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Changing of the guards

By Hannel Ham

I stepped down as the SAIF President, on the 1st of April. It was a great pleasure to serve forestry practitioners in the capacity as President over the past three years, but it is time to step down and hand over to a new leader. At the council meeting of 9 April, Wayne Jones was elected as the new President and Braam du Preez as Vice President for the next two years. The branch chairs are: Brett Hurley (Gauteng), Philip Crafford (Western Cape), Braam du Preez (Eastern and Southern Cape), Mmoledi Mphahlele (KwaZulu-Natal), while Mpumalanga is currently vacant. Corine Viljoen will remain the secretary, Tendani Mariba the DAFF representative and Neels de Ronde the Editor-in-Chief of the journal.

As a volunteer organisation, the members of council are serving pro bono whilst simultaneously holding professional positions within the industry. Without their continued support it would have been impossible to have reached as many milestones as we had the past three years. I want to extend a special word of thank you to all the council members (current and previous), SAIF members and family for their continuous support.

The Journal is also undergoing changes. Not only did Neels de Ronde took over from Andrew Morris, but they are working non-stop to implement the new online submission system. This process will introduce changes to the structure of the current editorial board. Unfortunately, Rob Pallett and Dave Everard also decided to step down as sub editors of the journal due to work pressure. I want to express a sincere thank you to both of them for their continued support to Andrew Morris during the past decade. They worked behind the scenes and are also responsible for increased success of the journal, e.g. impact factor increased from 0.5 to 0.97 in the past decade. If any member would like to be part of the editorial board, please feel free to contact either Neels de Ronde (nderonde@dorea.co.za) or myself (hamh@basicr.co.za).

The guest speaker at the National AGM in White River on 9 April was Ruddolph (Rudi) Hoffman. He entertained us with a presentation on "What it means to work as an expat in forestry in Africa". Rudi emphasized that to work in Africa is exciting and an amazing career path with great potential for growth if performance is evident. However, you need to have the ability

Inside This Issue

Changing of the guards	1
Changing of the guards (cont.)	2
Shot Hole Borer "What to Do" Guide	2
Guide on biological control of insect pests in forests published	2
Garden Route Fires: where to now?	3
It's just so easy	4
Garden Route Fires: where to now? (cont)	5
Upcoming events	5
SAIF contact details	6
May 2019 birthdays	6



ability to try the untried as you are not working within big cooperates boxes or boundaries. You have to be prepared to make a difference by utilizing survival skills to the maximum, enhances communication skills (language and culture is a big hurdle) and, travel extensively. (Cont. pg 2)

Changing of the guards (cont.)

However, obtaining a work permit can be a problem. Things you have to be prepared for are a high labour turnover in some companies, limited mentorship and support, life risks (accidents, malaria, HIV, conflicts etc.), food compatibility, work ethics, complicated travelling (congested roads e.g. 100 km takes up to four hours), medical insurance is a problem, infrastructure gaps, disruption to family ties, schools are not the best, accommodation issues and vague job descriptions with limited benefits.

Five awards were handed over to the following individuals:

- Continuous Service Award: Georg von dem Busche
- Merit Award: Samantha Bush
- Dedicated Service Award: Hannes van Zyl, Martie Joubert and Andrew McEwan

More information will be provided in future newsletters.

As council we want the SAIF to stay relevant and adapt to the ever-increasing changes in the Forestry environment we operate in.

Therefore, we have to create a space for all the members where they can be accommodated and recognised. Council is continuously revising and revisiting benefits to members and I am confident that the current council will continue to do so.

A warm thank you to all the loyal members. You made the SAIF the success it is today!

Shot Hole Borer “What to Do” Guide

Hilton Fryer has produced a guide to provide people with practical information on what to do about the Polyphageous Shot Hole Borer (PSHB) beetle. It provides information on how to save infested trees, and how to prevent infestation in their healthy trees. It explains that there is no single solution, and a successful treatment and prevention regime will incorporate multiple strategies and products, repeated over years.

