



GENERAL INFORMATION FOR TOURISTS REASONS FOR EARLY SEASON FIRES IN THE KNP

Fire is an obvious ecosystem driver and as such extremely important in shaping the savanna landscape. Africa is often referred to as the 'Fire Continent' due to the widespread occurrence of biomass burning, particularly in the savanna biome. The adoption of a new fire policy in 2002 by KNP management has resulted in a combination of point ignitions and wildfires in areas where fire is considered necessary. **This policy encourages the setting of early season fires (April to June) in order to break up the fuel load and allowing for lower intensity fires, while managing fires with the reality of unplanned burns caused by illegal trans-migrants from neighbouring countries and other causes, and by allowing lightning fires to occur in a controlled way.**

The reasons behind this decision are:

1. For safety, to break up the fuel load in the veld with cool, low intensity fires early in the dry season (May/June), thus creating a mosaic of burnt and unburnt areas in the park. This template will assist us in the dry season to prevent the hot, high intensity fires from becoming unmanageable.
2. Results from fire research conducted in the park has suggested that we may be able to knock back the bush encroachment tree species, such as sicklebush and encourage tree species such as (knobthorn) and possibly also other tall trees such as marula with early season fires. A positive spin-off from this is improved game viewing pleasure.
3. The early burns may sometimes resprout and this green flush during the dry season will benefit certain antelope species.
4. Finally the implementation of the patch mosaic burning program to the KNP is an effort to carry out feasible interventions which produce the varying ecosystem effects we desire, taking into account the realities of our large park. Many believe this approach will emulate or reinstate the burning patterns that were applied to this area for centuries before modern man moved in, and which are believed to have shaped this savanna.

It is envisioned that this fire system will result in the maintenance of biodiversity, provide a practical solution to the occurrence of large, extensive and highly dangerous unplanned wildfires by pre-empting many transmigrant fires.

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