

Update...

At last we are in a position to report that the rehabilitation program that commenced shortly after the terrible fire last June is finally complete.

Thanks mainly to the tireless efforts of the PGS and Rodderick Appels teams over the past 14 months, we have our nature reserve back for our home owner's enjoyment. Here is a brief update on what has taken place since our previous bulletin earlier in the year.

WALKING TRAILS

Except for a small section of the Forest Trail all our paths are now back in operation and walkable. We anticipate that this last section will be operable by the first week of next month, bringing to a close an intensive rehabilitation exercise.



1 This is what Hansie and team faced when starting the clearing of the upper Forest Trail

The Forest trail alone is about a kilometer long and as the fire damage, particularly in the upper reaches was so severe, it has taken until now to get it back on track. Some 200 steps had to be built, a new bridge was added over a section of the stream and a few damaged boardwalks were restored.

Maintenance of all trails is an on-going challenge, particularly with the abnormally robust regrowth after the fire. This will only become more so with the growing season upon us and as we only have PGS for two days per month resources are stretched, however we shall continually strive to maintain all trails in a walkable condition.

ROADS AND FIREBREAKS

As you will have noticed the regrowth of fynbos, bracken and bitou has been quite prolific, encroaching on the two access

roads (3-Dams and South roads). These have now been widened and the verges cleared of dead trees and other vegetation, doubling as a firebreak of sorts. We have also had to remove some 2 dozen dead trees that have fallen onto our western firebreak from the Wedlake property. We have approached the owner to have the costs refunded.

Most of the firebreaks on the Trust have been cut and widened but will need to be revisited within the next four months as part of a bi-annual process.

The two roads have taken a beating with all the activity over the past year, particularly the South road. A basic restoration exercise is planned for the new financial year however home owners wishing to access the reserve are advised that due to the terrain, only 4-wheel drive vehicles are permitted on the South road and while 2-wheel drive vehicles can normally be used on the 3-Dams road during dry conditions, seepage from the dams has caused a muddy patch which renders it impassable and in a 2-wheel drive you will get stuck! (and you will damage the road). So the message is clear, 4-wheel drive only.

PICNIC BENCHES

We have had two new picnic benches kindly donated by Bev and Bob Strain, one of which has been added to the picnic site at the 3-Dams and the other has been placed at the entrance to the Fynbos Trail on the top of the hill near our western boundary.



2 The spectacular views from this site make for a unique picnic experience

ALIEN VEGETATION

Today, at long last, Rodderick and team are busy clearing the last of the patches of aliens on our reserve which we identified as Phases 1&2. While we are satisfied with the results of our year-long exercise, we do not delude ourselves as to the challenges that spring will present us with. However, as the first two phases have been pretty successful, we are hoping that the rate of alien regrowth will not be as bad as we once feared, a view shared by various professionals who have visited us over the period, so hopefully costs will be contained. Our plan is to take a break for two months, by which time any new growth will have shown itself and we can then start the process of “sweeping” the area once again.

To put things into perspective, over the past 14 months we have:

- Employed 15 ladies for two weeks pulling wattle seedlings. These were so densely packed that they were literally pulling 5-10 plants at a time. A sample count was done in situ which indicated that they had managed to remove some 2 million plants over the period!
- Consumed 80 litres of herbicide, the bulk of which was donated by the GRRl program. If one considers that the average mix rate was 100ml herbicide to 20L water, this equates to 16 Kilolitres of spray mix, weighing 16 tons, all of which had to be manually handled by the teams (Rodderick and to a lesser extent PGS), ie. filled in the boat yard, loaded onto the back of a bakkie, driven up into the reserve, dispensed into back-packs of +-10L per pack and then sprayed (in many cases in areas that were inaccessible to vehicles and everything had to be physically carried in). Each pack would take between 10 and 30 minutes to disperse, depending on the size and density of the target, with lopping and spotting (with 1,5L hand-held sprays) taking a lot longer. A mammoth undertaking.

SECURITY

With the increased awareness on the estate regarding security we felt it was necessary to ensure that anyone



working on the reserve should be identified. As with the PGS team who have a distinguishing uniform, we issued Rodderick's team with vests which include a WBPVRT logo printed on the back, identifying them as official contractors.

VISITATIONS

We had no less than three visits by various bodies this month, the first being by Stiaan Kotze who heads up the legal side of the Dept. of Environment's "Compliance" division (Green Scorpions). As we have reported before we have been nagging them to put pressure on our two neighbours (Wedlake – Farhills and Botha – Riverside Lodge) and he came here to see things for himself. From comments made at a subsequent visit by two of Stiaan's staff, there is at last some action being taken. Evidently both parties have committed to implementing alien clearing programs, details of which we look forward to receiving. We can but wait and see.

We were also visited by representatives of the SCLI (Southern Cape Landowners Initiative), the GRRl (Garden Route Rebuild Initiative), SCFPA/WOF (Southern Cape Fire Prevention Assoc/Working on fire) and the WWF (World Wildlife Fund) no less. Happily they all seemed impressed with WB's efforts regarding alien eradication and they are sympathetic to our "errant neighbour" cause.

FINALLY...

Those of you who have been in the reserve of late will no doubt agree that the fynbos is looking beautiful. When one thinks back to a year ago it is quite amazing how wonderfully it has all recovered.



On reflection, it has been quite a year. Since the fire we have replaced nearly 1,000 steps, 60m of boardwalks, 400m of fencing, 7 benches, 70 trail signs, cut and cleared 9 kilometers of roads, firebreaks and walking trails, not to mention the alien eradication program, which has taken centre stage.

Well done team! Thanks to all who have played a part in it.