PSHB is a new invasive pest in South Africa and currently no chemical products are registered for use against PSHB. As a private individual you have the prerogative to evaluate existing chemical products and use them in accordance with their registered instructions.

The impact of poisons is covered. Injection of poison into the tree is the optimal delivery mechanism – it specifically targets your tree, without affecting the surrounding environment. Poisons applied directly to the soil can affect your pets, the soil and other plants and the groundwater.

Download the guide from: <https://polyphagous-shot-hole-borer.co.za/what-to-do/>

Guide on biological control of insect pests in forests published

The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations has published a “Guide to the classical biological control of insect pests in planted and natural forests”. This publication is in response to the serious threat of insect pests worldwide and the importance of biological control as a management option. The guide was written by a team of experts working in the field of biological control, including Marc Kenis (CABI, Switzerland), Fernanda Colombari (University of Padova, Italy), Simon Lawson (University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia), Carlos Wilcken (São Paulo State University, Brazil), Jianghua Sun (Chinese Academy of Science, China), Ronald Weeks (United States Department of Agriculture, United States), Shiroma Sathyapala (FAO, Rome) and FABI’s Prof Brett Hurley .

The guide includes information on the processes leading to classical biological control (CBC), the implementation of CBC and post-release monitoring and evaluation of CBC agents. The guide also includes various case studies, including those well known to the South African forestry industry such as the Sirex woodwasp and the eucalypt gall wasp. The main objective of the guide is to “help forest-health practitioners and forest managers – especially in developing countries – to implement successful classical biological control programmes.”

To view the news item and download the PDF file of the publication, see

<https://www.fabinet.up.ac.za/index.php/news-item?id=820>



Garden Route Fires: where to now?

Recognition: Adapted from article compiled by Theo Stehle for the March 2019 edition of SA Forestry Magazine.

As in the rest of the world, drought, heat, freak weather and out of control wildfires are on the increase in the Garden Route, highlighted by the recent Oct./ Nov. 2018 fires, which surpassed in intensity and extent all wildfires in this region during the past 100 odd years even the 2017 Knysna fires. From a forestry perspective, there are two main aspects that need to be considered when undertaking an assessment of the situation brought about by the recent fires, namely:

- fire management in regard to the changed fire hazard conditions caused by climate change,
- the continued viability of forestry and the timber industry in the Southern Cape in the light of these conditions.

This article will deal with the former i.e. challenges facing the Garden Route in regard to future prevention and fire suppression capabilities while the latter will be discussed in a future article. The recent Garden Route fires cannot be assessed in isolation from the rest of the globe. Earth warming has greatly intensified heat waves, droughts and strong winds, that have in turn triggered increasingly intense wildfires in regions with winter rainfall, hot dry summers and fire driven vegetation ecologies, like California, south-eastern Australia, Tasmania, southern France, Portugal and the western Cape in South Africa. It also has been a major cause of wildfires in moist and cool forested areas in parts of Europe, Scandinavia and Siberia, which is close to the Arctic Circle, and where the vegetation normally isn't fire prone or adapted to fires

For a long time experts clung to the notion that a build-up of biomass due to changes in land use and management over decades preventing regular natural fires, combined with a policy of fire suppression, was the actual culprit. Whereas this is certainly valid for many areas around the globe, including the Western Cape and the Garden Route, this by itself cannot adequately explain the fire behaviour experienced in



recent catastrophic wildfires. More recently freak extreme weather events, combined with long spells of increasingly hot and dry climatic conditions desiccating soils and vegetation, have emerged as the main driver of these fires.

