tsitsikamma section of the GRNP walked away with the Best Performing Camp of the Year for an increase in the number of day visitors by 8.94%. An increase in revenue generation by 13, 71% and an increase of income to cost of about 10, 29%.

The Knysna section received the Best Performing Entrance Gate for For overachieving free entrance targets, placing measures in place to record statistics on Roomseeker. This action brought about a 45% income compared to the previous financial year (2014/2015). This section also had a calculated Year on Year increase of 26%.

The Programme Director, Andile Namntu (Business Development Manager for the GRNP) kept the crowd in stitches with his jokes and local violinist Minx kept them mesmerized with popular hits.
Women’s Day celebrated

Approximately 92 women met in Tsitsikamma to commemorate Women’s Day. Organiser Geneve Lupacchini says the motto of the day is ‘you strike a woman, strike a rock.’ Marionette Scholtz, HR Manager, organised the Mayor of Knysna and the Managing Executive, Human Resources and our own Dr. Stef Freitag-Ronaldson (scientific services) to motivate women at the event. The day started off with play and games and then off to serious business...food, chats and laughter!