What makes it difficult to separate out the causes is the fact that fire management, prevention as well as suppression, has undergone marked changes during the past three decades – generally it has deteriorated. Local experts such as these local fire experts, foresters, viz. Piet van Zyl, Francois Sparks, Braam du Preez, Paul Buchholz and Charles Witcher, acknowledged the effect of a much altered climate, these wildfires could still be contained by returning to the fire prevention practices that were very effectively in place in the days of the Forestry Department, which until the 1980s controlled and managed not only the State plantations but also the State Mountain Catchments(MCA's). In those years a mosaic of different fynbos veld ages was established by controlled burning of large mountain blocks, in conjunction with which invader vegetation control took place. A system of perimeter firebreaks of several hundred metres width had been burnt in rotation where plantations bounded on natural veld, as well properly prepared and maintained fire-belts along roads and under eucalyptus belts inside plantations.

That this system was highly effective (in spite of runaway fires caused by such controlled burns now and then) in those days, is beyond question. That it could greatly assist, if accompanied by adequate numbers of experienced fire fighters and equipment, to contain some of the very intense wildfires of today, cannot be denied.

Since the State plantations in the Cape had first been commercialised and later privatised into what today is known as MTO, rationalisations and restructuring followed resulting in so-called lean and mean structures with very much **(Cont. Pg 3)**

It's just so easy

By Rob Thompson

By now, the fact that we have held a national election, would not have escaped you.

Every billboard, lamp post, robot, radio or TV station, building, newspaper, social media platform, piece of litter in the wind, et al was spewing forth some form of election announcement.

In some respects I take great pleasure from this largesse, knowing that every election poster has a timber composite backing, which has created a much needed surge in demand for the manufactured product, and ultimately the timber grower's resource. A short term gain for the industry but we'll take it nevertheless!

A study of what is pasted onto those composite boards conversely however, provides very little pleasure. The empty election promises made by the various political parties, in the hope of attracting electoral support, are quite mind-numbing. How easy it seems for political leaders to stand on their own perceived moral high-ground and promise the earth to the masses. Similarly, it seems just as easy for those leaders to ultimately avoid responsibility and accountability post-election.

But enough about politicians and more about those things that people generally find easy to do. Maybe it's the election that has stimulated this chain of thought but generally easy decisions or actions do not lead to far reaching or meaningful results. A few recent experiences have brought home to me, the potential implications of travelling along the easy route.

Knowing that many forestry practitioners are keen mountain bikers, I wrote an article last year May, centred around my discovery of cyclo-cross as a sport and my first foray into participating in the Swartberg 100 mile Gran Fondo. After the near-death experience that constituted my 2018 participation, the decision to enter the 2019 version was certainly NOT an easy one. Nevertheless, a combination of stupidity, bravado and the greater part of a bottle of red, contrived to see me enter again. It was easy to think that experience would trump youth and the presence of my new son-in-law in the race line-up would see him exalt in the prowess presented by this old Ballie. It was not easy to see him disappear over the horizon only to be seen again, through pain wracked vision, at the end, race complete, relaxed and third cold beverage in hand.

As the race progressed and my position moved precariously close to absolute back-marker, the sad-wagon collecting back-end stragglers for voluntary repatriation back-to-base looked decidedly attractive. How easy it would be to just stop and concede to the infernal, relentless and torturous Swartberg gradient. Arriving at the third and last checkpoint, remarkably in the nick of time, thereby avoiding obligatory relegation to the comfort of an air-conditioned bus, created its own challenges. A discussion ensued between a few of us tail-enders which highlighted some critical considerations that need to be

resolved ...How easy it would be to negotiate a berth on the bus despite still being within the time limit... How easy it would be to swallow that cold beverage whilst looking at the survivors plod up the incline. Tail enders however, to our detriment, are generally of poor cognitive ability, which fact saw a small group of thus afflicted, trudge onwards and upwards, towards recognition fame and reward. Well...not really... but it was easy for us to think that at the time.

The concerned medic on the motorbike enquiring as to our state of health (physical health not mental health I'll have you know) could easily have been given the response that we were all verging on cardiac incidents and in need of an immediate casevac. Seeing his tail light disappear over the ridge was not an easy sight. The ultimate mind blowing and rutted descent on the Prince Albert side of the pass, on top of 160 km in the (hard) saddle was never going to be easy particularly given the required race against time to qualify. How much easier to hunker up against a rock and wait for rescue. Damn...that poor cognitive affliction again...here we go onwards and downwards...fast!

Wow! Is that the end point? With a minute or two to spare? Hey we made it! Never doubted it for a second...not. Look, there's still a few people hanging around...oh wait, they're packing up!

Accepting a beverage from my young whippersnapper son in law, it occurred to me how grateful I was for not succumbing to all of the easy routes that presented along the way. Writing an article about my return ride in the bus would just not have held the gravitas of the perspective from a finisher, albeit a very sore finisher.

Back at work, the decisions that were taken on the ride, still play on my mind. Literally every decision making situation we encounter in the work environment has an easy option. From budgeting though to selection of species for site and even on to level of service provision. There is always an easy option and more often than not we take it because it presents as a convenient and reasonable solution. The outcome however is often not optimal. A little more effort and the greater the reward.

So we can learn something from the politicians during this frenetic period. Don't be like them...ever!

I hope you considered your options and didn't necessarily take the easy route. As you remonstrated with yourself about taking a more onerous decision and blame what you think is poor cognitive ability, consider for a moment that you may in fact be inherently attuned to greater effort making your contribution so much more worthwhile and sustainable.

Will I do the Gran Fondo again? An easy decision to make. Without any doubt... an absolutely final and resounding NO! ...maybe.

Garden Route Fires: where to now?

Cont. from Pg. 3. reduced managerial capacity and manpower which doesn't line up with the requirements for activities like burning kilometres of breaks in fynbos, large block burns in mountain veld, and fire suppression in inaccessible terrain, all of which cannot be mechanised. The State in those days (controlling not only the State plantations but the adjoining MCA's that were devolved to conservation agencies in the course of the past thirty years) carried the risk, and the investment in rather large work teams (at low wage rates compared with today) was a kind of "insurance" against damage by wildfires.

This is illustrated by the following example: According to Piet van Zyl and Braam du Preez, the 1996 Bergplaas-Witfontein conflagration, the first of a spate of climate change induced fires, had been contained by SAFCOL fire fighters by drawing on the in-house resources that then were still abundantly available. Altogether about 400 skilled men could be deployed, while at the October 2018 fire, under even more extreme conditions, only about a tenth of this number could be deployed.

Moreover, the adjoining State mountain catchments were transferred to conservation bodies. The consequence was that the old policy of investing in wide rotationally burnt fire breaks changed into hoed or ploughed perimeter breaks of the bare minimum of width required to satisfy the fire insurance firms, the rationale being (quite correctly), that a fire break is not necessarily capable of stopping wildfires (especially evidenced during the past twenty years), but a defence line from where to counteract wildfires, inter alia by back burning.

As a result of a series of restructuring and rationalisations, it left MTO management very exposed when having to try and contain numerous fires burning simultaneously with reduced own labour and not nearly as effective and reliable Working on Fire (WoF) proto teams as was the case in Oct./Nov 2018. Adding insult to injury, in the Tsitsikamma, which falls under the Sarah Baartman District Municipality Fire Brigade in the Eastern Cape, MTO had to abandon their plantations to the mercy of the fires in order to protect human lives and settlements in the area, because the former failed miserably in this regard.

Likewise, other State organs like the Provincial Conservation authorities and SANParks had to contend with reduced capabilities: finance, equipment and adequate skilled labour forces – and, moreover, importantly, a drain by natural attrition of the highly experienced forestry / conservation fire managers in their ranks, a legacy from better times. This was one of the reasons, why perimeter fire breaks and burning blocks in State conservation areas in the local mountains have during the more recent past been increasingly neglected, resulting in the accumulation of high fuel loads for thirty years and longer. The other even more important reason is dramatically increased risks and feasibility owing to climate change. Adjacent managers shrink away from carrying out controlled burns because if these run away into plantations their institutions may be faced with huge financial claims.

You cannot conduct high-risk controlled burns, including counter burns under extreme wildfire conditions, in fynbos with a high fuel load, without highly skilled and adequate numbers of experienced staff and with the amount of nerve and self-assurance that only comes with years of experience in fire behaviour and weather conditions. This becomes clear when listening to old hands like Piet van Zyl and

Francois Sparks, who told of conducting controlled burns in mountain veld in the Cape Peninsula, Outeniquas and Tsitsikamma mountains that under the circumstances of today would be unthinkable.

All these realities have left no other option but to pool resources and share fire management, and especially fire suppression, among all the role players through the Incident Command System (ICS). Modern technology (helicopters, drones) play an important role in this. This is also where the specialised dedicated teams from WoF come into the picture. They are, however, a poverty alleviation project funded by the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), which is also their weakness, as they cannot be relied upon fully during critical firefighting operations. In the October 2018 fires there have been instances where teams deserted their stations at the end of the working day while fires were still raging. This is something that requires serious attention.

In my discussions with the foresters there was general agreement on one aspect: We cannot just do nothing; we must attempt to reduce fuel loads wherever possible. In the Tsitsikamma the feeling among foresters seems to be that controlled under canopy burning in plantations, although desirable from a fuel reduction aspect, is too risky under current climatic conditions. Instead, Charles Whitcher for instance keeps his plantations almost clinically clean from any undergrowth, preventing surface fires to spread up into crowns, whereas, according to him, MTO does not invest in this because of a necessity to cut costs.

Braam du Preez, Paul Buchholz and others mentioned the desirability of executing controlled burns in the rest of the fynbos areas that escaped the 2018 fire, because this could be done with limited risks now that most of the mountains have been burned clean. Additionally, certain strategic veld blocks (key areas) should in future selectively be burned periodically for fuel reduction purposes. In the face of the changed circumstances and the costs of such preventative operations in order to minimize risks, this will probably be the only feasible approach.

Paul informed me of the initiative for an integrated fire and invader control management strategy for the Garden Route, under the auspices of the Garden Route District Municipality (GRDM). A small technical working committee to coordinate and prioritise projects will be formed under the garden Route Environmental Forum facilitated by the GRDM. Through this initiative it is hoped that all stakeholders will join forces to implement integrated fire management and invasive alien plant control projects in the Garden Route District to improve water security, reduce the risk of catastrophic veldfires and conserve biodiversity.

Upcoming events

- 6–8 November 2019. IUFRO Working Group 7.03.13 'Biological control of forest insect pests and pathogens', University of Pretoria. See <https://www.fabinet.up.ac.za/index.php/event/iufro/>

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May 2019 birthdays



02-May	DU PLESSIS L.J.B.	20-May	SLIPPERS B.
04-May	PRIEST D.T.	22-May	SEOKE P.
05-May	OLIVIER A.S.	24-May	ESLER W.K.
05-May	BIJL A.B.	24-May	DU TOIT B.
05-May	SUMMERSGILL C.	25-May	MEYER J.T.
06-May	CAZALET K.R.	26-May	GEVERS E.H.
06-May	EVERARD D.A.	27-May	HINZE W.H.F.
07-May	MAHADEO L.	27-May	NAIDOO T.
07-May	PRETORIUS H.M.	27-May	KIME P.L.
12-May	FERREIRA R.C.	28-May	BUCHAN R.
14-May	DREW D.	28-May	PIENAAR H.
16-May	GERISCHER G.F.R.	29-May	BOLD A.J.L.
17-May	WESSELS C.B.	30-May	HATTINGH N.L.
18-May	WALTON C.A.	31-May	SIMPSON G.M.
19-May	VON GADOW K.		

Newsletter compiled by Andrew McEwan